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THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE US ECONOMIC POLICY OBJECTIVES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

This article analyses the role of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in the implementation of the US foreign policy objectives in the Central African region particularly in the Central African countries that are eligible for the AGOA benefits. The US has a long-standing partnership with Central Africa in particular and sub-Saharan Africa in general. The US is committed to accelerating economic growth across the region through increased trade and investment. Since it was first enacted in 2000, the AGOA has been a key element of US economic policy in Central Africa and sub-Saharan Africa especially. The main focus of the article is to examine the purpose of the AGOA and its role in the relationship between the US and Central African countries that are eligible for the AGOA benefits. Such countries as Cameroon, Angola, Chad, Gabon, Rwanda, the Republic of Congo and Burundi and their relations with the US were considered by the author.

Key words: AGOA, US, economic policy, Central Africa.

The last decade has seen a remarkable surge in US economic interest in the continent of Africa. Policymakers who once considered Africa the languid backwater of global economics are now rushing in to stake a claim in the continent's enormous resource endowment. Most of this effort operates with a rhetoric focused on «partnership» and «development», with the vision of using US trade and investment to lift Africans out of poverty. The United States has a long-standing partnership with Central Africa in particular and sub-Saharan Africa in general. The United States is committed to accelerating economic growth across the region through increased trade and investment. Since it was first enacted in 2000, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has been a key element of US economic policy in, and engagement with sub-Saharan Africa especially Central Africa. The centerpiece of US trade policy for Central Africa in particular and for Africa in general is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The focus of this article is to examine the purpose of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, to analyze the US economic policy towards Central Africa and the role played by the African Growth and Opportunity Act in relationship between the US and Central African countries.

«The US African Growth and Opportunity Act and Central African Countries» will analyze trade and investment data between the US and Central African countries. However, Brock R. Williams, an analyst in International Trade and Finance (US Congressional Research Service) wrote about the background and reauthorization of the AGOA¹. In his work, he described the origin of the AGOA, country eligibility of the AGOA and the length of reauthorization of the AGOA. Also, Zenia Lewis, Mwangi S. Kimenyi, Stephen Karingi, Simon Mevel and Anne W. Kamau, analyzed the AGOA and the possibilities post-2015². In their work, they stated that without an extension of the AGOA there will be declines in African exports, economic diversification and employment for many AGOA-eligible countries. Equally, Benjamin Leo and Vijaya Ramachandran wrote about underperformance of the AGOA³.

¹ Brock, R. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA): Background and Reauthorization. *Federation of American Scientists fas.org*. <<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43173.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

² Zenia, L., Mwangi, S., Kimenyi, T., Karingi, S., and Mevel, S. The African Growth and Opportunity Act: An Empirical Analysis of the Possibilities Post-2015. *Brookings Institution brookings.edu*. <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-african-growth-and-opportunity-act-an-empirical-analysis-of-the-possibilities-post-2015>> (2016, November, 28).

³ Benjamin, L. Vijaya, R. Getting Serious about Underperformance of the African Growth and Opportunity Act: Policy Options for Supporting Trade Potential in Africa. *Center for Global Development cgdev.org*. <http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/getting-serious-underperformance-african-growth-opportunity-act_final_0.pdf> (2016, November, 28).

In their work, they described the failures of the AGOA and they proposed policy options for Supporting Trade Potential in Africa. Some authors have simply discussed the AGOA with regards to the whole of the African continent while others have discussed AGOA with regards to Sub-Saharan Africa. It is necessary to study the role of AGOA as a key element of US economic policy in, and engagement with countries in Central Africa that are eligible for the AGOA.

The aim of this article is to examine the role of the AGOA in the implementation of the US economic policy towards Central Africa. The main focus here is to analyze the purpose of the AGOA and how it has helped to improve US-Central African relations.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a United States Trade Act, enacted on 18 May 2000 as Public Law 106 of the 200th Congress. AGOA has since been renewed to 2025. The legislation significantly enhances market access to the US for qualifying Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. AGOA builds on existing US trade programs by expanding the (duty-free) benefits previously available only under the country's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program. Duty-free access to the US market under the combined AGOA/GSP program stands at approximately 7,000 product tariff lines, including the roughly 1,800 tariff lines that were added (to the GSP pool) by the AGOA legislation¹.

Qualification for AGOA preferences is based on a set of conditions contained in the AGOA legislation. In order to qualify and remain eligible for AGOA, each country must be working to improve its rule of law, human rights and respect for core labor standards. The Act originally covered the 8-year period from October 2000 to September 2008, but legislative amendments signed into law by former US President George Bush in July 2004 served to extend AGOA to 2015. After completing its initial 15 year period of validity, the AGOA legislation was extended on 29 June 2015 by a further 10 years, to 2025².

The African Growth and Opportunity Act has played a big role in promoting and enabling environment for Trade and Investment. Better policies to enable business and trade could support growth and promote an expansion in the benefits of the region's economies. Accordingly, the Obama administration has committed to encouraging «legal, regulatory, institutional reforms that contribute to an environment that enables greater trade and investment in Central Africa». The White House further states that this focus builds in US participation in programs like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Open Government Partnership. Many Central African countries have also prioritized creating an enabling environment for trade and investment as a result of the AGOA³.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act is improving economic governance. Somewhat relatedly, the US president's strategy on US-Central Africa relations also identifies «strong public financial management» as a key means to «increase transparency and effectiveness in government operations and broaden the revenue base». Several US programs for engaging Central Africa emphasize these areas, including the Millennium Challenge Corporation's government effectiveness focus as well as the work of the US Treasury's Office of African Nations. However, the latest version of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's Index of African Governance notes that scores around «sustainable economic opportunity» have generally «stalled», and a review of a subset of their data ranking African countries on «public management and accountability» shows a similar middling performance⁴.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act is promoting regional integration in Central Africa and Africa in general. African countries have historically traded with each other far less frequently than their counterparts in other regional groupings like Latin America and Western Europe. Acknowledging this deficiency, President Obama has prioritized supporting greater regional integration in Africa, highlighting intra-African harmonization as a key point in his strategy toward the region and backing that up with new programs like Trade Africa, which aims to increase coordination between countries in East Africa. This emphasis is consistent with the great priority African leaders have also placed on these issues, with 26 nations committing just last month to a new Tripartite Free Trade Area, a critical stepping stone toward the

¹ US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

² African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).About AGOA. *AGOA agoa.info*. <<https://agoa.info/about-agoa.html>> (2016, November, 28).

³ US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016,November, 28).

⁴ US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

ambitious goal of creating Africa-wide economic community by 2017¹.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act has helped expand African capacity to effectively access and benefit from global markets. The African Growth and Opportunity Act provides eligible African countries with preferred access to US markets and serves as a lynchpin behind broader US efforts to support trade capacity building and expanded market access for African countries around the world. However, this important milestone comes at an incredibly turbulent time for African exporters, who historically have relied predominantly on the sale of raw materials, like unprocessed oil and gas. Dramatic recent fluctuations in the prices of commodities have prompted associated decreases in Africa's international exports. President Obama's strategy also seeks to support a «diversification of exports beyond natural resources». Raw materials exports have decreased by 65 percent since 2008, while intermediate goods (those that involve some processing) have seen a 14 percent increase in the same time period².

The African Growth and Opportunity Act has helped encouraging US companies to trade with and invest in Africa. Helping US businesses identify and pursue opportunities to trade with and invest in sub-Saharan Africa has been a key focus of the Obama administration. This area is also one where the President has perhaps the greatest potential to positively influence growth, given his control over the many federal agencies mandated to support American commerce. In this regard, the US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa announced an entire «Doing Business in Africa Campaign» where the Commerce Department leads 11 US agencies and a private sector panel in efforts to «connect American business with African partners». These initiatives do correspond to increases in US exports to Africa, but there is still significant room for improvement: There has been a 22 percent increase in US exports to «Developing Africa» since 2008, but a 42 percent increase in exports to «Developing America» and a 38 percent increase to «Developing Asia». Unfortunately, African imports to the US – still largely concentrated in commodities – have seen sharp declines as the American domestic energy production capacity has advanced. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows to sub-Saharan African countries have been more positive, with a 19 percent increase since 2008³.

The eligibility requirements for the implementation of AGOA benefits in Central African countries include requirements that the country establish or be making continual progress toward establishing a market-based economy; the rule of law, political pluralism and the right to due process; the elimination of barriers to US trade and investment; economic policies to reduce poverty; a system to combat corruption and bribery; and protection of internationally recognized worker rights. In addition, the country may not engage in activities that undermine US national security or foreign policy interests or engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Not all Central African countries are eligible for implementation of the AGOA benefits. For example, Burundi's eligibility was terminated in January 2016, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo are not eligible for the AGOA benefits because they didn't meet the requirements for the AGOA benefits.

It is necessary to examine the role of the AGOA in the relationship between the US and Cameroon first, because Cameroon's geographical location in the center of Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea is very important to the US. Also with the role of Cameroon as a leader of Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), two of the most important organizations in the Central African sub-region, it is worth analyzing the role of the AGOA in implementation of the US foreign policy toward Cameroon and Central Africa as a whole.

The United States established diplomatic relations with Cameroon in 1960, following the independence of the French-administered part of the country. Cameroon has had two presidents since independence. US relations with Cameroon are positive, although from time to time they have been affected by concerns over human rights abuses and the pace of political and economic liberalization. The two countries are partners in countering regional threats to stability, such as the threat of Boko Haram, and addressing issues of democracy, regional security, environmental protection, public health and economic development. The United States continue to work with Cameroon to consolidate democratic gains and

¹ US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State.

US Department of State state.gov. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

² US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State.

US Department of State state.gov. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

³ US Strategy Towards Sub Saharan Africa (adopted June 14 2012) by the US Department of State.

US Department of State state.gov. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/209377.pdf>> (2016, November, 28).

economic growth¹.

Cameroon became eligible for the AGOA on October 2, 2000 and Cameroon is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). It also qualifies for textile and apparel benefits. Cameroon's exports to the United States include petroleum, cocoa, rubber, timber and coffee, while imports from the United States include machinery, chemicals, aircraft, vehicles and plastics. The United States is a leading investor in Cameroon, largely through the Chad-Cameroon petroleum pipeline project. The US and Cameroon signed a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) in 1986 that came into force in 1989. Commercial relations between Cameroon and the US have grown over the years. Two way trade between Cameroon and the US in 2011 rose 26% compared to 2010 (according to the US International Trade Commission), with Cameroonian exports rising almost eight percent and by 2015 two way trade between Cameroon and the US was \$357.1 million². According to the Department of Commerce, US exports of Goods to Cameroon supported an estimated two thousand jobs in 2015. US foreign direct investment (FDI) in Cameroon (stock) was \$73 million in 2014, a 11.0% decrease from 2013³.

The United States foreign policy towards Cameroon is mainly for US energy security, the fight against terrorism (Boko Haram) and to use Cameroon as a gate-way into other Central African countries as Cameroon is well positioned in the Center of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. In global political thought, Cameroon has particular potentials to attract the United States policy makers due to location, stability and resources. In this sense, both socio-cultural and politico-economic prowess of this country play an important role in understanding US interest in Cameroon. The US is the biggest investor in Cameroon through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project. US investment in Cameroon has helped in political, economic and social development of the country.

The US has also been very active in trade with other countries in the Central African sub-region. Through the AGOA, trade between the US and Central Africa has increased drastically.

Angola is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). The US and Angola signed a Trade & Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) in 2009. The first meeting of the United States-Angolan Council on Trade and Investment was held in June 2010 in Luanda. Angola was the 64th largest goods trading partner with \$4.0 billion in total (two way) goods trade during 2015⁴. Angola is the third-largest trading partner of the United States in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly because of its petroleum exports. US imports from Angola are dominated by petroleum, with some diamonds. US exports to Angola include machinery, aircraft, poultry, iron and steel products. Angola is a partner country with «Power Africa». The AGOA has helped the US foreign policy goals in Angola to promote and strengthen Angola's democratic institutions, promote economic prosperity, improve health, and consolidate peace and security, including maritime security. The United States has worked with Angola to remove thousands of landmines and help war refugees and internally displaced people return to their homes. The US has a very good relationship with Angola because of US energy security as Angola is sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest oil producer and has great agricultural potential including minerals⁵.

Chad is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). It also qualifies for textile and apparel benefits. The US and Chad have no trade or investment agreements. Chad was the 77th largest goods trading partner with the US, with \$2.4 billion in total (two way) goods trade during 2014. Chad's exports to the United States are dominated by oil, while imports from the United States include machinery, plastics and cereals. According to the Department of Commerce, US exports of goods to Chad supported an estimated 3 hundred jobs in 2014⁶. The US economic policy towards Chad is mainly oil based as the US is the biggest investor in Chad through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project. Equally, the United States provides humanitarian assistance

¹ United States Department of States. US Relations With Cameroon. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm>> (2016, November, 28).

² Office of the United States Trade Representative. Cameroon. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/cameroon>> (2016, November, 28).

³ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Cameroon. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/cameroon>> (2016, November, 28).

⁴ Office of the the United States Trade Representative. Angola. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/southern-africa/angola>> (2016, November, 28).

⁵ United States Department of State. US Relations with Angola. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6619.htm>> (2016, November, 28).

⁶ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Chad. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/central-africa/chad>> (2016, November, 28).

to refugees and internally displaced persons throughout Chad; encourages Chadian commitment to regional stability and security; promotes human rights and the rule of law; supports responsible public revenue management; and maintains US-Chadian cooperation on regional and international counterterrorism. The US Government works to achieve these goals through the AGOA, diplomatic engagement and multilateral, regional and bilateral assistance programs.

Gabon is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). US Gabon was the 94th largest goods trading partner with \$1.2 billion in total (two way) goods trade during 2014. Goods exports totaled \$417 million; goods imports totaled \$798 million. The US goods trade deficit with Gabon was \$381 million in 2014. According to the Department of Commerce, US exports of Goods to Gabon supported an estimated 3 thousand jobs in 2014¹. Gabon's economy is dominated by oil. The government is focused on economic diversification, most notably by expanding the agribusiness and tourism sectors. Most foreign investment, including US investment, is concentrated in the oil and extractive sectors. US exports to Gabon include machinery, agricultural products, vehicles and optical and medical instruments. US imports from Gabon include crude oil, manganese ores, agricultural products and wood².

The United States is using the AGOA in fostering its foreign policy towards Gabon mainly to protect US oil interest and also Gabon is a key player in conflict resolution efforts in the Central African region. It provided peacekeepers to the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) peacekeeping mission to stabilize the Central African Republic and continues to do so to the newly established African-Led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (AFISM-CAR). Gabon also hosts and acts as a driving force behind ECCAS, which is establishing a regional standby peacekeeping brigade under the auspices of the African Union's African Standby Force³.

Rwanda is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). It also qualifies for textile and apparel benefits. The US-Rwanda Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) was entered into force in January 2012. The negotiations toward the BIT were launched in 2007 as one outcome of the consultations under the 2006 United States-Rwanda Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). The most recent US-Rwanda TIFA Council meeting was held in Washington in December, 2011. The US also signed Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFA) with the East African Community (EAC) in 2008 and with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in 2001. Rwanda is a member of both regional organizations. USTR's Africa Office is also leading U.S. efforts to forge a new trade and investment partnership with the East African Community⁴.

Rwanda was the 180th largest goods trading partner with \$50 million in total (two way) goods trade during 2013. Goods exports totaled \$25 million; Goods imports totaled \$24 million. The US goods trade surplus with Rwanda was \$747 thousand in 2013⁵. US business interests in Rwanda have been modest, with private US investment in tea, coffee, energy, mining, water treatment, banking, franchising, and small holdings in services and manufacturing. US exports to Rwanda include aircraft, pharmaceutical products, machinery, optic and medical instruments and agricultural products. US imports from Rwanda include coffee, basketwork, tungsten ore, apparel and accessories⁶. The AGOA has helped to protect US investment in Rwanda

Sao Tome and Principe is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). The US and Sao Tome and Principe have no trade or investment agreements. Sao Tome and Principe is currently our 219th largest goods trading partner with \$2 million in total (exports plus imports) goods trade during 2013. Goods exports totaled \$2 million; goods imports totaled \$200 thousand. The US goods trade surplus with Sao Tome & Principe was \$1.7 million in 2013. US exports to Sao Tome and Principe include vehicles, electrical

¹ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Gabon. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/central-africa/gabon>> (2016, November, 28).

² Office of the United States Trade Representative. Gabon. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/central-africa/gabon>> (2016, November, 28).

³ United States Department of State. US Relations With Gabon. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2826.htm>> (2016, November, 28).

⁴ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Rwanda. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/rwanda>> (2016, November, 28).

⁵ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Rwanda. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/rwanda>> (2016, November, 28).

⁶ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Rwanda. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/rwanda>> (2016, November, 28).

machinery, aircraft, iron and steel products, while its imports from Sao Tome and Principe include optic and medical instruments, cocoa, furniture and bedding¹.

The AGOA has helped to implement US foreign policy towards to Sao Tome and Principe to focus on improving the professionalism and capacity of the country's small military and coast guard and enhancing its maritime security efforts. Situated in the oil-rich, strategically significant Gulf of Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe is a member of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which is the focus of an increasing number of regional security initiatives. Sao Tome and Principe has been an active player in ECCAS's Zone D maritime security exercises, and a participant in the US Navy's Africa Partnership Station ship visits to Gulf of Guinea countries².

The Republic of Congo (ROC) is eligible for AGOA this year (2016). The US and ROC have a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). It was signed in 1990 and entered into force in 1994 concerning the reciprocal encouragement and protection of investment. Congo was the 92nd largest goods trading partner with \$1.4 billion in total (exports plus imports) goods trade during 2013. Goods exports totaled \$225 million; goods imports totaled \$1.2 billion. The US goods trade deficit with Congo was \$941 million in 2013³. The Republic of the Congo's economy is based primarily on its petroleum sector, and US companies play a role in the petroleum production and services sectors. The country's top export to the United States is oil, while imports from the United States include machinery, poultry, optical and medical instruments and vehicles⁴. The deep water port in the economic capital of Pointe-Noire is International Ship and Port Facility Security-certified, making it eligible to receive and send shipments directly with the United States. The Republic of the Congo is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC). The AGOA has helped secure US investment in the petroleum sector, by so doing, protecting US energy security in the country.

The AGOA has done a lot in the improvement of economic ties between the US and Sub Saharan Africa countries especially in the Central African region. The AGOA has also played a big role in encouraging US investment in the Central African region which has led to economic development of the Central African sub-region. The AGOA has played a big role in implementing US foreign policy in the Central African region especially in Angola where Angola is the third-largest trading partner of the US sub-Saharan Africa and the largest trading partner of the US in Central Africa mainly because of its petroleum exports. The AGOA has helped to promote and strengthen Angola's democratic institutions, promote economic prosperity, improve health, consolidate peace and security, including maritime security. Angola is also the biggest receiver of US foreign aid in Africa.

The AGOA helps Burundi in its integration into regional and international markets, as a means to promote sustainable economic development. The AGOA has also played a big role in implementation of US foreign policy toward Cameroon. The US is the biggest investor in Cameroon through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and Cameroon is also benefiting from US foreign aid. The US foreign policy toward Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe has been facilitated with the help of the AGOA despite the fact that these countries receive less US foreign aids and investments than other countries in the Central African sub-region. Because of the important role played by the AGOA, all of Central African countries that are eligible to the AGOA are the US sphere of interest. All these countries have a good relationship with the United States as the AGOA is a key element of US foreign policy towards Central Africa.

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¹ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Sao Tome and Principe. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/central-africa/sao-tome-and-principe>> (2016, November, 28).

² United States Department of State. US Relations with Sao Tome and Principe. *US Department of State state.gov*. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5434.htm>> (2016, November, 28).

³ Office of the United States Trade Representative. Republic of Congo. *United States Trade Representative ustr.gov*. <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/central-africa/republic-congo>> (2016, November, 28).

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