

DECEMBER 2024

POLICY PAPER

BRIDGING GAPS, BUILDING FUTURES: ALIGNING THE EU'S GLOBAL GATEWAY AND AFCFTA FOR AFRICA'S SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION



MAHMOUD ARBOUCH & ASYA PELKES



The European Union's (EU) Global Gateway initiative, established to enhance global connectivity and sustainable infrastructure, offers a significant opportunity to align with Africa's development goals under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). However, the challenge lies in whether the Global Gateway can effectively complement AfCFTA's objectives of boosting intra-African trade and industrialization by addressing critical infrastructure gaps. This paper examines how the EU's initiative can foster successful partnerships rather than dependencies, while supporting Africa's economic integration and sustainable development. The paper argues that aligning the AfCFTA and Global Gateway initiatives can foster sustainable and inclusive growth by reducing logistical bottlenecks, enhancing regional trade, and creating a competitive and integrated African market. However, achieving these goals requires strategic coordination, robust policy frameworks, and a commitment to balancing external partnerships with Africa-centric priorities, to ensure long-term sovereignty and economic resilience.

MAHMOUD ARBOUCH & ASYA PELKES

INTRODUCTION

Intra-African trade faces significant challenges, notably poor transport infrastructure, complex regulatory environments, and fragmented markets. As of 2023, intra-African trade accounted for only 14% of the continent's total trade volume, compared to 65% in Europe, and 60% in Asia (UNCTAD). These low levels of trade within Africa are largely attributed to inadequate transport networks that fail to facilitate the efficient movement of goods between countries. With vast distances, poor road quality, insufficient rail networks, and limited port capacity, logistics costs in Africa are estimated to be 50%-175% higher than in developed regions (World Bank, 2020). These challenges are compounded by border delays and lack of harmonized customs procedures, limiting the continent's potential for regional integration and economic development.

Transport and logistics infrastructure are vital for enhancing intra-African trade and supporting industrialization. Effective road, rail, and port networks can drastically reduce the cost and time involved in cross-border trade, thereby increasing market access for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Improving transport infrastructure could increase intra-African trade by up to 15%, contributing directly to economic growth and job creation (AfDB, 2020). Moreover, infrastructure investments in energy and digital connectivity are essential for modernizing production systems, boosting productivity, and integrating African economies into global value chains. Without significant improvements in infrastructure, the economic benefits promised by trade agreements such as African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) may remain underexploited.

AfCFTA offers a platform for aligning national infrastructure projects with regional trade objectives, making cross-border trade more efficient by simplifying customs procedures and improving transport corridors. It could also boost trade volumes through customs tariffs elimination or reduction (up to 90%). Entered into force in 2021, AfCFTA aims to create the largest free trade area in the world, connecting 54 African countries with a combined GDP of over \$3 trillion. By reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, AfCFTA promotes intra-African trade, regional integration, and economic growth. This agreement opens up significant opportunities for Africa's infrastructure development, especially in sectors such as transport, energy, and digital networks, which are critical for boosting trade and industrialization.

In parallel, the EU's Global Gateway initiative, set out by the European Commission in 2021, aims at channeling critical investments into green and digital infrastructure, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy and digitalization, which are vital for sustaining long-term economic growth. By focusing on sustainable and resilient infrastructure, these initiatives enhance connectivity and also contribute to climate resilience and technological innovation (European Commission, 2022). Together, the Global Gateway initiative and the AfCFTA could transform Africa's economic landscape by addressing infrastructure deficits, facilitating greater intra-African trade, and creating new opportunities for industrialization and sustainable development.

While AfCFTA can act as a catalyst for intra-regional trade within Africa by reducing tariffs, harmonizing customs procedures, digitizing processes, and fostering regional value chains, the EU Global Gateway can provide a solid foundation for the AfCFTA by ensuring that the necessary initial conditions for smooth and efficient trade exchanges are met. This includes resilient, high-quality, and sufficient infrastructure, as well as efficient digital connectivity. By viewing these two initiatives as complementary, and ensuring their coordination to support capacity building, sustainable infrastructure, and regional value chain development, the Global Gateway can help strengthen Africa's economic resilience while ensuring mutual

benefits. Effectively coordinating these initiatives will be essential to achieving the shared goals of inclusive growth and sustainable development, in both Africa and Europe.

INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Africa's economic development is closely linked to the availability and quality of infrastructure. Despite progress in certain sectors, the continent faces persistent gaps, particularly in physical and social infrastructure. Energy infrastructure is the most pressing need, followed by water and sanitation, with transport ranking third in financing requirements (African Development Bank, 2018). Conversely, Africa performs relatively well in telecommunications, with mobile phone networks covering 80% of the population (African Capacity Building Foundation, 2016). However, these advancements have not significantly mitigated the broader infrastructure deficits that continue to constrain economic growth. Poor infrastructure quality reduces annual growth by up to 2 percentage points (Foster and Briceno-Garmendia, 2010), leaving Africa trailing behind other global regions in access to essential infrastructure services.

Comparatively, Africa's infrastructure access remains limited. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa in 2022, only 51% of the population had access to electricity, and 65% had access to water, compared to 98% and 96% respectively in East Asia and the Pacific. These disparities are exacerbated further when comparing urban to rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa—only 30% of the rural population has access to electricity, compared to 80% in urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Regional disparities are also evident in key indicators, such as paved road density and electricity production *per capita*, which remain significantly lower than in Europe or Latin America (Table 1).

Table 1:

Regional Benchmark of Infrastructure Access, 2022

Indicator	Sub-Saharan Africa	East Asia & Pacific	European Union	Latin America & Caribbean
Transport¹				
Paved road density (km of paved road per 100 km ² of land area)	2	25	122	3
Railway lines (km)	46.4	197.6	86.0	89.0
Information and communication technology				
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	0.7	31.1	38.7	17.7
Mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	87.6	128.7	123.7	110.1
Energy				
Access to electricity (% of total population)	51.4	98.2	100	98.6
Access to electricity (% of rural population)	30.7	96.5	100	96.8
Access to electricity (% of urban population)	81	99.8	100	99.6
Water supply and sanitation				
Access to water (% of total population)	65.1	96.5	99.1	97.6
Access to sanitation (% of total population)	34.6	93.5	98.4	89.4

Source: WDI & African Economic Outlook 2018.

Africa thus faces a critical infrastructure gap, particularly in transport and logistics. For example, only 25% of African roads are paved, and several key trade corridors remain underdeveloped (AfDB, 2018). Border delays and customs bottlenecks further reduce the efficiency of cross-border trade, increasing costs and transit times. For example, goods traveling through the Northern Corridor from Mombasa to Uganda can take up to 14 days to clear, compared to only a few hours on equivalent European routes (UNECA, 2020). At regional level, an assessment of the state of African infrastructure across Regional Economic Communities (RECs) reveals significant disparities.

In North Africa, infrastructure has improved remarkably in recent years, remaining well

1. 2018 data for transport, latest available (African Economic Outlook).

ahead of the rest of the continent, with a few exceptions such as South Africa and Mauritius (Figure 1). The region has seen substantial investment in transportation, energy, and telecommunications. For instance, Morocco inaugurated Africa's first high-speed rail line, connecting Tangier to Casablanca and reducing travel time from 4 hours 45 minutes to 2 hours 10 minutes. In Algeria, the 1,216-kilometer East-West Highway project has enhanced regional connectivity. Similarly, Egypt's expansion of the Suez Canal increased maritime traffic capacity, generating record revenues of \$8.7 billion in 2021.

However, challenges remain, including insufficient infrastructure in rural areas, and the need to modernize existing assets and improve water management. Tunisia, for example, struggles with outdated road and water networks, while Libya's infrastructure is deteriorating amid political instability. These dynamics underscore the need for tailored investment strategies to meet growing demand and ensure sustainable economic growth.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), comprising 15 countries, has seen significant improvements in transport and energy infrastructure. The World Bank (2020) highlighted the progress of the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Project, which aims to connect five countries with a modern highway, facilitating regional connectivity. However, access to electricity remains low, with only 42% of the population having access to reliable energy in 2020.

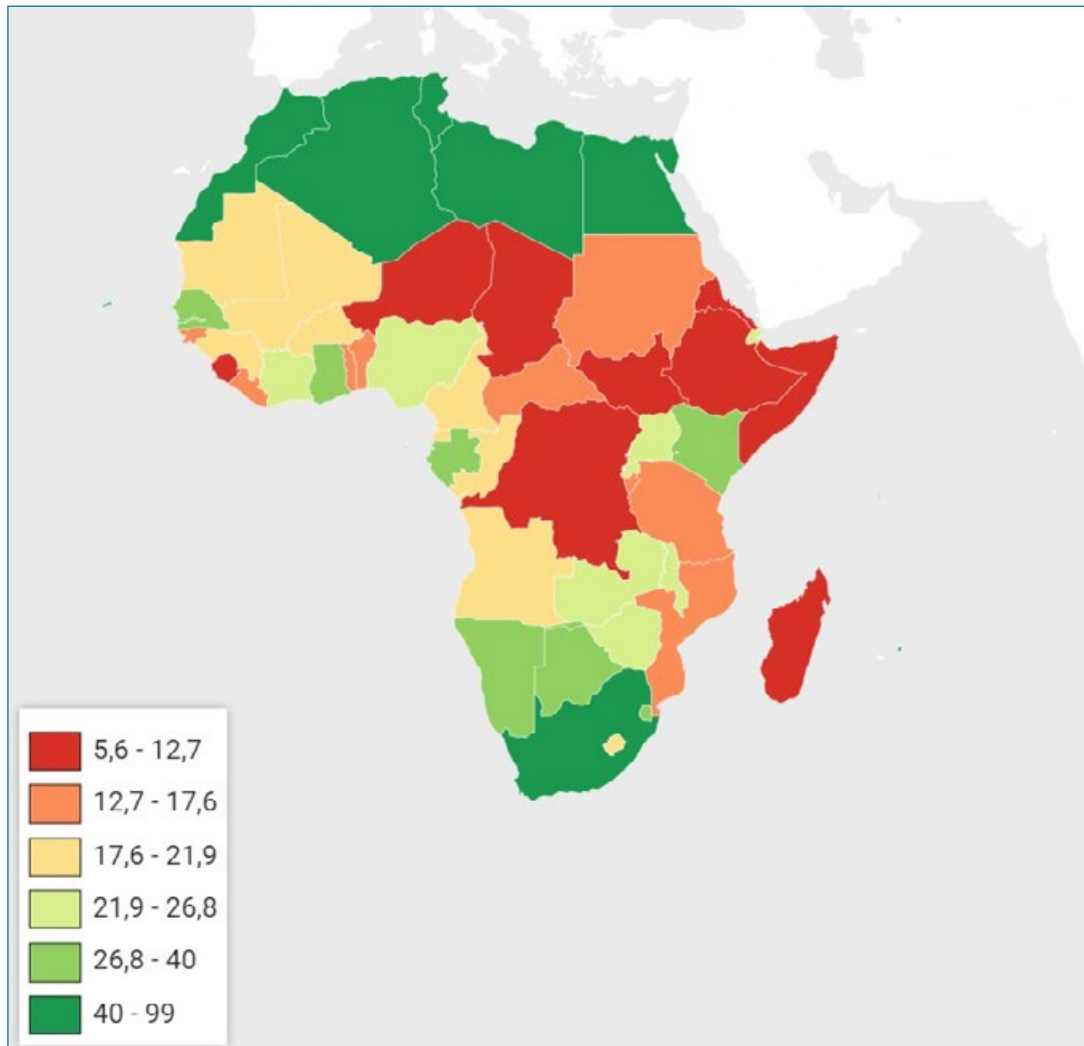
Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), composed of 16 countries, there are considerable infrastructure disparities. South Africa and Namibia boast high-quality infrastructure, but countries including Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) lag behind. According to the African Development Bank (2021), 70% of roads in South Africa are paved, compared to only 10% in the DRC. In the energy sector, SADC's energy initiative has driven meaningful progress, with an average electrification rate of 48% in 2020.

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), comprising 11 countries, suffers from significant deficits in transport and energy infrastructure. Only 30% of roads in the region are paved, and electricity access averages just 25% of the population (African Development Bank, 2021). Projects like the Douala-Bangui-Ndjamena Corridor aim to enhance connectivity, but progress has been slow.

Finally, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), which includes 21 countries, has a mixed record in infrastructure development. Initiatives such as Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway project between Nairobi and Mombasa have transformed regional logistics. According to the Africa Infrastructure Development Index (2021), Kenya and Ethiopia lead with scores of 35 and 32, respectively (on a scale of 0 to 100), while South Sudan remains at the bottom, with a score of 5.

Figure 1:

Africa Infrastructure Development Index for the 54 African Countries, 2022



Source: African Development Bank.

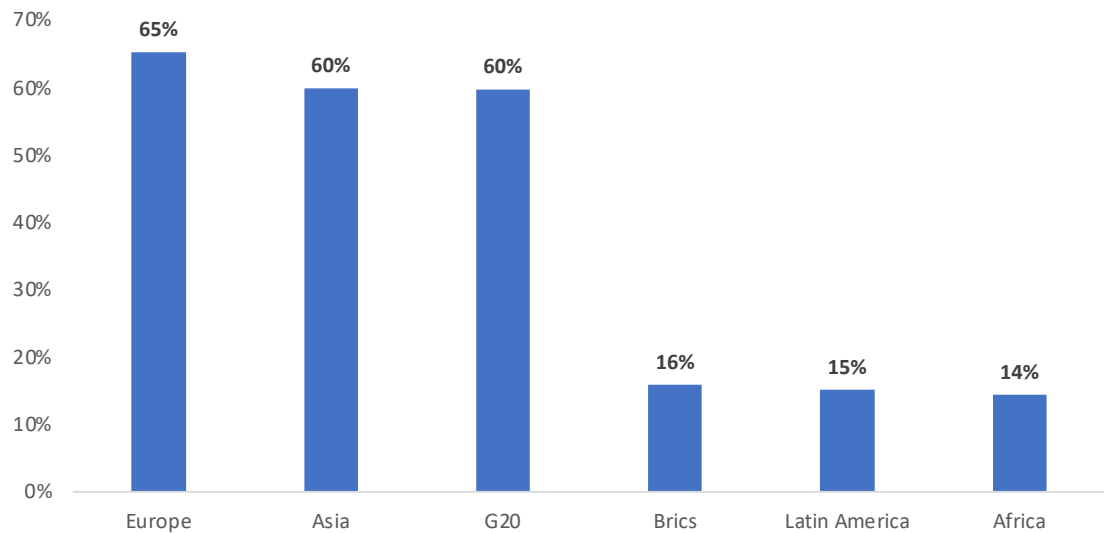
Addressing Africa's infrastructure challenges requires a coordinated effort involving domestic resources, regional integration, and international partnerships. In this context, the EU Global Gateway initiative can play a crucial role in closing financing gaps by aligning its agenda with AfCFTA's objectives, in order to leverage Africa's economic potential, foster its sustainable development, and reduce cross-regional disparities between African RECs.

CURRENT STATE OF AFRICAN INTRA-TRADE

Limited intra-African trade (section 1 and Figure 2) reflects structural challenges in infrastructure and market fragmentation, as well as the predominance of commodity exports directed toward non-African markets including Europe, China, and the United States.

Figure 2:

Intra-Continental Trade (% of Total Trade), 2023



Source: UNCTAD.

Most African exports are raw materials and low-value goods, while high-value manufacturing and processed products account for a relatively small share. The primary export markets for many African countries are non-African partners. For example, China is a major importer of minerals, while Europe remains the largest destination for agricultural products and oil (World Bank, 2020). As a result, African economies are more integrated with external trading partners than with neighboring countries, hindering the continent's efforts to build regional value chains and promote economic diversification.

In addition, regulatory misalignment between African countries limits the effectiveness of regional trade agreements. Non-tariff barriers, such as differing technical standards, import quotas, and licensing requirements, create administrative burdens for exporters. Customs procedures at many borders remain inconsistent and prone to delays. Despite AfCFTA's objective of streamlining these processes, the harmonization of regulations across countries remains an ongoing challenge (UNECA, 2020).

The economic disparities between African countries and highly uneven industrial capacity also affect the flow of intra-African trade. Relatively industrialized economies such as South Africa and Nigeria dominate regional trade in sub-Saharan Africa, while many smaller or less-developed countries struggle to engage meaningfully in continental trade. The lack of industrial capacity across much of the continent limits the production of goods that can be traded regionally, perpetuating dependence on imports from outside Africa (AfDB, 2020). In addition, fiscal constraints and weak governance undermine the capacity of governments to invest adequately in infrastructure and industrial development.

THE EU'S GLOBAL GATEWAY INITIATIVE: POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

With a budget of up to €300 billion through 2027, the EU's Global Gateway targets partnerships in regions including Africa, Asia, and Latin America to promote renewable

energy, digitalization, and green projects. Designed as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Gateway offers a values-based, transparent approach to infrastructure, aligning with climate goals and international standards (European Commission, 2021). By fostering partnerships rather than dependencies, the initiative seeks to position the EU as a key player in global development and geopolitical influence (Council of the EU, 2022).

In Africa, the Global Gateway's objectives are particularly focused on fostering sustainable and trusted connections, enhancing infrastructure, and supporting the continent's transition towards greener and more resilient economies. The EU-Africa Global Gateway, a specific arm of this broader initiative, reflects the EU's commitment to deepening its partnership with Africa. It aims to bolster investments in critical infrastructure projects and create opportunities for economic development, particularly benefiting Africa's young people. This partnership is underscored by a new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement with the African Development Bank Group, which has already allocated €972 million for blended financing arrangements and assurance measures (AfDB, 2024). By supporting infrastructure projects and promoting economic development, the EU-Africa Global Gateway intends to address Africa's pressing needs for affordable finance, particularly for climate resilience and sustainable development (European Commission, 2021).

Transport infrastructure projects will play a critical role in achieving the initiative's objectives. One such project is the Northern Strategic Transport Corridor, which aims to improve regional connectivity and trade along East Africa's busiest trade route, linking Kenya to Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (European Commission, 2022). By enhancing transport and trade facilitation, it seeks to boost regional economic integration. Under this framework, the focus has been on investments that improve infrastructure, streamline logistics, and reduce trade barriers, which is in line with the objectives of both the Trans-African Highway (TAH) network, and regional projects such as LAPSET (Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor).

These projects are not isolated efforts but are part of a broader strategy that aligns with the goals of AfCFTA. By investing in transport corridors such as the Northern Strategic Transport Corridor, the Global Gateway aligns with AfCFTA's goals of enhancing regional connectivity and trade. These projects help reduce transportation costs, improve access to markets, and streamline cross-border trade, thus fostering economic integration across the continent.

Furthermore, the Global Gateway's focus on mobilizing up to €300 billion for sustainable projects includes substantial investments in climate-resilient infrastructure. This financial support is crucial for African countries striving to meet their climate adaptation and mitigation goals under the Paris Agreement, and it thereby complements AfCFTA's efforts to promote sustainable economic development (European Commission, 2021). Enhancing digital connectivity through projects such as the Africa Europe Digital Innovation Bridge aligns with AfCFTA's objectives of promoting technological innovation and digital trade. Improved digital infrastructure facilitates e-commerce, enhances communication, and supports the development of new business models. Similarly, investments in clean energy support AfCFTA's broader goals of creating a sustainable and resilient economic environment. By increasing access to renewable energy and improving energy efficiency, these projects contribute to the overall competitiveness and environmental sustainability of African economies.

The Global Gateway's emphasis on health, education, and development of digital skills aligns with AfCFTA's vision of creating inclusive economic opportunities. By investing in these areas, the initiative helps build a skilled workforce, improve access to essential

services, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are broadly shared across different segments of the population (European Commission, 2021). Overall, the EU's Global Gateway initiative provides vital support for the infrastructure development needed to realize the full potential of AfCFTA. Through its alignment with AfCFTA's objectives, the Global Gateway can help create a more integrated, competitive, and resilient African market, fostering economic growth and regional integration.

CASE STUDY: THE MOMBASA-KISANGANI CORRIDOR

The Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor, a crucial part of the Lagos-Mombasa Highway, or TAH 8 (Trans-African Highway 8), exemplifies the potential impact of the EU's Global Gateway initiative on regional connectivity and trade facilitation in Africa. This corridor connects the port of Mombasa in Kenya to Kisangani in the DRC, traversing Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC. The corridor functions as a crucial multimodal trade route, managing over 30 million metric tons of cargo each year. By combining road, rail, pipeline, and inland waterway transport, it has the potential to become an efficient entry point into East and Central Africa (Mghenyi, 2023).

The Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor is designed to reduce logistical bottlenecks and enhance the efficiency of trade routes. Key features include the reduction of roadblocks, the operationalization of an Electronic Drivers' and Cargo Tracking System (EDCTS), Virtual and Weighing-in-Motion Weighbridges, and One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs). These measures are intended to streamline the movement of goods and reduce transit times, thus improving trade facilitation and market access across East and Central Africa. Integration with the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor is also planned, which will further improve regional connectivity and competition. This integration aims to create a comprehensive network that supports economic growth and regional integration by enhancing the efficiency and capacity of transport infrastructure (Mghenyi, 2023).

Today, the development of the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor offers valuable lessons in project implementation, stakeholder engagement, and leveraging international investments for local benefits. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have played a crucial role in the implementation of this project, highlighting the importance of leveraging both public and private sector resources for funding and implementation. Operational efficiency strategies, such as reducing roadblocks and using advanced tracking systems, have significantly enhanced the efficiency of trade routes. Aligning infrastructure projects with regional and continental initiatives, such as AfCFTA and LAPSSET, has also proven to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability (Mghenyi, 2023). However, there is still much more that the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor can offer in terms of economic benefits, regional integration, and long-term development opportunities.

The expected impact of the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor, and the broader TAH 8 project, on regional connectivity and trade facilitation is significant. By improving transport infrastructure, the project is expected to reduce transportation costs, enhance trade facilitation, and improve market access, thereby contributing to economic growth and integration in East and Central Africa. The project is also anticipated to generate many jobs across multiple sectors, funded by a blend of private-sector investment and public funding provided by African governments. Employment opportunities will arise in areas such as engineering and design, where skilled professionals will be needed to plan and conceptualize the infrastructure. The construction phase will also see a surge in job openings for laborers and technicians tasked with building and maintaining the roadways. In

addition, the logistics sector will experience significant growth as new transportation routes will require efficient coordination and management of goods and services. The supply chain will expand, providing jobs related to production, distribution, and procurement of materials necessary for the highway's construction and upkeep (Transport Africa, 2022).

Businesses along the new routes will gain increased access to markets, potentially spurring economic activity and creating further employment opportunities. This ripple effect will benefit not only large companies but also SMEs looking to capitalize on improved connectivity. Materials suppliers will be crucial in providing the raw inputs needed for construction. Construction firms and subcontractors will find ample opportunities to participate in the project, whether through direct construction roles or specialized tasks that support the overall infrastructure (Transport Africa, 2022).

Overall, this network will play a key role in connecting African nations through integrated road transport infrastructure, fostering both physical and economic integration across the continent. By improving connectivity and reducing trade barriers, it can strengthen relationships and enhance cooperation among African countries (AfDB, 2003). This improved infrastructure, alongside common trade regulations, can facilitate easier access to Africa's vast markets, encouraging diversification and investment in sectors beyond the traditional ones. Such efforts are critical to achieve economies of scale, a central objective of AfCFTA. Once fully realized, AfCFTA is expected to stimulate economic restructuring, promoting diversification while supporting agricultural and industrial growth. The Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor's ability to reduce trade costs and enhance connectivity will create a ripple effect, driving economic activity and furthering the emergence of a more integrated African market. Projections suggest that AfCFTA could unlock up to \$450 billion in benefits by 2045, with the TAH 8 project playing a vital role in realizing these opportunities (Luke, 2023).

Furthermore, the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor is poised to greatly improve access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and emergency response in the regions it connects. As transportation infrastructure is enhanced, healthcare services will become more accessible to remote and underserved communities, allowing for quicker and more efficient delivery of medical supplies, better access to hospitals and clinics, and more timely medical interventions. With better roads, emergency vehicles will be able to reach affected areas more swiftly, potentially saving lives by reducing response times. This improved connectivity will be crucial during natural disasters or crises, as it will enable more efficient evacuation processes and the rapid deployment of aid and rescue teams.

In terms of education, the improved road network will facilitate easier travel for students and teachers, reducing absenteeism and enabling higher enrollment rates in schools. Educational institutions will also benefit from improved supply chains, ensuring that schools have better access to necessary resources including textbooks, technology, and other educational materials.

Overall, the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor is not just about economic development through job creation and market access. It also promises to enhance the overall quality of life for people in the connected regions by making vital services more accessible and reliable, thereby contributing to broader social and community wellbeing.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering Africa's critical infrastructure gap and weak intra-regional trade integration, there is an urgent need for targeted policy measures that will bridge this gap and bolster trade among African economies. Priorities outlined in initiatives such as AfCFTA and the

EU's Global Gateway can provide a suitable framework for these policy measures, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development across the African continent. Policy measures should include:

1. Simplifying Trade Regulations and Enhancing Cross-Border Coordination

To overcome regulatory challenges and reduce non-tariff barriers, African countries should implement reforms to streamline trade processes. Harmonized customs procedures, supported by digitized systems, can significantly reduce bureaucratic delays and improve the efficiency of cross-border trade. Establishing regional trade facilitation bodies will also ensure better coordination among countries and regional economic communities. These measures are essential to unlock the potential of integrated transport networks, such as the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor, and to address the high logistics costs identified as a key impediment to intra-African trade.

2. Building Local Capacity for Sustainable Infrastructure

Investing in capacity building is critical to ensure the long-term sustainability of infrastructure projects. Training programs must focus on developing local expertise in infrastructure development and maintenance, equipping communities with the skills needed to manage and replicate such projects. Technology transfer and the promotion of best practices through international partnerships can enhance local capabilities. Additionally, a strong emphasis on inclusive workforce development, with active employment and training opportunities for women and marginalized groups, will boost job creation and foster equitable economic growth.

3. Promoting Social and Environmental Sustainability

To ensure that infrastructure projects are both socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, several best practices should be adopted:

Conduct thorough environmental impact assessments (EIAs) before project implementation to identify and mitigate risks such as deforestation and water pollution.

- Incorporate climate-resilient and green infrastructure techniques, including renewable-energy integration, permeable paving, and elevated roads, to enhance adaptability to extreme weather events and reduce environmental harm.
- Engage marginalized and indigenous communities during project planning to ensure inclusive development and equitable distribution of benefits.
- Implement continuous monitoring systems, supported by independent audits, to ensure compliance with environmental and social standards.

These measures, aligned with the goals of the Global Gateway initiative, will balance economic development with long-term ecological and social resilience.

4. Preserving Africa's Autonomy in Infrastructure Development

To maintain Africa's independence and sovereignty in infrastructure projects, policies must prioritize Africa-centric approaches that serve the continent's long-term interests.

Investment agreements should not lead to new dependencies or favor external stakeholders over local communities. Expanding African-led initiatives can strengthen intra-African trade and connectivity on terms defined by the continent. By ensuring that regional integration reflects African priorities, these efforts will contribute to sustainable and self-reliant growth.

5. Addressing Financing Challenges and Maximizing Investments

Financing remains a significant impediment to completing major infrastructure projects. Governments and stakeholders should prioritize projects with high impact and should adopt phased implementation strategies to manage funding constraints. PPPs should be leveraged to attract private investment through proven models such as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) and Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT). Regional workshops and stakeholder engagement initiatives can raise awareness and encourage greater private-sector participation.

Equally important is the focus on maintaining existing infrastructure. Ensuring the durability of investments through consistent maintenance standards will maximize their long-term economic impact, as emphasized in the successful development of transport corridors such as Mombasa-Kisangani.

By addressing these key areas—regulatory reform, capacity building, environmental sustainability, preserving autonomy, and strategic financing—Africa can effectively leverage AfCFTA and the EU's Global Gateway initiative. Together, these measures will enable the continent to reduce logistics costs, enhance regional integration, and unlock its vast economic potential while ensuring that growth is inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of Africa's priorities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the EU's Global Gateway initiative offers substantial potential to advance the development of Africa's infrastructure, promote regional integration, and contribute to sustainable economic growth across the continent. By strategically investing in critical infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and digital networks, the Global Gateway can enhance connectivity and trade facilitation within Africa, aligning closely with the objectives of AfCFTA. Such collaboration promises a more competitive, resilient, and integrated African market, enabling economies of scale and positioning Africa as an attractive investment destination.

Projects such as the Mombasa-Kisangani Corridor, which seek to connect African countries and facilitate trade through improved road networks, exemplify the impact that continent-wide infrastructure projects can have on economic growth, employment, and poverty reduction. In the long term, projects like this will complement and amplify the goals of AfCFTA and the EU's Global Gateway.

Ultimately, a balanced approach—in which external support aligns with Africa's priorities and African-led initiatives drive integration—will be crucial for building a robust and self-sustaining economic landscape across the continent. The EU's Global Gateway, in conjunction with AfCFTA, has the potential to transform Africa's infrastructure and connectivity. Yet, achieving this vision requires an unwavering commitment to Africa's economic sovereignty, fostering partnerships that benefit African communities and promote long-term growth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- African Development Bank (AfDB). (2003). *Review of the Implementation Status of the Trans-African Highways and the Missing Links*.
- African Development Bank (AfDB). (2020). *African Economic Outlook 2020: Developing Africa's Workforce for the Future*. Abidjan: African Development Bank.
- African Development Bank (AfDB). (2024). *Global Gateway: European Commission and African Development Bank Group unlock new funding for African infrastructure projects*. Abidjan: African Development Bank.
- African Union. (2022). *African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*.
- Agyei-Boakye, O. P. (2022). *TransAfrica Highway, the next transport project of the century?* Transport Africa.
- Council of the European Union. (2022). *Global Gateway: Strengthening Europe's Engagement with the World*.
- European Commission. (2021). *Global Gateway: Up to €300 billion for the EU's strategy to boost sustainable links around the world*. European Union.
- European Commission. (2022). *Global Gateway: First section of modernised 560km highway along the strategic Northern Corridor, inaugurated in Kenya, will boost trade in East Africa*. European Union.
- Foster, V., & Briceño-Garmendia, C. (2010). *Africa's Infrastructure: A Time for Transformation*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Luke, D. (2023). *Understanding African trade is key to helping its development*. LSE.
- Mghenyi, C. (2023). *State rolls out plans to ensure efficiency on Northern Corridor*. The Star.
- UNCTAD. (2021). *Economic Development in Africa Report 2021: Reaping the Potential of the AfCFTA for Inclusive Growth*. New York: United Nations.
- World Bank. (2020). *Connecting Africa through Trade: Infrastructure, Growth, and Trade Facilitation in Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MAHMOUD ARBOUCH



Mahmoud Arbouch is an Economist at the Policy Center for the New South. He is a graduate engineer from the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA – Rabat). His research focuses mainly on macro and regional economics in Morocco, industrial policy issues, as well as infrastructure development and financing.

Mahmoud is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the Faculty of Governance Economic & Social Sciences of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (FGSES – UM6P), working on industrial policy and regional development in Morocco.

ASYA PELKES



Asya holds a law degree and is currently pursuing her studies at the European University Institute, focusing on migration governance, sustainable development, and Africa-EU relations. During her time at the Policy Center for the New South, as an intern, she explored the role of infrastructure development in fostering regional integration and economic growth across Africa. Her research interests also include human rights and the politics of migration control.

ABOUT THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

[Read more](#)

All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author.

Policy Center for the New South

Rabat Campus of Mohammed VI Polytechnic University,
Rocade Rabat Salé - 11103
Email : contact@policycenter.ma
Phone : +212 (0) 537 54 04 04
Fax : +212 (0) 537 71 31 54

www.policycenter.ma

