Intra-Trade Relations and the Implementation of African Continental Free Trade Area. A Study of Nigeria and Ghana Relations (2015-2026)

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Abstract
African Continental Free Trade Area was established to enhance economic integration, promote intra-African trade, and create a unified continental market. Since the commencement of trading under AfCFTA in 2021, African states have intensified efforts towards implementation through initiatives such as the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), and the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol. Despite its promise, implementation has faced significant challenges. This study examined intra-trade relations and the implementation of AfCFTA, a study of Nigeria and Ghana trade relations (2015 to 2026), with a view to assessing progress, identifying constraints, and suggesting improvement strategies. The study was anchored on Liberal Intergovernmentalism Theory, which emphasises the role of state preferences and bargaining in regional integration. The study adopted a qualitative research design and relied on secondary data from scholarly publications, official reports, and trade statistics. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Findings revealed that although both Nigeria and Ghana have ratified the AfCFTA and established administrative structures, implementation remains uneven. Ghana has shown a stronger commitment through hosting the AfCFTA Secretariat and aligning policies, whereas Nigeria demonstrated initial reluctance due to protectionist tendencies. The study also identified policy incongruence, infrastructural deficits, trade imbalances, low SME awareness, and political instability as major impediments. It concluded that, while AfCFTA holds significant potential for economic transformation, its success between the two countries depends on translating political commitments into actionable measures. The study recommended that, among other measures, policy harmonization, digital trade coordination, and sustained political commitment, supported by bilateral mechanisms and infrastructure investments, are vital for ensuring the effective implementation of AfCFTA and promoting inclusive economic growth in West Africa.

Keywords: *African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Intra-African Trade, economic integration, liberal intergovernmental theory, Pan African payment etc*

Introduction:

Trade has long been recognised as a fundamental driver of economic growth and development across nations. In Africa, intra-African trade has historically remained low compared to other regions, largely due to structural bottlenecks, infrastructural deficiencies, and policy inconsistencies. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), reported that, intra-African trade accounts for only about 15% of the continent's total trade volume, in contrast to intra-regional trade in Europe and Asia, which exceeds 60% (UNECA, 2019). This limited level of trade integration has constrained Africa's capacity to achieve sustainable industrialisation, technological advancement, and economic diversification. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which came into force in 2019, represents a landmark initiative aimed at addressing these challenges by creating a single market for goods and services across 54 African countries. The AfCFTA aspires to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, enhance competitiveness, and promote economic integration across the continent. If effectively implemented, it has the potential to boost intra-African trade by up to 52% by 2025 and lift millions out of poverty (World Bank, 2020), and enhance the economic resilience of African States (UNECA, 2018; Ajewumi, Afolabi & Joe-Akunne, 2024). However, realising these objectives requires strong political will, policy harmonisation, and infrastructural development among member states.

Nigeria and Ghana are among the leading economies in West Africa and occupy strategic positions within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Ghana hosts the AfCFTA Secretariat in Accra and has consistently demonstrated strong institutional commitment towards the implementation of the agreement. Nigeria, on the other hand, initially expressed concerns regarding industrial protection, revenue losses, and market competitiveness before eventually ratifying the agreement in 2020. Recent developments between 2024 and 2026 indicate increasing efforts towards the operationalisation of AfCFTA across the continent. These developments include the expansion of the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), the implementation of tariff concessions, the growth in the issuance of AfCFTA Certificates of Origin, and an increased emphasis on digital trading under AfCFTA frameworks through structured customs and trade facilitation mechanisms. Furthermore, recent initiatives, including the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol, and regional digital infrastructure projects, have been introduced to reduce cross-border transaction costs and improve trade efficiency across Africa was also appointed co-champion of the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol in 2025 and has increased efforts toward digital trade coordination and export facilitation. However, despite these implementation efforts, significant challenges continue to hinder effective trade integration between Nigeria and Ghana. These challenges include infrastructure deficits, border delays, inconsistent trade policies, limited awareness among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and uneven implementation of AfCFTA provisions across member states. Consequently, the extent to which AfCFTA has improved intra-trade relations between Nigeria and Ghana remains a subject of scholarly and policy concern. Although numerous studies have examined the prospects and challenges of the AfCFTA, relatively few have focused specifically on its implementation and implications for bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and Ghana over an extended period. Most existing studies have concentrated on theoretical projections and continental-level analysis with limited attention to recent implementation developments and bilateral experience following the commencement of trading under the Agreement.

Against this background, the study examines intra-trade relations and the implementation of African Continental Free Trade Area between Nigeria and Ghana from 2011-2026. It evaluates the extent of AfCFTA implementation, identifies the major challenges affecting its effectiveness, and examines strategies for strengthening bilateral trade within the framework of regional economic integration

Theoretical Framework

The liberal intergovernmentalism idea of integration was used as the study's analytical framework. Notably, the critique of neo-functionalism led to the emergence of liberal intergovernmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s (Scheingold 1970; Schmitter 1969). This theory explains regional integration as the outcome of rational decisions made by sovereign states pursuing their national interest through interstate negotiation and cooperation. Liberal intergovernmentalism argues that domestic economic interests influence government preferences, while regional agreements emerge through bargaining among states seeking mutual benefits. This theory is relevant to this study because both Nigeria and Ghana participate in the AfCFTA based on their national economic priorities while cooperating within the broader objective of African Regional Integration.

Application of the Theory to the Study

In applying Liberal Intergovernmentalism to this study, AfCFTA forms the independent variable, while the level and quality of its implementation between Nigeria and Ghana represent the dependent variable. The theory explains why AfCFTA implementation varies across countries regardless of shared legal commitments. The theory posits that states commit to and comply with regional agreements only when such commitments align with domestic economic interests and political priorities. Consequently, implementation results indicate the convergence of domestic preferences rather than uniform continental obligations. In Nigeria's case, domestic preference formation has been shaped by concerns over industrial competitiveness, revenue protection, employment security, and border control. Interest groups such as manufacturers' associations, labour unions, and revenue-generating agencies have exerted significant influence on government trade policy. These domestic pressures have resulted in a cautious and selective approach to AfCFTA implementation, manifested in the retention of import restrictions, discretionary border enforcement, and slow policy harmonisation. Liberal Intergovernmentalism thus provides a coherent explanation for Nigeria's uneven implementation posture, as national authorities prioritise domestic economic stability over full trade liberalisation. On the other hand, the theory explains Ghana's relatively proactive approach to AfCFTA implementation. Ghana's domestic preference structure is characterised by a more diversified economy, export-oriented industrial policies and strong private-sector advocacy for market expansion. These factors have generated broader political consensus in favour of AfCFTA compliance. As Liberal Intergovernmentalism predicts, when domestic actors perceive regional integration as beneficial, governments are more willing to align national policies with regional commitments. Ghana's early ratification of AfCFTA, hosting of the Secretariat, and integration of AfCFTA objectives into national development strategies are therefore results of favourable domestic preference aggregation. Liberal Intergovernmentalism also illuminates bilateral bargaining dynamics between Nigeria and Ghana. The theory posits that interstate cooperation is the product of negotiated compromises shaped by relative power and strategic interests. Furthermore, the theory provides an analytical lens for understanding the challenges affecting AfCFTA implementation and also recommends

strategies. These strategies are consistent with the theory's core argument that effective regional integration requires aligning regional obligations with domestic interests.

In a nutshell, the application of Liberal Intergovernmentalism provides rich explanatory framework for analysing AfCFTA implementation between Nigeria and Ghana. The theory enables a systematic understanding of why implementation results remain uneven and how they can be improved. This theoretical application therefore provides a strong foundation for interpreting the study's findings and advancing policy-relevant conclusions.

Conceptual Review

Intra-African Trade

In the multifaceted domain of international trade, one particular concept stands out for its focus on promoting commerce within specific geographical or economic regions: intra-trade. Essentially, intra-trade refers to the exchange of goods, services, and capital across borders, but within a particular regional bloc or among member countries of a defined economic group (Stiglitz & Charlton, 2005). The World Trade Organisation, in various publications, often defines intra-trade primarily in the context of regional trade agreements and trading blocs. Intra-trade refers to trade in goods and services that takes place between member countries of a regional trade agreement. The volume of intra-trade is frequently used as a metric to determine the success or vitality of these regional agreements in promoting economic cooperation among member countries (WTO, 2011). Brülhart (1995) provided a nuanced understanding of intra-industry trade, which is closely linked to the broader concept of intra-trade. He defined intra-industry trade as the part of trade (imports and exports) that is not associated with inter-industry trade. This definition was particularly focused on distinguishing between vertical and horizontal intra-industry trade, where the former involves trade in goods of different quality levels, and the latter involves trade in goods of similar quality levels. Each of these definitions, while distinct in its focus, highlights the core principle of intra-trade: commerce between nations or entities within defined economic or regional groups.

One of the primary motivations behind the promotion of intra-trade lies in the shared cultural, historical, or economic ties among member countries. These shared attributes often translate into similarities in consumer preferences, production capabilities, and regulatory frameworks. Such commonalities can significantly reduce transaction costs and increase the predictability of trade outcomes, making commerce among these nations more appealing and economically viable (Krugman, 1991). For instance, countries within a specific region might share similar agricultural practices, dietary preferences, or even fashion trends. These shared characteristics can result in a higher propensity for goods and services to find receptive markets within the bloc, fostering an environment where member countries can specialise in producing goods and services for which they have a comparative advantage, and trade them efficiently within the region.

Moreover, the strategic significance of intra-trade extends beyond mere economic considerations. Regional blocs or economic groups, such as the European Union (EU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), often promote intra-trade as a means to achieve broader socio-political objectives. Enhanced trade relations can serve as a tool for fostering political cohesion, ensuring regional stability, and facilitating diplomatic dialogue among member nations (Mansfield & Reinhardt, 2003). While the concept encourages trade within a specific bloc, it might inadvertently lead to trade diversion, wherein trade is shifted from a more efficient external producer to a less efficient producer within the bloc (Panagariya, 2000). Such diversion can potentially result in economic inefficiencies and might even be counterproductive in the long run. Additionally, overly focusing on intra-trade might make regional economies too interdependent,

rendering them vulnerable to localised economic shocks or downturns. In sum, intra-trade represents a strategic focus on consolidating and enhancing trade relations within specific regional or economic blocs. While economically promising, given shared preferences and reduced transaction costs, it's also a tool wielded for deeper geopolitical objectives. Like all trade strategies, the key lies in balancing the benefits of consolidated regional trade with the broader advantages of diversified global commerce (Deardorff, 1998).

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) stands as a beacon of potential for the African continent, poised to redefine commerce and catalyse economic growth. Its inception was driven by the aspiration of creating a single market for goods, services, and the movement of persons, to accelerate the establishment of the Continental Customs Union. By consolidating an integrated market of over 1.2 billion people, it's slated to become the world's largest free trade area in terms of participating countries since the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Sayeh & Lipton, 2020). The AfCFTA's establishment was not just a feat of economic and trade diplomacy but also a clear expression of Africa's ambition to be the master of its destiny. Historically, intra-African trade had been considerably low. As per the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), intra-African exports were 16.6% of total exports in 2017, compared to 68% in Europe, and 59% in Asia. This posed a conundrum given Africa's rich endowment in resources and the potential of its burgeoning young population. AfCFTA, thus, was a collective response to enhance intra-African trade and reduce dependency on external continents for trade and commerce (UNECA, 2018). The operational dynamics of the AfCFTA are anchored on a foundation of progressive liberalisation. The primary aim is to progressively eliminate tariffs on intra-African trade, making it easier for African businesses to trade within the continent and cater to and benefit from the African market. To this end, member nations have committed to removing tariffs from 90% of goods, allowing free access to commodities, goods, and services across the continent. The remaining 10% of tariffs, categorised under sensitive and exclusive lists, would be dealt with subsequently. This promise of tariff removal can revolutionise industries, with sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services standing to gain significantly. For instance, according to the African Union, the agricultural sector could see a potential output gain of $16.1 billion by 2025 (African Union, 2019). Also, recent developments show the expansion of the expansion of the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), which was introduced to facilitate practical trading among participating states and trade sector. However, the success of AfCFTA is not without challenges. One significant hurdle is the differing levels of economic development among member nations. While some countries have more advanced industries, others have nascent economic structures, which could lead to concerns about potential imbalances in trade benefits. Additionally, the implementation of such an extensive trade agreement requires robust infrastructure, physical for the movement of goods and digital for the provision of services. The current infrastructural deficit, thus, poses a substantial challenge. Also, concerns about the potential influx of cheap goods harming local industries have been raised, necessitating the establishment of safeguards to protect burgeoning industries (Oqubay & Lin, 2019). In sum, the AfCFTA is a monumental stride toward realising Africa's potential. By fostering a conducive environment for intra-African trade, it can catalyse economic growth, reduce unemployment, and pave the way for Africa's integration into the global economy as a formidable bloc. However, its potential can only be fully realised through diligent execution, robust infrastructure development, and proactive policies to safeguard and promote local industries.

Exposition of Thesis

AfCFTA Implementation between Nigeria and Ghana

Empirical literature conceptualises AfCFTA implementation not merely as treaty ratification but as the practical translation of commitments into domestic policies, institutional arrangements, and measurable trade outcomes (UNECA, 2018; World Bank, 2020). This includes legal domestication, policy harmonisation, institutional coordination, and increased intra-African trade flows. Studies have shown that implementation varies significantly across African countries due to differences in domestic economic structures, political priorities, and institutional capacity.

From a theoretical standpoint, scholars such as Moravcsik (2013) and Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2019) argue that regional agreements are implemented effectively only when they align with national interests and domestic preferences. This perspective is particularly relevant in the African context, where states often prioritise economic sovereignty and domestic industrial protection over regional commitments. Empirical evidence from Nigeria suggests a cautious and inconsistent approach to AfCFTA implementation. Ezeoha, Uche, and Uche (2019) found that Nigeria's delay in ratifying the agreement was driven by concerns over industrial vulnerability, potential revenue losses, and fear of market domination by more competitive economies. Although Nigeria eventually ratified the agreement and established the National Action Committee on AfCFTA, subsequent studies (Adeoye, 2021; Bello, 2022) reveal that implementation has been constrained by persistent protectionist policies, including import bans, border closures, and regulatory restrictions. These measures contradict AfCFTA principles and limit the extent of trade liberalisation. In contrast, Ghana is widely regarded as a proactive implementer of AfCFTA. Adom (2020) and Quartey (2022) highlight Ghana's early ratification, institutional preparedness, and strategic alignment of national policies with AfCFTA objectives. The country's decision to host the AfCFTA Secretariat further demonstrates its political commitment and leadership in regional integration. Additionally, Ghana's diversified export base and export-oriented policies enhance its capacity to benefit from and implement AfCFTA provisions effectively.

However, bilateral evidence on Nigeria-Ghana trade relations presents a more complex picture. Ampratwum (2021) and UNECA (2019) note that despite policy commitments, the actual level of implementation remains uneven due to persistent non-tariff barriers, administrative inefficiencies, and inconsistent enforcement of trade regulations. These challenges continue to limit the full realisation of AfCFTA benefits between the two countries. Overall, the literature reveals a divergence in implementation patterns, with Ghana demonstrating stronger institutional commitment compared to Nigeria's cautious approach. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these differences evolve and how they jointly shape intra-trade relations between both countries. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a longitudinal and comparative analysis of AfCFTA implementation between Nigeria and Ghana**.**

Challenges Affecting AfCFTA Implementation

Empirical literature identifies a wide range of structural, institutional, and policy-related challenges that constrain the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), particularly in the context of Nigeria and Ghana. These challenges are often interconnected and reflect deeper issues within African political economies.

One of the most significant challenges highlighted in the literature is policy incongruence between national trade policies and AfCFTA commitments. Ibrahim and Ogbeidi (2015) argue that many African states continue to adopt protectionist policies despite formally committing to trade liberalisation. This contradiction is particularly evident in Nigeria, where measures such as import

bans, border closures, and selective tariff enforcement have undermined AfCFTA principles (Bello, 2022). Adeoye (2021) further notes that such policies are often driven by domestic economic pressures, including the need to protect local industries and generate government revenue. These inconsistencies weaken trust among member states and hinder the smooth implementation of the agreement. Another major constraint is infrastructural deficit, which significantly increases the cost of doing business across African borders. Amusa, Mabuza, and Mabuza (2020) and UNECA (2018) emphasise that poor road networks, inefficient port systems, unreliable electricity supply, and weak digital infrastructure limit trade efficiency. In the Nigeria-Ghana corridor, issues such as port congestion, customs delays, and high transportation costs reduce the competitiveness of exports and discourage intra-regional trade. These infrastructural challenges not only slow down the movement of goods but also increase transaction costs, thereby limiting the potential benefits of AfCFTA. Trade imbalances and structural asymmetries also pose a significant challenge. Quartey (2022) observes that Ghana's relatively diversified export structure contrasts sharply with Nigeria's heavy dependence on crude oil exports. This imbalance creates unequal opportunities for participation in intra-African trade. Ampratwum (2021) argues that such asymmetries often lead to tensions, particularly in areas such as market access and trade restrictions. For instance, Ghana's enforcement of retail trade laws against foreign traders and Nigeria's retaliatory policies reflect underlying economic imbalances that complicate bilateral trade relations. Furthermore, limited awareness and capacity among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain a critical barrier. Osei-Assibey (2021) and Chirwa (2021) highlight that many SMEs lack adequate knowledge of AfCFTA provisions, including rules of origin, export documentation, and market opportunities. As a result, participation in intra-African trade is often dominated by larger firms with greater resources and access to information. This undermines the inclusive development objectives of AfCFTA and limits its impact on grassroots economic growth. Another important challenge is political instability and policy inconsistency. Awolowo (2021) and Oloruntoba (2022) argue that changes in government, electoral cycles, and shifting national priorities often disrupt long-term trade commitments. In many cases, governments prioritise short-term domestic concerns over regional integration goals. This leads to inconsistent implementation of AfCFTA policies and weakens the credibility of the agreement.

With all these complexities, However, there is still limited empirical analysis that examines how these challenges interact over time within specific bilateral contexts such as Nigeria and Ghana. This study addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive assessment of these challenges and their combined impact on intra-trade relations.

Strategies for Enhancing Intra-Trade Relations and AfCFTA Implementation

Empirical literature proposes a range of strategies aimed at improving AfCFTA implementation and strengthening intra-trade relations among African countries, particularly between Nigeria and Ghana. These strategies focus on addressing structural constraints, enhancing institutional capacity, and promoting policy coherence.

One of the most widely emphasised strategies is policy harmonisation. Adeoye (2021) argues that aligning national trade policies with AfCFTA commitments is critical for ensuring effective implementation. Similarly, Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2019) stress that regional agreements can only succeed when domestic policies are consistent with collective goals. In the context of Nigeria and Ghana, the establishment of bilateral policy coordination mechanisms is essential to reduce contradictions, prevent trade disputes, and ensure uniform application of trade regulations.

Another key strategy is institutional strengthening and coordination. Mensah (2021) and Nwachukwu (2021) highlight that effective implementation of AfCFTA requires strong institutions capable of managing trade processes, enforcing regulations, and coordinating stakeholders. This includes the establishment of national AfCFTA committees, inter-agency collaboration, and public-private partnerships. For Nigeria and Ghana, joint implementation frameworks and regular bilateral consultations can enhance cooperation and improve policy execution. Infrastructure development is also critical to improving intra-trade. Mbekeani (2021) and Asongu and Nwachukwu (2018) emphasise the need for significant investment in transport networks, ports, energy supply, and digital infrastructure. Efficient infrastructure reduces transaction costs, improves logistics, and enhances the competitiveness of exports. Regional initiatives such as cross-border transport corridors and trade facilitation systems are particularly important in strengthening trade between Nigeria and Ghana.

In addition, capacity building and awareness creation among SMEs are essential for inclusive participation in AfCFTA. Osei-Assibey (2021) and Atta-Asamoah and Mensah (2022) argue that targeted training programmes, access to trade information, and financial support mechanisms can empower SMEs to engage in cross-border trade. Enhancing SMEs' understanding of export procedures, rules of origin, and market opportunities will increase their participation and contribute to broader economic development.

Another important strategy is trade facilitation and digitalisation. Streamlining customs procedures, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks, and adopting digital trade platforms can significantly improve trade efficiency. Studies suggest that the use of electronic documentation, single-window systems, and automated customs processes can reduce delays and enhance transparency in cross-border trade. Finally, sustained political commitment and leadership are crucial for the success of AfCFTA. Drawing from liberal intergovernmentalism, Moravcsik (2013) argues that regional integration depends on the willingness of states to prioritise collective interests over narrow domestic concerns. Strong political will is necessary to implement reforms, resolve disputes, and maintain long-term commitment to the objectives of AfCFTA.

In summary, the literature identifies policy harmonisation, institutional strengthening, infrastructure development, SME empowerment, trade facilitation, and political commitment as key strategies for enhancing AfCFTA implementation. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these strategies can be effectively integrated and applied within specific bilateral contexts such as Nigeria and Ghana. This study seeks to fill this gap by analysing the practical applicability of these strategies in improving intra-trade relations between the two countries.

Conclusion

This study examined intra-trade relations and the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) between Nigeria and Ghana from 2011 to 2023. The findings revealed that while both countries have demonstrated commitment to the AfCFTA framework through ratification and policy adjustments, the level of implementation varies considerably. Ghana has been more proactive, integrating AfCFTA provisions into its national trade strategies and hosting the AfCFTA Secretariat, while Nigeria adopted a more cautious approach due to concerns over economic vulnerability and revenue losses.

The study further established that several impediments hinder the effective implementation of AfCFTA between Nigeria and Ghana. These include policy incongruence, infrastructural deficits, trade imbalances, lack of awareness among small and medium enterprises, and political instability. Despite these obstacles, the study identified feasible strategies for enhancing intra-trade relations

and accelerating AfCFTA implementation. These strategies include policy harmonisation through bilateral commissions, massive investment in infrastructure, targeted diversification to correct trade imbalances, sustained political commitment through institutionalisation of AfCFTA provisions in national laws, and increased stakeholder awareness campaigns. If these measures are systematically implemented, they will not only strengthen trade relations between Nigeria and Ghana but also contribute significantly to the broader goal of deepening economic integration across Africa. Thus, the success of AfCFTA depends on the ability of member states to translate commitments into concrete actions that address structural challenges and foster an enabling environment for inclusive trade growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are suggested:

i. Governments of Nigeria and Ghana through their Ministries of Trade and ECOWAS Commission should establish a bi-national trade harmonisation committee to align domestic trade regulations with AfCFTA provisions; conduct quarterly joint policy review meetings to resolve inconsistencies such as import restrictions, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers; and adopt a dispute resolution mechanism for addressing trade disagreements swiftly to prevent escalation.

ii. Governments of Nigeria and Ghana (AfDB) and Private Investors must prioritise completion of the Lagos–Accra Coastal Highway to facilitate smooth movement of goods and people; modernise key ports (Apapa in Nigeria and Tema in Ghana) through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for efficient cargo handling; and secure funding through AfDB loans and concessional financing for rail projects connecting major trade corridors.

iii. Ministries of Trade and Industry in both countries, National Chambers of Commerce, AfCFTA Secretariat should launch nationwide sensitisation programmes through media campaigns, workshops, and business forums to educate SMEs about AfCFTA opportunities; promote training on export readiness and AfCFTA rules of origin to enable SMEs to participate effectively; and develop digital trade platforms to disseminate trade information and facilitate cross-border transactions.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes significant contributions to knowledge. One of the major contributions of this study is its shift from broad continental projections to a focused bilateral analysis of AfCFTA implementation between Nigeria and Ghana. Much of the existing literature examines AfCFTA from a macro-continental perspective, often relying on simulation models and projected welfare gains. However, there is limited empirical work that interrogates how implementation unfolds between specific member States. The study contributes to theoretical knowledge by applying Liberal Intergovernmentalism to explain variations in AfCFTA implementation. While many studies on African integration rely heavily on economic integration theories, fewer incorporate political economy frameworks that emphasise domestic interest formation and interstate bargaining. Another important contribution lies in its systematic identification of gaps between formal AfCFTA commitments and practical implementation outcomes. The study shows that ratification and institutional establishment do not automatically translate into seamless trade

liberalisation. Persistent non-tariff barriers, infrastructural constraints, policy inconsistencies, and trade protection measures continue to affect intra-trade flows.

The study contributes to knowledge by contextualising AfCFTA within pre-existing ECOWAS trade arrangements and historical Nigeria-Ghana trade interactions. Rather than treating AfCFT as an isolated initiative, it situates the trade agreement within the broader context of West African economic cooperation.

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