the US market should worry Kenya because it makes its apparel sector susceptible to unpredictable swings in the US market.

While Kenya s non-textile exports to the US mainly coffee, tea, nuts and cut flowers – also grew during the 2000-2016 period, their growth rate was less impressive.

Socially, AGOA has also helped to create jobs for marginalised groups such as women and youth. Nevertheless, we found that working in these apparel firms entailed poor working conditions, low pay, temporary work, and the sexual harassment of female workers.

We also found that Kenya, like many other eligible countries, is under-utilising AGOA with the near neglect of the non-texitle sectors. Whether or not the US-Africa trade programme is renewed when it expires in 2025, Kenya s experience points to many policy implications for the country and other member countries.

Trade pact objectives

The African Growth and Opportunity Act was signed into law by former US president Bill Clinton. Its main objectives were to diversify the region's export production, expand trade and investment between the two destinations, and accelerate economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa.

These would be achieved in a number of ways. First, the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers. Second, the negotiation of trade agreements. Third, the integration of the region into the global economy. Finally, the expansion of US assistance to Africa s regional integration.

In many ways, its main aim was to support African economies ability to use the textile and apparel sectors as potential engines of industrialisation and economic growth. In this sense this mirrored the similar success in South and Southeast Asia.

Much of the growth in exports to the US from Kenya and other non-oil exporting countries has come from the textile and apparel sector. There is a relatively tepid response from other sectors of the economy. These countries can make better use of the US trade initiative by not so heavily basing their exports on only a few of the thousands of eligible products.

Lessons for Africa

In our study, we found a number of policy gaps in Kenya that are relevant for other African countries. For example, the trade opportunities are largely driven by US trade policy rather than by the region s competitive advantage. Also, the US dominates the terms and conditions of the pact s renewal. In our view, eligible countries like Kenya should look beyond US-Africa programme and diversify their markets accordingly.

Second, to make the most of their apparel exports to the US and to capture new global markets, the African countries should ensure that their apparel industries are globally competitive. They should have a good supply of the inputs and infrastructure they need to thrive. Improvements in transport infrastructure, for instance, would speed up and reduce costs of moving inputs in and finished goods out.

Third, the vast majority of Kenya's export processing zone investments are foreign-owned. There is also a huge pay gap between Kenyan and foreign workers due to the cadre of jobs and skills possessed by these two types of workers. Thus, there is a need for capacity building to produce a critical mass of professionals who can lead the country s textile and agro-processing industries to maximise their gains from current and future trade opportunities.

Countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region should also strengthen their regulatory frameworks. These include mechanisms for enforcement of laws regarding labour and other forms of human rights protections envisaged under the US-Africa trade pact. This would ensure that women and youth workers in Kenya s export-led enterprises are protected and enabled to benefit from this trade programme.

These countries should also create a favourable export policy environment which is globally competitive to attract substantial manufacturing

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