

Beyond the U.S.: Canada's Strategic Turn to Africa and the Caribbean



CanAfro Research Institute

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Beyond the U.S.: Canada's Strategic Turn to Africa and the Caribbean

Opportunities, Risks, and Realities for Canada in a Changing Global Economy

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About CanAfro Research Institute & This Report

Who We Are:

The CanAfro Institute is a registered non-profit and is a collective of African and Caribbean diasporic scholars and professionals based in Canada. Our unique position provides deep, culturally-nuanced insights into the economic and social landscapes of both Canada and the regions we are connected to.

About This Report:

Title: Beyond the U.S.: Canada's Strategic Turn to Africa and the Caribbean

The Project: This was a volunteer-led, unfunded policy research and engagement project. It was undertaken as a civic duty to contribute unbiased, community-grounded analysis during a time of economic uncertainty and global realignment. If such rigorous, community-grounded analysis can be achieved without financial support, it underscores the transformative potential and high-quality impact that could be realized with dedicated institutional funding and resources.

Methodology: The report combines rigorous quantitative analysis of 15 years of Statistics Canada trade data with a qualitative review of historical, contemporary literature, Afrocentric methods, and expert analysis of the researchers. It is filtered through the unique lens of the Diaspora experience.

Our Goal: To move the conversation beyond traditional, often extractive models of engagement and provide a credible, actionable framework for Canada to build sustainable, mutually beneficial, and ethical partnerships in two of the world's most dynamic regions. Businesses, policy makers, governments and citizens can benefit from this report.

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Acronyms

CAGR – Compound Annual Growth Rate
CARIBCAN – Caribbean–Canada Trade Agreement
CARICOM – Caribbean Community
CBC – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CBSA – Canada Border Services Agency
CIBC – Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
COVID – Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
CRS – Congressional Research Service
CUSFTA – Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement
CUSMA – Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement
DFID – Department for International Development (UK)
DRC – Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC – East African Community
EDC – Export Development Canada
EI – Employment Insurance
ESG – Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU – European Union
FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
FECC – Former English Caribbean Colonies
FTA – Free Trade Agreement
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GVC – Global Value Chain
IFI – International Financial Institution
IMF – International Monetary Fund
IRCC – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
LDC – Least Developed Country
MNC – Multinational Corporation
NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP – Public–Private Partnership
RBC – Royal Bank of Canada
SAWP – Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
SER – Social and Environmental Responsibility
SSCFAIT – Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade
SSRN – Social Science Research Network
TECA – Trade Expansion and Cooperation Agreement
TSP – Tripartite Strategic Partnership
UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNSD – United Nations Statistics Division

Executive Summary

Canada's efforts to diversify trade beyond the United States have intensified amid growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty. Africa and the Caribbean have emerged as regions of strategic interest, offering demographic growth, geographic proximity, and long-term market potential. This report examines whether Canada's current engagement with these regions is positioned to strengthen economic resilience or whether it risks reinforcing longstanding patterns of asymmetry and limited value creation.

Drawing on Afrocentric methods, 15 years of Canadian trade data (2009–2024), alongside historical and qualitative analysis informed by Diaspora researchers' perspectives, the report finds that Canada's economic engagement with Africa and the Caribbean remains modest in scale and concentrated in extractive and low-value-added sectors. Trade with Africa accounts for approximately one percent of Canada's total merchandise trade, while engagement with the Caribbean remains comparatively small despite its geographic proximity and strategic relevance.

The analysis identifies a persistent trust deficit shaping Canada's relationships with both regions. This deficit is rooted in historical experience and reinforced by contemporary dynamics in banking, resource extraction, and labour mobility. As a result, Canada's engagement often struggles to translate stated commitments to partnership into durable economic relationships. At the same time, global competitors, including the European Union, China, and the United States, have expanded their economic presence across Africa and the Caribbean, placing Canada at a relative strategic disadvantage.

These dynamics give rise to what the report describes as a diversification paradox. While Canada seeks to reduce vulnerability by expanding beyond U.S. markets, prevailing trade and investment patterns risk creating new forms of dependence that offer limited long-term resilience. Without structural change, diversification may remain narrow and reactive rather than strategic and sustainable.

The report argues that incremental adjustments will be insufficient. It calls for a reorientation toward a New Covenant of Tripartite Partnership among Canada, Africa, and the Caribbean—one that prioritizes ethical trade, value-added production, and mutual strategic benefit. Central to this approach is the meaningful integration of Diaspora communities as trusted intermediaries, alongside targeted investment, enforceable standards, and sustained institutional commitment.

Taken together, the findings suggest that effective diversification requires not only new markets, but new models of engagement capable of building trust, resilience, and shared economic value.

Beyond the U.S.:

Canada's Missed Opportunities in Africa & the Caribbean

A data-driven analysis by the CanAfro Institute (2026)

THE DIVERSIFICATION PARADOX

Canada's Trade Reliance vs. Rhetoric



- ▶ **63%** of Canada's total trade is with the U.S.
- ▶ **1%** of Canada's total trade is with Africa
- ▶ **0%** of Canada's total trade is with the **Caribbean** (statistically negligible)
- ▶ Over **70%** of Canada's trade with Africa is in **raw materials** (farm, energy, minerals)

STAGNATION & ASYMMETRY

Africa Trade (CAD Billions)



- ▶ Persistent trade deficit with Africa = **\$3.7B CAD** in 2024
- ▶ Stagnant between **\$3.7B–\$5.5B CAD** over 15 years

Caribbean Trade (CAD Billions)



- ▶ Stagnant between **\$3.7B–\$5.5B CAD** over 15 years
- ▶ Trade surplus declined **79.2%** in 2024

TOP TRADE PARTNERS (2024)

	South Africa \$2.9B		Nigeria \$2.86B
	Morocco \$1.8B		Morocco \$1.8B
	Algeria \$1.5B		Mauritania \$1B
	Cuba \$0.9B		Dominican Republic \$0.8B

THE TRUST DEFICIT

- Banks don't lend locally in the Caribbean
- Mining & environmental damage
- Exploitative farm worker program
- No budget for Africa Strategy 2025

THE CANAFRO VISION: From Extraction to Partnership

- Atlantic Partnership Fund **\$5B CAD**
- Province-to-Province Links
- 20% Local Lending in the Caribbean
- Ethical Resources Standard
- Pathway to Permanence
- Diaspora Research Centre

THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF INACTION



Source: CanAfro Institute, Beyond the U.S. Canada's Strategic Turn to Africa and the Caribbean (2026)

1| INTRODUCTION

Economic development in Africa and the Caribbean has long been shaped by global policy frameworks that limited domestic policy autonomy and constrained pathways to structural transformation. During the 1970s and 1980s, many countries in both regions adopted market-oriented reforms under conditions of fiscal stress, often in response to requirements set by international financial institutions. Scholars have noted that these reforms prioritized liberalization and fiscal discipline while placing significant adjustment burdens on domestic populations (Bakker, 2003; John, 2021).

Although many African and Caribbean states had only recently achieved political independence during this period, patterns of economic dependence persisted under new institutional arrangements. Several analysts argue that the post-war international financial architecture was shaped in ways that privileged creditor stability and capital mobility over long-term development outcomes in the Global South (Rahman, 2021). As a result, economic restructuring frequently reinforced export-oriented, resource-dependent growth models rather than fostering diversified domestic industries.

Against this historical backdrop, Canada has increasingly signaled its intention to strengthen economic ties with Africa and the Caribbean as part of a broader effort to diversify trade beyond the United States. Initiatives such as Canada's Africa Strategy 2025 and the Canada-CARICOM Strategic Partnership reflect growing recognition of both regions' demographic, economic, and geopolitical significance. These efforts have gained urgency amid heightened trade uncertainty, including renewed protectionist pressures and tariff risks in the United States.

However, recent parliamentary analysis has raised concerns about the depth of Canada's commitment. A Senate committee reviewing Canada's Africa Strategy noted that, unlike the Indo-Pacific Strategy—which was accompanied by \$2.3 billion in dedicated funding—no new financial resources were allocated to Africa-focused initiatives (SSCFAIT, 2025). The strategy's absence from the federal budget has further prompted questions about whether Canada's stated objectives can be realized without sustained investment.

Canada's historical relationship with Africa and the Caribbean is complex and extends beyond contemporary trade policy. While Canada was itself a former colony, historians document its economic and political entanglements with colonial and apartheid systems, including commercial ties, diplomatic positions, and participation in imperial conflicts (Engler, 2015). These legacies continue to shape perceptions of Canadian engagement and contribute to skepticism regarding claims of partnership and mutual benefit.

Today, Canada's economic relationships with Africa and the Caribbean remain uneven. Differences in market size, historical trajectories, and institutional capacity have produced asymmetrical trade and investment patterns, often centered on resource extraction and limited value addition. Although Canada did not directly administer colonies in these regions, it benefited economically from colonial trade structures and post-colonial instability. As a result, contemporary engagement cannot be understood without reference to these longer historical dynamics. In this context, Canada's contemporary efforts to position itself as an ethical partner require a clear break from these historical patterns.

At the same time, evolving geopolitical and economic conditions present a strategic opportunity. Volatility in Canada–U.S. trade relations has intensified the need for diversification, while Africa's demographic growth and the Caribbean's geographic proximity offer complementary pathways toward greater economic resilience. In particular, the Caribbean's closeness to Canada creates opportunities for near-shore supply chains, logistics integration, and cooperative approaches to shared challenges such as climate adaptation and regional security.

Within this context, the objective of this report is threefold: first, to assess Canada's current economic and political engagement with Africa and the Caribbean; second, to identify structural limitations and risks embedded in prevailing trade and investment models; and third, to propose a practical, Diaspora-informed framework for building sustainable, value-added, and ethically grounded partnerships that advance mutual economic and strategic interests.

The report argues that diversification is not simply a matter of expanding trade volumes or identifying alternative markets. Rather, it requires deliberate attention to the quality, balance, and governance of economic relationships. Africa's long-term growth potential and the Caribbean's strategic proximity together represent critical pillars of a diversification strategy aimed at enhancing Canada's sovereignty, resilience, and global competitiveness.

2| METHODOLOGY

The current report uses literature review as well as export and import data analysis and diasporic stakeholders' analyses to respond to the objectives of the current report. The literature review explores Canada's trade reorientation toward Africa and the Caribbean, examining geopolitical drivers, historical contexts, and emerging narratives post 2025. To this end, both scholarly and non-scholarly sources are combined to provide the basis of understanding the evolving, sometimes inconsistent, but strategic pivot towards Africa and the Caribbean. The latter analysis (export import) provides a comprehensive analysis of Canada's trade trends with Africa, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world, covering developments from 2010 to the most recent patterns observed in 2024.

Data Sources and Variables for Import Export Analysis

The analysis relies on publicly available data and information sources, primarily from Statistics Canada on merchandise trade. The Statistics Canada dataset facilitates cross-region comparisons of Canada's trade with the world. Data, although comprehensive and comparable across regions, may not perfectly reflect total trade statistics and thus highlight where data limitations required cautious interpretation. However, for the purposes of current report, exports, imports and trade are defined as exports, imports and trade in goods (merchandise).

Also, for the purposes of analysis, the names and composition of geographical regions follow those presented in the "Standard country or area codes for statistical use" (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/49/Rev.3), available at UNSD (United Nations Statistics Division). The following geographic groupings were considered in the analysis: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Rest of the World (which includes Europe) and the U.S. The boundaries, categorization, naming and other information used for the purposes of this analysis do not imply any judgement concerning the legal status of any country or territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Product categories used to perform the analysis follow the North American Product Classification System (NAPCS) as presented by Statistics Canada. Monetary figures are in Canadian dollars, except where otherwise specified. Tables and graphs, properly sourced, are used for illustrative purposes to provide clarity.

Analytical Methodology: This report adopts a multi-method approach to analyze Canada's evolving trade relationship with Africa and the Caribbean. Strategic quantitative trade flow analysis by region and product category is used to explore these trading relationships while balancing empirical rigour with communicative clarity. This approach also facilitates a comparative analysis of Canada's trade relationships worldwide, including with the U.S. Another deliberate choice is made to use the time horizon of 15 years, 2010 to 2024 inclusive. This time horizon allows for methodological soundness, as it captures the post-

crisis adjustment periods of the global financial crisis and COVID-19 disruptions. The time horizon also provides sufficient length to compute Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) and conduct trade balance shifts. To compute growth rates and trade trends over time (for more than 2 years of data points), the CAGR is used, as it smoothens short-term irregularities, like movements in the data during the COVID-19 years. It is also preferred by trade economists for long-horizon growth measurement. The year-over-year percent change is used to portray trends over two years.

The following trade indicators are used in the analysis:

Exports: Produced or manufactured Canadian goods that are subtracted from the stock of material resources in Canada as a result of their movement out of the country. Exports are the sum of domestic exports (exports of goods that are grown, extracted, or manufactured within Canada) and re-exports (exports of goods of foreign origin that were previously imported and then exported either without significant alteration or after undergoing minor processing). (Statistics Canada, 2021 & Statistics Canada, 2024)

Imports: Goods that have entered Canada by crossing territorial (customs) boundaries, whether for immediate domestic consumption (following the payment of any duty) or for storage in customs (bonded) warehouses. Re-imports are included in Canadian trade data. Re-imports are goods, materials or articles that are imported in either the same condition in which they were exported or after undergoing repair or minor alterations (e.g., blending, packaging, bottling, cleaning or sorting) that leave them essentially unchanged. (Statistics Canada, 2021 & Statistics Canada, 2024)

Trade Volume: Refers to the sum of Canada's merchandise exports and imports by commodity, measured in Canadian dollars (Statistics Canada, 2025; Statistics Canada, 2016 & Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2017)

Trade Balance: The difference between the value of exports and the value of imports over a given period and can be calculated from a broad perspective or for specific product categories or trading partners. Trade balance statistics are generally calculated by subtracting the value of imports from the value of exports. (Statistics Canada, 2025)

Trade Balance-to-Total Volume Ratio: The ratio gives the difference between exports and imports as a share of trade volume (total trade), thereby controlling for higher volumes (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2017). This ratio is an important indicator of a nation's level of trade integration with the other regions.

To ground the methodological approach in strategic policy lenses, the African and Caribbean regions are secluded and analyzed in more detail. This part of the analysis is filtered through the lens of Canada's trade diversification strategy, which emphasizes growth beyond North America and Europe, as well as Canada's African Strategy 2025,

where Canada seeks to balance an equitable and inclusive approach to trade that seeks to ensure that more Canadians have access to the benefits and opportunities that flow from international trade. Although cautiously done, where possible, results are elucidated through the lens of how diasporic presence in Canada influences the trade patterns.

Multiple visuals are produced to communicate findings. Pie charts, bar graphs, line graphs, and multipurpose tables are used to illustrate different analyses of Canada's evolving trade relationship with Africa and the Caribbean. All visualizations are appropriately sourced and presented in the right format for insights.

Lastly, an opportunity–risk matrix is used to provide a comparative, product-category snapshot of promising areas for commercial engagement in Africa and the Caribbean, two regions central to Canada's evolving trade diversification strategy. The matrix will assess for various product categories the commercial opportunity based on market demand, trade trends, innovation potential, and alignment with Canadian comparative advantages. It will also assess risks based on Africa and the Caribbean's specific constraints, such as regulatory environments, institutional capacity, and infrastructure. The opportunity-risk matrix is not intended to provide exhaustive due diligence but rather to offer a strategic tool to support decision-making for public and private stakeholders interested in inclusive, sustainable, and mutually beneficial trade partnerships with Africa and the Caribbean.

Afrocentric Methodological Analysis and Discussion

This report employs both quantitative trade data and an Afrocentric methodological framework, distinguishing our analysis from conventional Western research paradigms. While Western approaches often emphasize objectivity and Eurocentric measures of development, our Afrocentric method prioritizes the lived experiences and cultural contexts of African and Caribbean peoples. We move away from a deficit-based narrative that views these regions solely through the lens of lack or dependency. Instead, we adopt a communal and historical analysis that interprets Canada's trade data within the context of colonial legacies and asymmetric power dynamics. This approach allows us to understand the "trust deficit" not merely as an obstacle but as a result of historical and ongoing extractive practices, often overlooked in traditional economic analysis. By framing our findings around concepts of restorative justice and mutual benefit, this report illustrates how Afrocentric methodology transforms research into an instrument for advocacy and structural change, ensuring that the voices and interests of Africa and the Caribbean are central to defining terms of partnership and progress.

Methodological Limitations

This analysis provides a foundational snapshot of Canada's evolving trade patterns, while highlighting important avenues for deeper research. Future work should address several key limitations by moving beyond nominal dollar values to analyze real trade volumes and

price effects, particularly for volatile commodities. It should also isolate the impacts of global crises on trade resilience and recovery and incorporate critical but often excluded dimensions such as trade in services, re-exports, and value-added economic activity. To fully explain trade outcomes, this quantitative data must be integrated with qualitative insights on sociopolitical factors, institutional capacity, and non-tariff barriers. Finally, a historically informed analysis that examines the enduring influence of colonial legacies and post-colonial dynamics would be essential for unpacking the deeper structural narratives shaping Canada's trade engagement with Africa and the Caribbean.

Artificial Intelligence Disclaimer: This report used Artificial Intelligence (AI) for less than 10% of its content, specifically for generating visual aids and assisting with a few summarizations.

Canada's Strategic Trade Routes: —— Africa & the Caribbean ——



3| RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from literature review and import and export data are presented under this section. The first part of this section provides a comprehensive analysis of Canada's trade trends with Africa, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world, covering developments from 2010 to the most recent patterns observed in 2024.

3.1 Canada is a Trading Nation

As it is well known, Canada has always been a trading nation, and trade continues to be a primary driver of Canada's economy (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2012, p. 42). Historically, much of Canada's total trade and economic exchange has involved trading with the U.S. In recent years, there has been a definite upward trend in the share of Canada's trade to the U.S. A recently published report by Statistics Canada revealed that over 85% of Canadian exporting firms sold to the United States in 2024, while just over 34.1% sold goods to non-US destinations (Statistics Canada, 2025a, para. 7). Understanding this trade relationship is important, as the longstanding dependence on the U.S. as a principal trading destination contributes significantly to Canada's prosperity. For context, US\$2.5 billion in goods and services cross the Canada-U.S. border each day, amounting to nearly US\$1 trillion per year, according to Global Affairs Canada (Global Affairs Canada, 2024a). But this relationship has not just been about Canada exporting to the U.S., as the U.S. sells more goods to Canada than to any other country. The U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that Canada was the top destination for U.S. goods exports (\$349 billion) in 2024 (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

Canada and the U.S.' bilateral trade relationship has been a long, interconnected, and complex one since the nineteenth century. Beginning in 1855, Canada, under British control, signed a reciprocity treaty with the US to enable free interchange of natural products from the sea, forest, the farm, and the mine (Curtis, W. E., 1907). The treaty, however, didn't cover manufactured goods (Curtis, W. E., 1907). With the cancellation of the reciprocity treaty in 1866, a year before Canadian confederation, similar limited reciprocal trade agreements were signed in 1911 (Baird, 2021) and 1935 (Brian Mulroney Institute of Government, n.d.) before the signing of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) in 1988, which substantially increased cross-border trade between the US and Canada. CUSFTA was later replaced by a succession of free trade agreements, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994, and the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), which came into force in 2020 (Canada Border Services Agency, 2025a). These agreements fostered deep economic integration and contributed to Canada's heavy reliance on the U.S. market for trade.

In the face of the recent tariff threats from the Trump administration in the U.S., Canada's heavy reliance on U.S. markets for trade has become a matter of critical concern for Canadians. U.S. tariffs on Canadian lumber, steel, and aluminium have exposed how fragile this reliance can be. Consequently, Canadians have called for retaliatory measures against the U.S.' announced tariffs. This call for retaliation was embodied by the "elbows up" movement. The Government of Canada responded with its own tariff measures. Point in case, Canada implemented 25% tariffs on steel and aluminium products and auto imports from the US (Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), b, para. 1). Others have also advocated for Canada to strategically shift towards emerging markets to secure Canada's economic future. However, Canada's overreliance on U.S. markets has long been identified as a vulnerability. According to advocates of this position, free trade agreements between Canada and the U.S. in whatever shape, including the agreements that include Mexico, are the source of significant economic dependence of Canada on U.S. markets. For example, Beaulieu (2019) explains that the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) of the 1980s and 1990s dramatically increased and entrenched Canada's dependence on the U.S. as an export market. While others like Dan Ciuriak (2011) argue that Canada's trade diversification away from the U.S. is useful from a risk reduction perspective, reasoning that dependence on the U.S. leaves Canada vulnerable to trade shocks. The Canadian Global Affairs Institute's Bercuson (2020) also recommends that Canada should seek trade opportunities in other parts of the world to supplement continental trade ties with the United States and Mexico.

3.2 Canada's Strategic Repositioning to Africa and the Caribbean

With calls for diversification growing louder even before the latest tariff measures implemented by the Trump administration, the Canadian government began pursuing strategies that aimed to strengthen economic ties with emerging markets, including in Africa and the Caribbean. Global Affairs Canada, for instance, has started to pursue an approach to secure more opportunities for Canadian exporters and investors to compete and succeed in global trade. Therefore, it launched an Export Diversification Strategy that aimed to broaden Canadian exporters' reach by reaching 50% more overseas exports by 2025 (Global Affairs Canada, 2024b). Efforts to strengthen ties with other markets have also led Canada to launch the Canada-CARICOM (Caribbean Community) strategic partnership in 2023 and release strategies such as the "Canada's Africa Strategy 2025" (Global Affairs Canada, 2025c), indicating its intent to pivot to markets in the Caribbean and Africa.

Canada's Africa Strategy 2025 is designed with the aim of strengthening engagement with Africa to realize greater economic cooperation, continued partnership on sustainable development, and enhanced engagement of African Diaspora communities in Canada, amongst other goals. The strategy also recognizes Africa's role on the world stage and its

growing influence on geopolitics and international organizations is expanding. Thus, creating the need for Canada to compete for influence across the continent while leveraging the significant potential of the continent. The strategy, through a high-level trade mission to Africa, looks to prioritize innovative sectors, infrastructure and critical minerals to foster mutual benefits between Canada and Africa. Moreover, the strategy also seeks to establish closer people-to-people ties, including between businesses, civil society, government, parliamentarians, students and others. By pursuing these objectives, Canada aims to diversify and reduce its high trade dependence on U.S. markets.

The launch of the Canada–CARICOM Strategic Partnership at Ottawa in 2023 marked an important milestone that created a permanent mechanism for structured dialogue and coordination on issues including building inclusive and sustainable economies (Global Affairs Canada, 2025d). This partnership builds on the economic relationships that have existed between Canada and Caribbean countries through the 1979 Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (TECA). TECA provided non-reciprocal duty-free access for most exports from Caribbean countries to Canada under the Caribbean–Canada Trade Agreement (CARIBCAN) program (Canada-Caribbean Institute, n.d.). The partnership is also shaped by strategic initiatives and entities like the Caribbean Development Bank, which has massively contributed to aligning Canada’s trade strategies with sustainable development in the Caribbean. Although there has been significant cooperation and history between Canada and the Caribbean countries, some commentaries have pointed out that Canada’s trade with CARICOM has shown signs of stagnation or decline. Both the Canada Caribbean Institute and Nicholls (2025) observe that Canada has lost its share of trade with the Caribbean and that CARICOM exports to Canada have declined. Although these strategies and partnerships promise and promote mutual benefits, critics argue these remain aspirational without financial commitments (Ayana & Kong, 2025).

Canada's Africa Strategy 2025 acknowledges the impacts of colonialism on Africa’s development. However, the strategy document fails to acknowledge that Canada’s trade relationship and economic development are intertwined with the transatlantic slave trade and colonization of Africa. Hunter (2022) explores this issue in depth in his article titled “Tainted Wealth: Canada Has Tried to Erase Its History of Slavery.” In the article, he notes a quote from Natasha L. Henry from her book *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (2010): “Very few Canadians are aware that at one time their nation’s economy was firmly linked to African slavery through the building and sale of slave ships, the sale and purchase of slaves to and from the Caribbean, and the exchange of timber, cod, and other food items from the Maritimes for West Indian slave-produced goods.” Andrew Hunter goes on to explain how industry leaders from Montreal, the Maritimes, and Upper Canada/Canada West accumulated vast wealth from the slave-related economic activities. “Following Canadian confederation in 1867, economic gains linked to slavery contributed to the development of national infrastructure and the capitalization of major financial

institutions, which historically restricted access to capital for non-white populations. This unacknowledged economic legacy contributes directly to the 'trust deficit' that hinders contemporary partnership-building. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that Canada's trading relations with Africa and the Caribbean historically were deeply tangled with colonial structures. In the post-independence period, Canada's engagement with Africa has often been tied to development assistance (Ayana & Kong, 2025). Therefore, this meaningful economic collaboration by the announcement of Canada's Africa Strategy 2025 was widely well received. Comparatively though, Canada has been late to enter the African and Caribbean markets.

3.3 Canada's Positioning in a Competitive Global Trade Arena

Canada's renewed interest in Africa and the Caribbean markets is timely but unfolding in a time when China has already launched its Belt and Road Initiative (Johnston, 2018), the E.U. has launched its Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) (Meyn, 2008), and the U.S. already has its Prosper Africa Initiative (Sseruwagi, 2024) in place. These activities by major players and competitors in these regions will influence and shape how Canada delivers on its strategies for Africa and the Caribbean. As Odoom (2025) notes, China has pushed ahead to become Africa's largest trading partner over the past two decades, with US\$295 billion in trade volumes in 2024. Beyond trade, Chinese firms have helped the continent build infrastructure like roads, ports, railways, dams and telecom structures. This deep, intertwined relationship with Africa means China has now become a natural partner for African leaders to look to. This has particularly been the case as China's willingness to finance large-scale projects in Africa with limited political accountability and transparency has strings attached. Conversely, the U.S. and E.U. have cemented their influence in Africa. The U.S., for instance, has maintained its presence and influence in Africa with a variety of military activities and security assistance over several decades (Henk, 1998). Through its EPAs, the E.U. has offered preferential trade regimes to Africa, which has allowed a significant portion of African exports enter the EU market of 450 million consumers (European Commission). Africa has also pursued strategic partnerships with Japan, Korea, the Arab League, India, Turkey, Russia, the Gulf States and Brazil, although it struggles to form unified positions on global matters (Shiferaw & Di Ciommo, 2023). These efforts from Africa suggest Africa's readiness to be cooperative on the global stage despite the continent's economic, political and security challenges.

Despite the competitive pressures, Canada's strategies to form strategic partnerships with Africa and the Caribbean seek to differentiate itself by prioritizing sustainable partnerships and ethical trade practices. Specifically, Canada's African Strategy 2025 emphasizes partnership on sustainable development, improved sustainable agri-food practices adapted from Canada, sustainable production of critical minerals in Africa in line with the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy, and unlocking new sources of sustainable finance for

development. For credibility, Canada needs to take these competitive disadvantages seriously by mobilizing concrete resources and sustained engagement with Africa and the Caribbean. Doing this will also belie the critique that Canada is just using Africa and the Caribbean as fallback options, or "Plan B" markets, when relations with the U.S. become strained. The time is now, and the need has become increasingly urgent with the changing geopolitical landscape. The U.S. has withdrawn substantial funding from USAID programs and the EU faces mounting pressures with shifting priorities towards defence funding and Ukrainian reconstruction. This leaves a vacuum in these regions and the need for new meaningful partnerships, which Canada can tap into with its focused approach.

3.4 The Role of the Diaspora in Canada's Trade Relations with Africa and the Caribbean

Canada's strategies and partnerships targeted towards the regions of Africa and the Caribbean make it clear that Canada will leverage enhanced engagement with the regions' Diaspora communities in Canada to achieve its aims. Despite their under-representation in formal trade strategies, the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora communities act as cultural and economic connectors, i.e., bridging gaps in trust, economy, knowledge, and networks. The Diaspora's unique position allows them to act as the cultural, economic and intellectual intermediaries, enabling both mutual understanding and strengthened economic exchanges. As pointed out by Kerubo (2021), African Diaspora communities are always willing to give back to the continent, whether it is through financial remittances, philanthropic activities or supporting African institutions of higher learning in an intellectual capacity. Notably, Kerubo (2021) observes that the African Diaspora has played a key role in facilitating trade exhibitions and delegations from Canada, thereby promoting business opportunities and partnerships between Canada and Africa. In some instances, the African Diaspora have offered their expertise to support their countries of origin by assisting consular services and networks to foster trade and business partnerships (Kerubo 24). These activities go a long way to not just strengthen economic ties but also strengthen cultural exchanges, thereby enhancing mutual appreciation for innovation. The Diaspora-country of origin relationship hasn't been unidirectional either. Many Caribbean and African countries consider the Diaspora communities as an important resource stream and therefore have courted the Diaspora to leverage their precious expertise and financial capital (Mehta & Johnston, 2011). Therefore, similar to the contributions made to Canada by African and Diaspora communities, Canada can leverage these communities through existing channels to execute its trade diversification strategies to reduce its reliance on traditional markets like the U.S. This is especially important as growing evidence suggests that foreign-born Canadians feel just as committed to Canada as Canadian-born citizens (Mehta & Johnston, 2011).

Engaging Diaspora communities, although now a strategic necessity for Canada, continues to be fraught with challenges that may prevent effective engagement. Kerubo (2021), for instance, highlights barriers relating to inadequate policy frameworks in African countries. Such challenges suggest a need for a robust implementation and engagement framework from Canada so that its diversified trade can benefit African and Caribbean countries.

3.5 Extractive Economics and Sustainable Development

With the deepening of economic relations between Canada, Africa and the Caribbean countries, there remains a need to tackle the complexities of extractive economies in fostering sustainable development. Despite years of industrial mining, oil production and a general abundance of mineral resources, Africa and the Caribbean remain small players within the globalized extractive economy, markets and value chains. Africa is estimated to host or hosts about 30 percent of the world's total mineral reserves, with an even greater share of the global deposits of diamonds, vanadium, manganese, platinum, cobalt and gold (Nwaebo & Orji, 2021). However, these regions continue to grapple with issues around how extractive industries best fit into the pursuit of sustainable economic growth, development and structural transformation. Thus, in order to unlock its extractive industry potential, sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, is reported to have implemented numerous regulatory and fiscal changes governing extractive industries over the past 20 years – a time frame not long enough in the economic lifecycle of extractives for regulatory changes to be effective (Roberts, 2014). But as observed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2021), the extractive industry in Africa is facing many challenges. These challenges range from low industrialization leading to mainly exports of raw products to environmental problems and social issues caused by the extractive sector to bad governance, illicit financial flows and underdevelopment.

The Caribbean region is not spared from problems either. The Caribbean region and Latin America hold a noteworthy share of the world's endowment of non-renewable resources, with 25 percent to 63 percent of the world's reserves of metals and minerals (copper, tin, graphite, lithium, molybdenum and silver) and 19 percent of the world's oil reserves (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [ESCWA], 2021). Yet, as noted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2021), the extractive industries' contribution to domestic resource mobilization in the Caribbean region and Latin America has been hampered by illicit financial flows. There also persist significant issues in the extractive industry in these regions relating to the opacity of contracts and beneficial ownership.

Canada's collaboration with Africa and the Caribbean can influence solutions and positive change in the extractive industries by promoting responsible extraction methods while leveraging Canada's expertise in sustainable resource extraction. These efforts, a few outlined in Canada's African Strategy 2025, can achieve a dual purpose: advancing

sustainable development in Africa's and the Caribbean's extractive economy, which in turn would provide a market for Canadian exports in services and technology. Canada's role remains ambiguous due to the gap between its stated commitments to responsible investment and the limited enforceability of standards abroad. This point is aptly made by Musampa (2019), who identifies that although 48% of Canada's bilateral international development assistance was targeted to sub-Saharan Africa in the 2017-18 fiscal year, only two international development programs addressed the extractive industries.

Canadian businesses are the world leaders in the production of potash and rank highly among global producers of highly sought minerals and metals, including uranium, aluminum, and gold, as well as diamonds. In extracting these minerals in Canada, mining companies compulsorily abide by world-recognized standards for sustainable social and environmental mining practices (Musampa, 2019). However, the adoption of these standards is voluntary for Canadian mining companies operating overseas projects. However, as Musampa (2019) argues, Canadian businesses are well-positioned to share with African countries and other parts of the world how to transform their natural resource wealth into a global competitive advantage due to Canada's substantial endowment of minerals and metals.

Therefore, by adopting such a holistic approach, Canada can influence positive outcomes and transform Africa and the Caribbean's extractive economies into engines of sustainable growth, contributing to long-term resilience.

3.6 Fair Trade and Ethical Trade Frameworks

Canada's strategic engagement with Africa and the Caribbean has to inculcate fair trade practices and ethical trade frameworks. These frameworks aim to ensure that trade partnerships help the disadvantaged partners in the developing world while prioritizing the welfare and protecting the rights of these partners throughout the trading chain (Ethical Trading Initiative, 2023). There has been growing interest in these frameworks recently. Fair Trade Canada advocates for a world in which justice, equity and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices (McKenzie et al., 2023). Canadian business and government can leverage the solutions in this area espoused by Fair Trade Canada to differentiate themselves from their competitors to foster transparent and morally conscious trading relationships with Africa and the Caribbean. This approach is especially crucial as Canada mitigates the impact of historical exploitative practices that have sometimes led to pushback, or even contempt, from the civil societies of these regions towards trading with the West. By aligning its diversification strategies with considerations for ethical trade, Canada can realize its aim of increasing mutually beneficial economic opportunities with these regions.

Canada had identified this as a priority and partly addresses issues of fairness and ethical business through its strategy for responsible business conduct abroad (Global Affairs Canada, 2022e). The strategy sets out priorities for the Government of Canada to support Canadian companies active abroad to integrate leading responsible business practices into their operations no matter their size, sector or scope of activities. The strategy does not, however, explicitly and comprehensively address issues of fair and ethical trade.

Moreover, the implementation of fair-trade practices in Canada's engagement with Africa and the Caribbean is likely not going to be easy, as it presents several challenges that need strategic addressing. The impacts of historically entrenched exploitative practices by Western countries and businesses in Africa and the Caribbean provide strategic difficulties. These practices have historically disadvantaged local communities and now hinder equitable trade relationships, as every well-intentioned engagement is mistrusted as a continuation of exploitative practices. Also, disparities in regulation between Canada and these regions and disparities among countries of the regions have the potential to restrict how far implementation of fair-trade practices can go. Overcoming these barriers is mightily important. To effectively combat these barriers, Canada must learn from the mistakes and lessons of their Western counterparts' engagement with Africa and the Caribbean. Canada also must find creative ways to foster collaborative frameworks with stakeholders in the regions like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to integrate fair trade principles into all levels of economic partnership. Championing fair and ethical trade in Canada's engagement with Africa and the Caribbean would reinforce Canada's role as a dependable ally committed to sustainable development in the global economy.

To assess whether Canada's trade diversification truly embodies these principles of fairness and mutual benefit, it is essential to examine how Canadian businesses operate within specific sectors of these economies, starting with the banking industry, where Canadian institutions have long maintained a commanding presence.

3.7 Banking Disparity

In terms of the banking system within the Caribbean and African region, the IMF/World Bank has played an important role in promoting and incentivizing the opening of the free markets. Non-local banks have a strong presence within the Caribbean region, and Canada has played a key role in supplying them. Canada, through "neoliberal policy prescriptions in societies that already had limited amounts of capital for government spending, high unemployment rates, and crisis management, only deepened the effects of crisis" (John, 2021, p. 8). The relationship between Canada and the Caribbean banking system is structurally imbalanced, as countries in that region did not benefit. Foreign banks infringe on the growth and prosperity of local banks. For instance, the Royal Bank of Canada

engaged in financial expansionism, which could be equated to asymmetrical past relationships; however, it was in the form of establishing economic power beyond Canada.

In the Caribbean region, "the Royal Bank's expansionist strategy was flexible and multiform and anticipated the current global/local tactics deployed by contemporary multinational financial institutions as they seek, in an unregulated financial landscape, new markets and new customers" (Hudson, 2010, p. 36). The Royal Bank of Canada was not the only Canadian bank to venture into the Caribbean, as the Bank of Nova Scotia and CIBC are also mainstays within the English-speaking Caribbean. However, what must be clear is that no local Caribbean banks, such as the National Commercial Bank (NCB) located in Jamaica, have a strong presence within the Canadian banking system. Thus, the relationship is structurally asymmetrical, with foreign banks holding a disproportionate influence within the financial system. This in fact has a negative effect, especially since "of the five largest banks in Canada, three of them, Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), Bank of Nova Scotia (Scotiabank), and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC First Caribbean), operate in the Former English Caribbean Colonies (FECC) as dominant financial institutions acting as subsidiaries" (John, 2018, p. 1). What this means is that the Canadian banks are not subjected to the rules/regulations of most foreign banks because of their occupying the status of a subsidiary. Accordingly, they are "not required to give out loans to Caribbean companies. However, what they are allowed to do is raise capital and issue debts and loans to corporations and governments" (John, 2018, p. 1). As a result, Canadian banks operating in these jurisdictions face fewer obligations to lend locally, while retaining the ability to extend credit primarily to governments and large corporate actors.

Canadian banks could exacerbate the economic duress and challenges that the Caribbean region already faces due to its developing country status. Not to mention, with the crowding of the banking sector within the Caribbean with foreign banks, it is hard for local banks to compete. Hence, the idea of free markets is paradoxical at best, especially when it comes to the idea of competition being positive. For instance, "competition often results in monopoly or oligopoly, as stronger firms drive out weaker" (Harvey, 2005, p. 67). This in turn creates an uneven marketplace with dwindling diversity because of local banks either shutting down or merging with a bigger bank. The 1980s, which correlated with the rise of neoliberalism, saw "the English-speaking Caribbean region...increase in mergers, acquisitions, and takeovers in its financial services industry. This helped Canadian banks grow bigger in the region and solidify their 'competitive edge'" (John, 2021, p. 10). Thus, Canadian banks established control over the market and pushed a lot of the local banks out of the way.

Institutions such as the IMF/World Bank have made the functioning of financial services within the Caribbean region virtually impossible to have autonomy with their stipulations. The IMF/World Bank have made "access to credit for many developing country governments...increasingly determined by global market conditions over which they have

little control. This is exacerbated by political imperatives to privatise key industries and assets and to restrict public spending, especially for social purposes" (Bernards, 2022, p. 66). These types of restrictions only hurt the economy of countries in the Caribbean region and create more impoverished conditions as the citizens cannot afford basic amenities. Yet foreign institutions are not punished when their stipulations create more harm than good. A good example of this would be the IMF support of Canada's increased role in the Caribbean region in supplying financial aid to banks, as their actions were deemed to be "proof of Canada's 'goodwill', versus rank neo-extractiveism towards its neighbours. As testament, Canada in 1990 forgave \$182 million worth of debt for 11 Caribbean countries, 8 of which belonged to the English-speaking Caribbean region, after the unfairness of Canadian trade deals towards the region was scrutinised" (John, 2021, p. 18).

As it pertains to the region of Africa, Canada has not managed to make the same impact on the local banking system as demonstrated in the Caribbean. Despite this difference, Canada holds a position on the African Development Bank (AfDB). With this position, Canada "is the fourth-largest non-African shareholder to the Bank" (Government of Canada, 2025). The purpose of the AfDB is to revitalise and integrate the socioeconomic functioning of the African region with that of the Western world. According to former Minister of International Trade Chrystia Freeland:

"The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia are on the ascendant, delivering ever-increasing living standards to fast-growing populations bursting with innovation, creativity and enterprise. . . . Let us seize the great opportunity we now have to help the people of the world's fastest-growing countries join the global middle class and the multilateral system that supports it" (Cobbett, 2017, p. 6).

Thus, there is an ideological and indoctrinating approach to economic help by Canada towards the region of Africa. Africa has often been positioned as a testing ground for externally driven market reforms (such as neoliberal economic systems), with mixed development outcomes. Nothing in Chrystia Freeland's message reflects how Africa as a region can benefit from the help Canada proposes. On paper, the proposal sounds like an advertisement for an investment opportunity for Canadian entrepreneurs. Under former Foreign Minister Stephane Dion's "sub-Saharan African tour, the African Development Bank launched its High 5 strategy: light up and power Africa, feed Africa, industrialise Africa, integrate Africa, and improve the quality of life for the people of Africa" (Cobbett, 2017, p. 8). The language of such initiatives can sometimes carry an implicit assumption that economic development requires alignment with a particular model of modernization. This framing can inadvertently overlook the complex historical realities of the region. To build truly effective and respectful partnerships, it is important to recognize how the legacies of colonization and periods of destabilization have fundamentally shaped the socioeconomic structures and challenges faced by African nations today. Acknowledging this context is not merely historical reflection; it is essential

for designing collaborative strategies that are grounded in equity and a genuine understanding of shared paths to sustainable development.

3.8 Asymmetrical Business

When it comes to the influx of international investors/corporations in the Caribbean and African regions, environmental protocols are often neglected. The Dominican Republic serves as Canada's largest mining "Caribbean investment site, the 1,200 permanent jobs at the Barrick Gold and Goldcorp Pueblo Viejo mine near the city of Cotuí pale beside the USD3.4 billion invested in the project (less than three jobs for every USD1 million invested)" (Birn et al., 2023, p. 312). Therefore, Canada has a dominant position in the country with respect to the economics of the country, as mining brings in a lot of jobs. However, with the entrenchment of the Canadian corporation in the Dominican Republic, it came with serious health and environmental challenges for the citizens. For instance, when communities impacted by health and environmental issues reject the expansion of gold mining within the country, they are met with "police repression for resisting the expansion of a Barrick Gold tailings pond that would have contaminated multiple waterways and crops, affecting the health of millions of residents and the livelihood of thousands of local cacao farmers" (Birn et al., 2023, p. 314). Hence, it appears that economic gains are valued more than the health and safety of residents in the Caribbean.

This is also evident in Jamaica, where Canada has great stakeholder power within the bauxite industry in the country. With the economic and political turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s in Jamaica, Canada benefited from the stronghold the IMF/World Bank had on the country. The IMF stipulated structural adjustment programs so that Jamaica met certain economic requirements to receive help. For instance, "these policies included reduced public spending, privatization, and liberalization of the mining sector, effectively incentivizing multinational corporations, including those headquartered in Canada—to expand extraction projects further" (Samuel-Jones, 2025, p. 1). The government were essentially expendable in that they had to follow the policies of the IMF/World Bank even if it was detrimental to their local economy. Canada, through its bauxite company Alcan, was able to flourish due to limited regulation on the mining sector and the expansion of multinational corporations in the country. The environmental impact of mining in the country has "led to deforestation, destruction of agricultural land, and significant air and water pollution. Particulate matter, including PM10 and PM2.5, emitted by bauxite refineries, contributes to respiratory illnesses, including asthma and sinusitis, in communities near mining sites" (Samuel-Jones, 2025, p. 2). Thus, whatever economic gain bauxite may supply, it creates further damage and harm to the island and the people. Not to mention the whole expansion of multinational corporations on the island by foreign

investors like Canada is structurally imbalanced in nature, as they do not apply the same level of health and safety protocols that they do in their own country.

Furthermore, Canada's mining expenditure is also present in the region of Africa, and like the Caribbean, the business relationship is structurally imbalanced. Although Canada presents itself as an economic saviour to countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, which they believe can benefit from foreign investment in mining, as it would be a "great opportunity to catalyze economic growth and better conditions for the people of the DRC" (Stimpson, 2020, p. 7), the country is still one of the poorest in the world. Thus, African countries like the DRC are seen as valuable landscapes of natural resources to benefit the Canadian economy, not to truly uplift the citizens. Canada is present across Africa in various capacities and levels of involvement and engagement.

For instance, Canada has partaken in "purportedly blocking the settlement of the Congo's debt to the Paris Club. That debt of approximately \$4 billion or \$5 billion" (Butler, 2015, p. 98), which occurred under the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. The problem with Canada blocking Congo's ability to make debt payments is that it affects its getting "access to the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, which the country very much needs" (Butler, 2015, p. 98). This was done despite knowing that the DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world and as such needs economic help to manage its poverty crisis. When examining the reasoning for the blockage, it was made from a purely business standpoint in which Canada was acting in its own self-interest. A Canadian corporation operating in the country was "dissatisfied with the outcome of the renegotiation of one of its contracts. The Congolese government had decided to cancel one of those contracts" (Butler, 2015, p. 98). This had its own negative impact. As such, Canada's relationship with the DRC and in many cases examined, foreign investment has failed to translate into broad-based development gains.

Another example of Canada reaping the benefits of mineral extraction in Africa is in Angola through the mining of diamonds. Angola, which has undergone both political and economic turmoil attributed to civil wars, has been opened to international investors despite this issue. The Canadian company SouthernEra Resources Ltd acquired a "32 percent stake" in the Camafuca mine, with the Angolan government owning "the remaining 35 per cent" (Khalifa, 2020, p. 6). Thus, Angola as a country does not have full control in being able to regulate the mining industry. Canada's infiltration in the diamond industry in Angola has allowed for a racialization of diamond mining. For instance, they have "begun marketing its diamonds as clean diamonds in contrast to the blood diamonds produced in zones of savagery such as Angola" (Butler, 2015, p. 80). This demarcation signifies that there are, in fact, two tiers of diamond production, where one produces superior quality while the other produces inferior quality.

Canada is not absolved from the blood diamond identity that is pushed onto Angola, as Canadian corporations have been found to use child labour in mines. For example, "in the Lunda Norte province in Angola, where both Canadian companies Southern Era and Tango Mining operate, 46% of miners have been found to be between the ages of 5 and 16. Angolan children are tasked with "performing the most dangerous activities", with the "impact of landmines" perilous to child health, leading to multiple "social atrocities" (Khalifa, 2020, p. 11). There is a growing discussion about Canada's and other investor nations roles in global mineral supply chains, concentrating on labor practices and the potential exploitation of vulnerable populations, including children, in high-risk extraction sectors.

3.9 The Case of the Labour Force

The Caribbean and African regions are integral to the Global North's economic sustenance due to the labour force they provide. Despite providing the labour force as mentioned previously regarding the mining industry, the wealth gap is significantly unequal, in which the citizens do not benefit from the transnational corporations. Wealth inequality is connected to processes of social reproduction, as it establishes the "conditions of possibility for the life of capital, as well as life and death within racial capitalism. This spans a range of spheres, including institutions and networks within households, communities, states and across national borders, as well as the labour practices, relations and organisation that reproduce capitalism" (Goffe & Luke, 2024, p. 1312). When social and economic capital are unavailable, human capital becomes the service that gets used. In the case of the Caribbean and African regions, human capital becomes abused as the exchange is unfair since the wages and safety conditions are of poor standard.

This is evident in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), which explicitly targets labourers in Global South countries to work in Canada. Although it may seem that the SAWP programme would be beneficial in providing financial assistance to struggling labourers to improve their lives in their native country, the reality could be different. The program could allow corporations to unfairly benefit. For instance, SAWP operates as a modernized version of indentured labour, as they hire:

workers on closed work permits that tie them to a single Canadian employer who can fire and deport them without cause, notice, or process. Annual SAWP contracts can last up to a maximum of eight months, but all workers must return home by mid-December of the hiring year. For the duration of their time in Canada, SAWP workers must live in employer-provided housing, but there is no national housing standard, and the existing minimum standards are inadequate. (Mayell, 2024, p. 1).

As such, there is limited regulation by the Canadian government to ensure that labourers are treated humanely and not as second-class citizens. Jamaica provides the vast majority

of SAWP workers in Canada, yet the workers face racism and mistreatment. Their status within the country is controlled by their employer, not the Canadian government, who authorizes this program. As such, "Jamaican workers characterize their time in Canada as 'prison life' and situate these experiences in the context of anti-Black immigration policy in Canada and the workings of racial capitalism in Canadian institutions" (Mayell, 2024, p. 3).

When it comes to the region of Africa, the treatment of labourers is no different, as they are exploited by investor nations and corporations. Despite possessing large amounts of natural resources such as diamonds, the relationship between Canada and Africa is uneven, as African labourers are exploited for the benefit of multinational corporations. Unfortunately, countries like "Nigeria cannot keep up with technologically advanced foreign investors to ensure the survival of their local businesses. This is because "most businesses in Nigeria run on generators, and many have folded up on account of this" (Durotoye and Olusola, 2016, p. 126).

The Manitoba Hydro case in Nigeria exemplifies the entrenched asymmetries that define Canada's historical engagement in these regions. Framed as a transformative partnership to reform Nigeria's electricity sector (Oke, 2012), the project instead manifested core contradictions of such ventures: a Canadian Crown corporation advocating for the privatization of a Nigerian state asset, thereby undermining public sector capacity (Akinkugbe, 2017). This dynamic reproduced racialized economic hierarchies, with foreign staff paid in U.S. dollars at premium rates while local workers received lower wages in local currency, a clear practice of labor exploitation (van Niekerk et al., 2017). Furthermore, the operation exploited a regulatory void, structuring its legal standing to potentially evade accountability in Canadian courts if challenged in Nigeria (Oke, 2012). Far from an isolated incident, this case is emblematic of a pattern where Canadian corporate initiatives, even under the banner of development, could prioritize commercial interests and risk repatriation over equitable growth, thereby deepening the very "trust deficit" that this report identifies as a fundamental barrier to sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership.

Canadian corporate engagement often mines socioeconomic vulnerabilities, offering low-quality employment that fails to deliver upward mobility. Instead, it entrenches racialized and class-based inequalities, a dynamic Khalifa (2020) identifies as structurally useful to capitalism. This reflects a broader pattern: Canada's ties remain defined by extractive, low-value sectors that reinforce dependency rather than build mutual resilience. A fundamental shift toward value-added, equitable partnerships is urgently needed.

3.10 The State of Import and Export: Canada's Trade Evolution

Data between 2010 and 2024 supports the assertion that Canada is highly dependent on trade with the U.S. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the concentration of merchandise trade (exports and imports) in 2010, 2020 and 2024, comparing Canada's trade with different regions of the world. Across all the years, the U.S. consistently accounts for the majority of Canada's trade volume in 2010 (\$502 bn CAD, or 63%), 2020 (\$648 bn CAD, or 61%), and 2024 (\$974 bn CAD, 63%).

As Stephen Maher (2025) aptly identified in his article, if the U.S. no longer wants Canadian aluminium or potash, there isn't the rail and port capacity to send it elsewhere. This signifies the importance of the infrastructure that has been developed due to geographic proximity, which has a huge impact on how Canada trades.

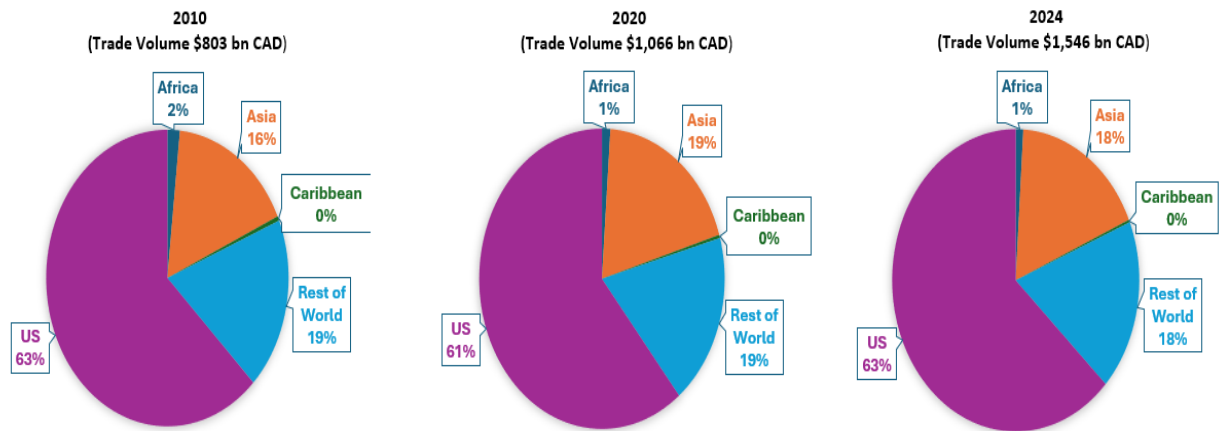
Meanwhile, Africa's trade with Canada is minimal and hasn't expanded since 2010, moving from 2% in 2010 to 1% in 2020 and 2024. According to the World Bank, over the next three decades, Africa will see the fastest rise in working-age population of all regions, with an estimated net increase of 740 million people by 2050. Similarly, Canada's trade with the Caribbean remains negligible over the years in comparison to trade with other regions. In all three years (2010, 2020, and 2024), the Caribbean's trade share is 0%, signifying a complete lack of prioritization of Caribbean economies in Canada's trading relationships. As noted by the Canada Caribbean Institute, CARICOM preference in the Canadian market is eroding while its competitiveness is declining, which may be a contributing factor to this trend.

Canada's concentration of trade as it relates to other parts of the world, including Asia (16% in 2021, 19% in 2020 and 18% in 2024) and the rest of the world (19% in both 2010 and 2020, and 18% in 2024), has held stable. This relative stability in trade concentration may also be influenced by the likely moderate engagement from Canada in regions like Europe and shifting trade tensions with countries in Asia (e.g. China and India) over the years (CBC News, 2023).

Figure 2.1

Canada's trade with U.S. dominates Canada's total trade

Canada's Trade Volume Concentration by Region (2010 vs. 2020 vs. 2024), CAD\$ billion



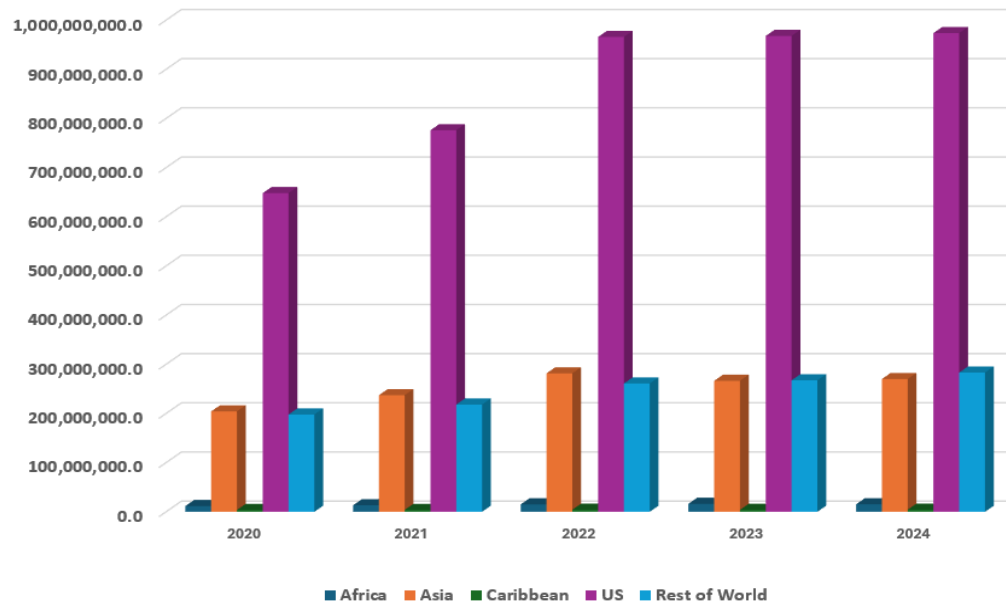
Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

Results from figure 2.2 below show the consistent and significant growth of Canada's trade with the U.S. between 2020 and 2024, reaching \$974 bn CAD in 2024. This trajectory confirms Canada's increasing dependence on U.S. markets for trade and the associated systemic risk to U.S. policy shifts. This high reliance may limit Canada's ability to pivot in the face of U.S. tariffs, thereby necessitating the need for trade diversification. As mentioned by Maher (2025), every Canadian government since Pierre Trudeau has tried to diversify trade, but the gravitational pull of America has been impossible to resist, or ignore. If governments then had tried to diversify Canada's trade because it was preferred, Canada now would need its trade diversified because it's a matter of survival. As is visible in figure 2.2, trade volumes with Africa and the Caribbean remained negligible between 2020 and 2024. Increasing trade with Africa and the Caribbean will be key in Canada's fight for survival and facilitate building the trade resilience needed by Canada and the development impact needed by these regions. Figure 2.2 below shows the trend in Canada's trade concentration for the last 5 years of available data.

Figure 2.2

Canada's trade with the U.S. showed an upward trend over the last five years

5-year Trend in Canada Trade Volume Concentration by Region, CAD\$ billion



Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

3.10.1 Canada's Bilateral Trade with Africa and the Caribbean

Trends of the last 15 years (2010 to 2024, inclusive) suggest that trade between Canada and Africa has exhibited a cyclical trend characterized by sharp increases followed by steep declines. Trade volume peaked at \$18bn CAD in 2011, then declined significantly over the next decade to a low of \$9bn CAD in 2018. A moderate recovery began post-2020, with volume reaching \$15bn CAD in 2024 (Figure 2.3). This cyclical pattern likely reflects insufficient institutional engagement and underinvestment in trade facilitation infrastructure that fosters stable, long-term trade with Africa. The results must be interpreted cautiously, as other political and societal factors in Africa could be influencing the trends in the data. Trade volumes between Canada and the Caribbean region over the past 15 years have been remarkably stagnant, hovering between \$3.7 bn CAD and \$5.5 bn CAD (figure 2.3), with only marginal changes. Unlike trade with Africa, where trade volumes show a cyclical trend, the Caribbean's flat trajectory is characterized by neglect in trade policy (agreements) priority and limited access to Canadian markets, as noted by the Canada Caribbean Institute.

Canada's small trade volume with the Caribbean means that Canada's trade with Africa consistently outperformed Canada's trade with the Caribbean by a factor of approximately 3 to 4 times across the 15-year period (figure 2.3). Beyond all the factors mentioned above, this is also indicative of Africa's geopolitical weight and the population size disparities between these geographic regions. According to data from World Bank data, Africa's population was approximately 1.5 billion people in 2024, while the Caribbean's population was around 45.4 million (figure 2.4). The population trend over the last 15 years, where Africa's population has been roughly 33 times larger than the Caribbean's, has influenced trade patterns by affecting the demand for goods and supply of labour in the different sectors, including the extractive industry. Undoubtedly, trade with Africa is likely to be larger than trade with the Caribbean on the global stage. The bigger volume of Canada's trade with Africa compared to trade volume with the Caribbean also reflects deeper structural dynamics: Africa's greater natural resource base has meant that trade with Africa is much greater.

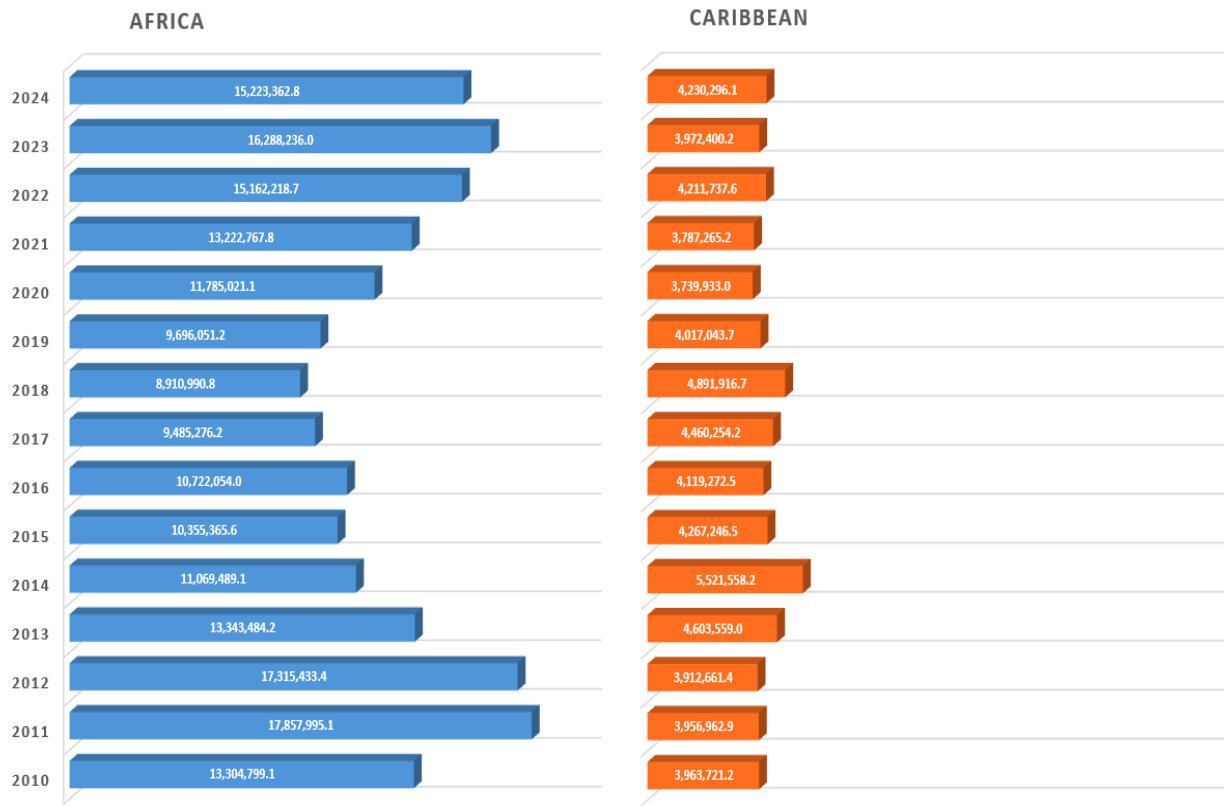
According to 2024 Statistics Canada data, Canada's trade with Africa and the Caribbean remains modest but shows distinct patterns. From Africa, Canada primarily imports farm, fishing, and intermediate food products (27.7%), energy products (16.2%), and metal ores and non-metallic minerals (14.6%), while exporting industrial machinery, transport equipment, and agri-food products. Trade with the Caribbean is smaller in scale, with imports led by metal ores and minerals (29.1%) and energy products (17.2%), and exports mirroring those to Africa, mainly machinery, transport, and agri-food, though the region offers significant untapped potential in services and manufactured goods.

Canada's economic engagement with Africa is primarily focused on the extractive sector. As of 2023, Canadian mining assets were valued at approximately C\$39.1 billion, making this industry the core of Canada's private sector presence in the region (Natural Resources Canada, 2024). Major companies like Barrick Gold in Tanzania and Ivanhoe Mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo exemplify this dominance. Bilateral merchandise trade reached \$15.1 billion in 2024, influenced by commodity market fluctuations (Statistics Canada, 2024; Mining Review Africa, 2023; Ivanhoe Mines, 2023). While there are reports of a strategic diversification into renewable energy, agri-processing, and technology, supported by FinDev Canada, this shift remains limited compared to the extractive model and is challenged by a "trust deficit" rooted in historical legacy (FinDev Canada, 2023; JCM Power, 2024; Calhame Financial, 2023).

Figure 2.3

Canada's trade with Africa reached a high in 2011, while trade with the Caribbean reached a high in 2014

15-year Trend in Canada's Trade with Africa and the Caribbean, CAD\$ billion



Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

These stark differences in trade volume are not only a function of policy and investment but also indicates fundamental demographic realities. The scale of potential markets and labor forces in Africa and the Caribbean varies enormously, which in turn influences the ceiling and nature of trade engagement. This demographic context is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

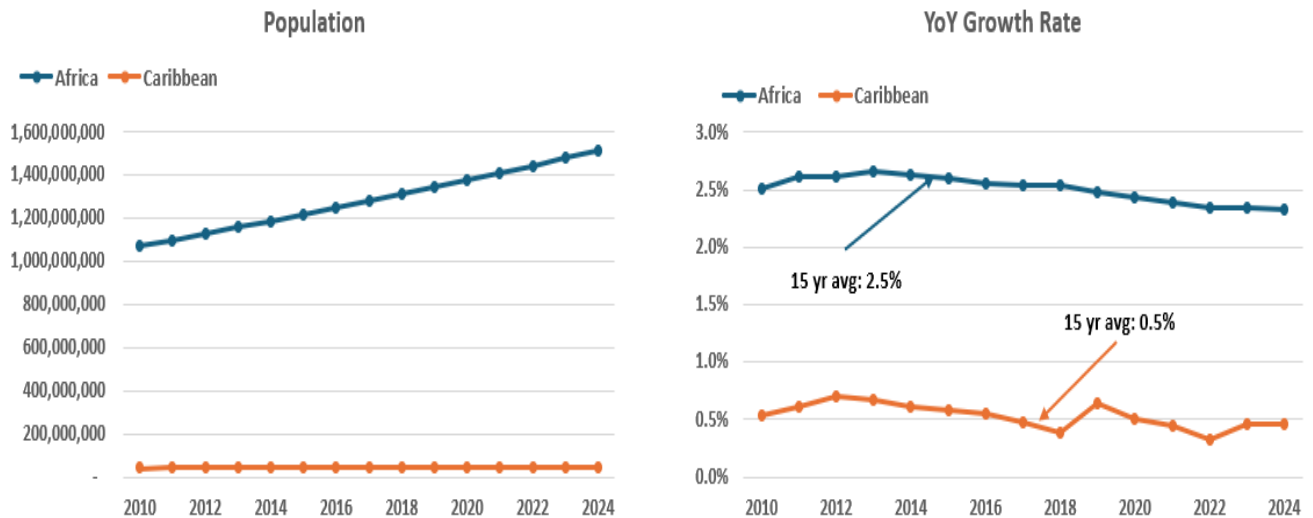
Although trade volumes with the Caribbean are modest, this metric does not fully reflect the strategic leverage of proximity. The U.S. dominance in Canadian trade stems from both geographic integration and economic size. Similarly, the Caribbean offers Canada an underutilized advantage: the potential for tightly integrated, just-in-time logistics, secure regional supply chains, and rapid-response partnerships on shared challenges like climate resilience and security. Emphasizing this proximity does not replace the need to engage

with Africa's scale; instead, it serves as a complementary strategy to strengthen immediate economic resilience closer to home.

Figure 2.4

Africa's population is 33 times larger than the Caribbean's population, growing 2.5% on average over the last 15 years.

15-year Trend in Africa and the Caribbean's Population



Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on World Bank data.

South Africa (\$2.9 bn CAD), Nigeria (\$2.86 bn CAD), Morocco (\$1.8 bn CAD), Algeria (\$1.5 bn CAD), and Mauritania (\$1 bn CAD) represent a dominant share of Canada's trade with African nations in 2024 (figure 2.5). The list of nations leading Africa's trade with Canada suggests Canada's reliance on a handful of resource-rich or logistically strategic economies where resource extractive trade persists. This pattern aligns with broader findings in the literature suggesting that commercial engagement by Canada and other Western economies in Africa has been concentrated in natural-resource-based sectors. According to the NGO Monitor's report "Resource Extraction in Africa and the Controversial Role of NGOs," there is growing rivalry and competition for influence and resources among the European Union, the United States, Canada, Russia, and China in Africa. This trend is also largely seen in the import and export breakdown, where over the last 15 years, imports from Africa to Canada have consistently and significantly outperformed exports to Africa (figure 2.6). The data illustrated in figure 2.6 suggests that extractive-driven import relationships have remained a dominant feature of Canada's trade with Africa over the past 15 years. The limited spread of nations in Africa that Canada has more than \$1 bn CAD trade with presents missed opportunities in the fast-growing African economies such as Egypt (State Information Service [Egypt], 2025). Canada's African

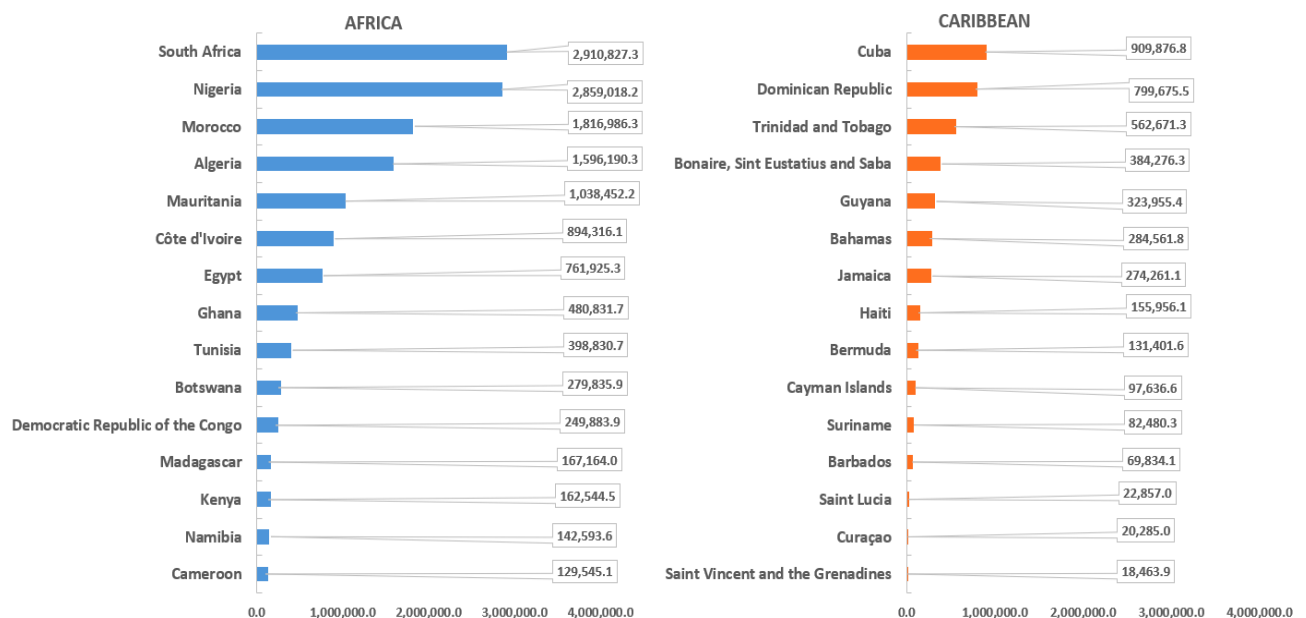
Strategy 2025 presents the opportunity to structurally address this missed opportunity and pivot towards more economic cooperation while supporting economic development and climate adaptation in those fast-growing African economies to rebalance the spread of trade across the region.

Cuba (\$0.9 bn CAD), the Dominican Republic (\$0.8 bn CAD), and Trinidad and Tobago (\$0.6 bn CAD) dominate Canada's trade relationship with the Caribbean in 2024, jointly accounting for over 70% of the total trade with the region. Most other Caribbean nations—including Jamaica, Guyana, and the Bahamas, hover below \$0.3 bn CAD, while smaller economies like Saint Vincent, Curaçao, and Saint Lucia register below \$0.03 bn CAD. Figure 2.5 illustrates the spread of Canada's trade with the Caribbean region in 2024. The low values in Canada's trade with the Caribbean region reflect a prolonged underinvestment in bilateral trade relations. This is likely a consequence of policy neglect or limited trade engagement or both. However, unlike Africa, the export and import data from the last 15 years suggest that Canada's trade engagement with the Caribbean has been more balanced (figure 2.6). The low volume of trade between Canada and the region, though, still indicates a missed opportunity, highlighting a lack of deepened regional integration, particularly given Canada's proximity to the Caribbean.

Figure 2.5

South Africa and Cuba led the pack in trade with Canada for Africa and the Caribbean respectively

Top 15 trade destination in Africa and the Caribbean for Canada in 2024, CAD\$ billion

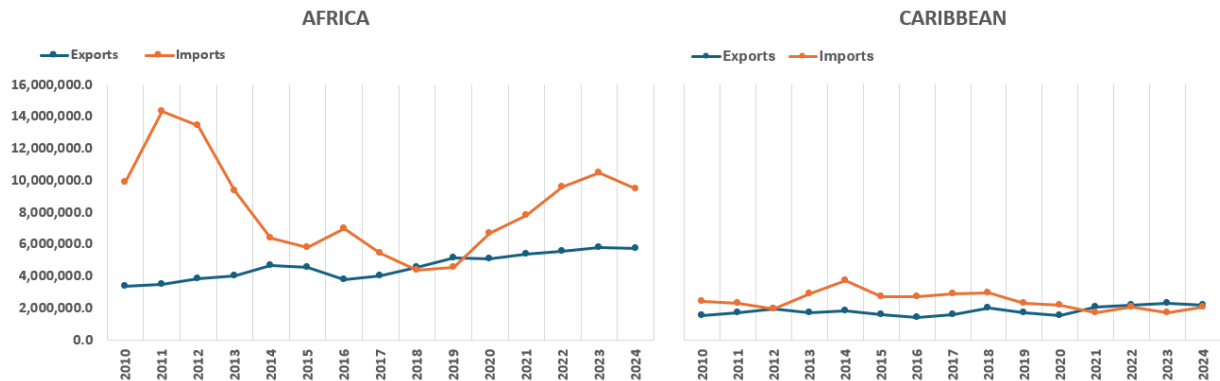


Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

Figure 2.6

Canada's Trade with Africa Is Marked by Persistent Asymmetry, While Trade with the Caribbean is Balanced

15-Year Export and Import trends of Canada's Trade with Africa and the Caribbean, CAD\$ billion



Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

3.10.2 Trade Balance and Growth Indicators

Sectoral Analysis of Canada's Trade with Africa and the Caribbean

Staying remarkably inelastic and hovering around \$5.8 bn CAD by 2024, Canadian exports to Africa have consistently been outperformed by imports from Africa across the last decade and a half (figure 2.6 above). Imports peaked at over \$14 bn CAD in 2011, then declined significantly to \$5.4 bn CAD in 2017, only to rise again post-2020 to \$9.4 bn CAD in 2024 (figure 2.6). The notable rebound from 2019 onwards signals a resurging and renewed demand for African commodities through bilateral trade agreements (NGO Monitor, 2025). Results here have to be interpreted cautiously, as the effects of Covid-19, when global supply chains were disrupted, may be impacting the trends between 2019 and 2024.

Also, as noted earlier, Canada's trade with Africa has also been reliant on trading in extractive resources and less on manufacturing or capital goods. Figure 2.7 shows a breakdown of Canada's trade with Africa by sector. Trade with Africa in 2024 is dominated by four raw material-based product categories: Farm, Fishing and Intermediate Food Products (27.7%); Energy Products (16.2%); Metal Ores and Non-Metallic Minerals (14.6%); and Metal Ores and Non-Metallic Mineral Products (11.8%), collectively accounting for over 70% of the trade volume. These figures clearly reveal and reinforce the classic North–South trade asymmetry, where African markets are viewed by the rich

western countries predominantly as resource destinations, not as partners in value-added manufacturing trade. When the numbers are looked at closely, that asymmetry is present in Canada's trade relationship with Africa over the 15-year period. While trade in energy products experienced significant long-term contraction (–7.6% from 2010 to 2024), Metal Ores and non-metallic minerals trade showed a worryingly significant long-term expansion (15.2% from 2010 to 2024). Seen in the numbers is also Canada's failure to build a more balanced trade portfolio with Africa. For example, industrial and technology-intensive product categories like industrial machinery and equipment (–0.4% from 2010 to 2024) and Aircraft and other transport equipment (–2.5% from 2010 to 2024) show low trade volumes and negative growth over the 15 years. These sectors with minimal trade volumes represent key enablers of Canada's structural diversification under the Canada's African Strategy 2025. A failure to prioritize trade in these value-added product categories would not only limit Canada's current efforts to diversify and expand more into African markets, but it will also delegitimize future efforts.

Figure 2.7

Significant differences in growth and trade by product category between Canada and Africa

Canada-Africa trade growth and share in 2024 by Product Category

AFRICA	Value; 2010 to 2024 (CAD\$ x1000)	Growth 2010 to 2024	Growth 2023 to 2024	Share 2024
Industry Category				
Aircraft and other transportation equipment and parts	504,673.1 → 345,925.4	-2.5%	17.0%	2.3%
Basic and industrial chemical, plastic and rubber products	269,750.4 → 983,440.3	9.0%	11.9%	6.5%
Consumer goods	792,827.7 → 1,260,911.7	3.1%	26.4%	8.3%
Electronic and electrical equipment and parts	263,773.1 → 342,689.9	1.8%	2.7%	2.3%
Energy products	8,088,731.3 → 2,468,870.2	-7.6%	-20.2%	16.2%
Farm, fishing and intermediate food products	1,374,605.9 → 4,214,512.7	7.8%	1.9%	27.7%
Forestry products and building and packaging materials	218,689.5 → 168,301.8	-1.7%	7.6%	1.1%
Industrial machinery, equipment and parts	528,296.9 → 495,715.0	-0.4%	-24.4%	3.3%
Metal and non-metallic mineral products	735,000.4 → 1,788,883.8	6.1%	-28.0%	11.8%
Metal ores and non-metallic minerals	265,154.5 → 2,223,716.3	15.2%	-11.4%	14.6%
Motor vehicles and parts	217,540.0 → 783,098.5	8.9%	22.8%	5.1%
Special transactions trade	45,756.3 → 147,297.2	8.1%	34.4%	1.0%
Total	13,304,799.1 → 15,223,362.8	0.9%	-6.5%	100.0%

Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

Similarly, Canada's trade with the Caribbean is concentrated in extractive product categories. Figure 2.8 shows that in 2024, metal ores and non-metallic minerals (29.1%) and energy products (17.2%) accounted for close to half (46%) of Canada's total trade volume with the Caribbean, although trade happens in 12 different product categories. This concentration in raw commodity products shows that Canada's trade with the Caribbean is shallow in developmental depth, reinforcing trade patterns centred on resource extraction rather than industrial value add. This pattern also illustrates a missed opportunity to support the Caribbean's resilience and economic transformation, especially in light of the CARICOM Secretariat Strategic Plan 2022-2030 and the Canada-CARICOM Strategic Partnership. Although the aircraft and other transportation equipment product category grew by 408% between 2023 and 2024, the volume of trade was just 2.3% of the total volume between Canada and the Caribbean in 2024. This massive growth is also a result of the decline (-79%) in trade volumes in the Aircraft and other transportation equipment product category between 2022 and 2023. The data also reveals worrying declines in technology-intensive and industrial machinery trade between 2022 and 2023, notably, the Industrial machinery and equipment (-16.7%), Motor vehicles and parts (-16.6%), and Electronic and electrical equipment (-3.3%). In fact, Canada's industrial trade with the region has either stagnated or regressed over the last decade and a half, highlighting weak market penetration and an apparent mismatch between rhetoric and policy impact.

Figure 2.8

Canada's trade with the Caribbean is concentrated in low-complexity commodities

Canada-Caribbean trade growth and share in 2024 by Product Category

CARIBBEAN	Value; 2010 to 2024 (CAD\$ x1000)	Growth 2010 to 2024	Growth 2023 to 2024	Share 2024
Industry Category				
Aircraft and other transportation equipment and parts	68,425.6 → 97,708.8	2.4%	408.2%	2.3%
Basic and industrial chemical, plastic and rubber products	229,544.5 → 341,148.4	2.7%	-8.9%	8.1%
Consumer goods	426,787.9 → 684,546.5	3.2%	6.6%	16.2%
Electronic and electrical equipment and parts	192,800.5 → 265,199.4	2.1%	-3.3%	6.3%
Energy products	390,416.1 → 727,954.6	4.2%	24.0%	17.2%
Farm, fishing and intermediate food products	247,694.1 → 461,394.0	4.2%	-2.0%	10.9%
Forestry products and building and packaging materials	121,936.8 → 79,544.7	-2.8%	-13.6%	1.9%
Industrial machinery, equipment and parts	153,074.0 → 165,624.1	0.5%	-16.7%	3.9%
Metal and non-metallic mineral products	194,661.1 → 56,826.7	-7.9%	-15.6%	1.3%
Metal ores and non-metallic minerals	1,861,324.7 → 1,231,281.0	-2.7%	10.5%	29.1%
Motor vehicles and parts	36,591.4 → 52,264.0	2.4%	-16.6%	1.2%
Special transactions trade	40,434.5 → 66,803.9	3.4%	-3.6%	1.6%
Total	3,963,721.2 → 4,230,296.1	0.4%	6.5%	100.0%

Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

3.10.3 Comparative Trade Balance Analysis

As noted in different parts of this analysis, Canada's export growth is heavily reliant on export growth to the U.S. The rest of the world region, including Europe, also shows export growth, while trade with developing regions shows signs of stagnation. Figure 2.9 shows the growth rates of exports and imports for the different regions considered in this analysis. In 2024, Canada's exports to the U.S. of over \$596.7 bn CAD dwarfed exports to all other regions, more than 10 times the exports to Asia, over 100 times more than the exports to Africa, and nearly 300 times the exports to the Caribbean. While export growth to the U.S. was a robust 9.3% over the last 5 years, recent growth between 2023 and 2024 stagnated at 0.4%. This raises concerns about overreliance on a mature market in the face of geopolitical pressures. This exposes Canada's vulnerability to concentration risk and underlines the need to diversify export destinations as acknowledged by the government of Canada (11), particularly toward emerging economies with growing populations and infrastructure needs. Meanwhile, Canada's export performance as it relates to Africa (–1.2%) and Asia (–1.4%) declined year-over-year in 2024, despite positive 5-year growth. Exports to the Caribbean fell sharply by –4.7% between 2023 and 2024 despite an impressive 7.2% 5-year growth, suggesting immediate limited market penetration or recent disruption of trade channels.

The U.S. also dominates Canada's import performance at \$377 bn CAD in 2024 (figure 2.9). However, imports from Asia and the Rest of the World regions remain significant, at \$187.3 bn CAD and \$189.8 bn CAD, respectively. The 2023-2024 growth rates of 2.5% and 2.3% suggest relatively stable and expanding trade relationships. Notably though, imports from Africa declined dramatically by –9.5% in 2024, despite a strong 5-year growth rate (7.1%). This recent contraction of imports from Africa is consistent with global supply disruptions brought about by geopolitical conflicts and commodity price shocks, which have raised trade costs and hampered investment. As the UNCTAD notes in their recent *Economic Development in Africa Report 2024*, infrastructure gaps in transport, energy, and ICT drive up trade costs in Africa 50% above the global average, reducing competitiveness. While energy insecurity compounds risks. These and the findings from the data support evidence that North–South supply chains are typically characterized by low resilience, necessitating trade facilitation reforms that stabilize flows and ensure that African suppliers are not systematically marginalized in global trade. This is an area where Canada can take a lead with its *Canada's Africa Strategy 2025*.

Figure 2.9

Canada's Export and Import Trade

Growth (per cent) and value (CAD\$ billion)

Region	Growth 2020 to 2024	Growth 2023 to 2024	Value in 2024 (CAD\$ x1000)
Exports			
Africa	2.6%	-1.2%	5,761,095.9
Asia	5.0%	-1.4%	82,632,340.9
Caribbean	7.2%	-4.7%	2,176,937.0
Rest of World	6.4%	14.2%	93,462,239.6
US	9.3%	0.4%	596,724,317.9
Imports			
Africa	7.1%	-9.5%	9,462,266.9
Asia	6.1%	2.5%	187,349,575.6
Caribbean	-1.4%	21.6%	2,053,359.1
Rest of World	7.9%	2.3%	189,786,815.9
US	7.3%	0.9%	377,010,493.0

Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

Canada's trade deficit with Africa stands at –\$3.7 bn CAD in 2024, although that is a 20.1% smaller deficit compared to 2023 (Figure 2.10). The trend, however, implies that Canada relies heavily on imports of Africa's extractive resources to boost its economic activities. It also underscores the importance of investment facilitation and trade-related infrastructure as enablers of balanced, equitable and fair trade between Canada and African partners. Canada's average trade balance-to-trade volume ratio of –0.2 reflects a moderate deficit over the last five years (figure 2.11). This deficit is less severe than those with Asia (-0.4) and the Rest of World (-0.3) as Canada has more severe trade deficits with these regions. In 2024, Canada's trade deficit with Asia (-\$104.7 bn CAD) and the Rest of World (-\$96.3 bn CAD) remains huge.

Between 2023 and 2024, Canada's trade surplus with the Caribbean sharply declined, falling by 79.2% to \$0.1 bn CAD in 2024. However, the trade balance-to-trade volume ratio stayed negligible, indicating the minimal trade activity with the Caribbean. This is alarming, especially given the Caribbean's historical role as a surplus market for Canada. Trade with the Caribbean region needs revitalization towards more expansion, resilience and regional integration if Canada is to successfully diversify its trade destinations. This is crucial, as Canada's only substantial integration remains with the U.S. (\$219.7 bn CAD surplus in 2024), supported by a positive average trade balance-to-trade volume ratio of +0.2 over the last five years.

Figure 2.10

Canada's only substantial and stable trade surplus is with the United States

Canada's Trade Balance by Region (2020 to 2024), CAD\$ billion

Region	Avg; 2020 to 2024 (CAD\$ x1000)	Growth 2023 to 2024	Value in 2024 (CAD\$ x1000)
Trade Balance			
Africa	-3,280,385.1	-20.1%	-3,701,171.0
Asia	-95,362,568.5	5.9%	-104,717,234.7
Caribbean	106,522.3	-79.2%	123,577.9
Rest of World	-82,427,579.8	-7.1%	-96,324,576.3
US	193,514,849.4	-0.4%	219,713,824.9

Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

Figure 2.11

Canada's Caribbean Trade Balance-to-Trade Volume remains negligible

Canada's Trade Balance-to-Trade Volume by Region (2020 to 2024), CAD\$ billion

Region	Average 2020 to 2024	Growth 2023 to 2024	Value in 2024
Trade Balance-to-Trade Volume ratio			
Africa	-0.2	-14.5%	-0.2
Asia	-0.4	4.5%	-0.4
Caribbean	0.0	-80.5%	0.0
Rest of World	-0.3	-12.3%	-0.3
US	0.2	-1.0%	0.2

Source: Authors' compilation/calculation based on Statistics Canada data.

As shown, the evidence presented in terms of export and import, in this report reveals a Canadian international economic strategy at a critical inflection point. The analysis uncovers a fundamental and critical disconnect: Canada's rhetorical pivot towards Africa and the Caribbean is starkly contradicted by its entrenched, extractive commercial practices and a history of failed promises. This discussion moves beyond diagnosing this failing status quo to propose a radical recalibration of the relationship's very foundation, framing it as a matter of urgent economic and geopolitical necessity as shown below.

1. The "Diversification Paradox" and a Looming Geopolitical Edging

Our data confirms a profound "Diversification Paradox." While Canada seeks to reduce its perilous reliance on the U.S., which accounts for 63% of its total trade, its engagement with

Africa and the Caribbean remains confined to the volatile, politically sensitive sectors of mining and energy. This is not diversification; it could be a replication of a high-risk dependency under a different name and leadership.

This economic myopia is compounded by a critical geopolitical blind spot. Canada's core security concerns, from Arctic sovereignty to cyber threats and upholding a rules-based order, are often discussed in isolation from its relationships with the Global South. This is a strategic error. In a multipolar world, influence is currency. The 54 votes of Africa and the 14 votes of CARICOM in international fora represent a significant geopolitical bloc. A relationship based on extraction and neglect, as seen in the ineffective CARIBCAN program which has "done remarkably little to alleviate CARICOM's adverse developmental positionality," does not earn support; it actively cedes influence to competitors. It is not only that it is perpetuating and reproducing racial and economic injustice.

2. The Trust Deficit: How Failed Promises Create Strategic Openings for Rivals

Canada's current relationships with these regions are characterized by a deep "trust deficit," born from a legacy of extractive business practices and unmet commitments. This deficit is not merely an ethical concern; it is a tangible strategic liability that other global powers are expertly exploiting.

While Canada's engagement has stagnated, China's Belt and Road Initiative has built tangible infrastructure, such as the roads and bridges in Jamaica, framed around principles of "peaceful cooperation" and "dialogue among civilizations." Africa, once dismissed by Western business, is now recognized as an "emerging economic resource power" and a 'new frontier market,' attracting intense competition from the EU, the U.S., Russia, and India. Canada's historical advantage, its reputation as a neutral, peacekeeping nation, is rapidly depreciating because its on-the-ground corporate conduct in sectors like mining and seasonal labour does not match its diplomatic rhetoric. This gap between word and deed creates a "risk premium" on all Canadian commercial and diplomatic efforts.

3. The Foundational Imperative: A Diaspora-Led Strategic Communication Campaign

Before any substantive economic measures can succeed, a foundational step is required: a deliberate and heartfelt Strategic Communication (StratCom) program aimed at mending past wounds and drawing a new line of equity. This must be more than a public relations exercise; it must function as a "truth and reconciliation" process for Canada's international relations.

This StratCom initiative must be co-designed and led by the African and Caribbean Diasporas in Canada. Their cultural credibility positions them as the essential "honest brokers" to win the public opinion battle. This campaign requires:

Acknowledgment: High-level Canadian officials must explicitly acknowledge the harmful practices documented in this report.

Narrative Reframing: The discourse must pivot decisively from "what Canada can get" to "what we can build together."

Diaspora-Led Dialogues: Funding must be allocated for Diaspora-led public forums, media campaigns, and cultural exchanges to build a grassroots foundation of trust before major political and economic agreements are signed.

4. The Innovation: A Synergistic Tripartite Model for Mutual Security and Prosperity

A successful StratCom campaign paves the way for the core innovation of this report: a move from bilateral, transactional deals to a synergistic tripartite model that integrates the unique, complementary assets of Canada, Africa, and the Caribbean for mutual economic and security benefit.

Africa's Asset: Demographic power (a working-age population increase of 740 million by 2050), vast renewable potential, and growing influence in multilateral institutions.

The Caribbean's Asset: Geographic proximity to Canada, deep diasporic links, and frontline experience with climate change, a direct threat to Canada's own Arctic and coastal security.

Canada's Asset: Technology, capital, and expertise in sectors critical to the future.

This model connects these dots to create powerful, reciprocal partnerships:

Climate Security: Partnering with the Caribbean to develop climate-resilient infrastructure serves as a strategic R&D partnership for Canada to protect its own vulnerable Arctic and coastal regions.

Digital Sovereignty: Partnering with Africa to build secure digital infrastructure and governance frameworks helps counter structurally imbalanced models and promotes a stable, secure global cyberspace.

Multilateral Solidarity: A relationship built on equity earns Canada reliable partners in international organizations, a critical asset in defending a liberal international order.

5. From "Justice Gap" to Competitive Advantage: Quantifying the Opportunity

Addressing the historical "justice gap" is not charity; it is the key to de-risking Canadian investment and securing a durable "license to operate." Proactive, verifiable restorative measures, such as independent environmental audits, community equity stakes, and reformed labour mobility, transform a strategic vulnerability into a competitive advantage.

If Canada continues its current trajectory, trade growth will remain anaemic (1-3% annually). However, embracing this new covenant, underpinned by effective StratCom and the tripartite model, could yield transformative results within two to five years:

Trade with Africa: Growth from \$15 billion to \$25-30 billion (a 66-100% increase), driven by new flows in services, technology, and green exports.

Trade with the Caribbean: Growth from \$5 billion to \$9-11 billion (an 80-120% increase), driven by climate-resilient infrastructure and the digital economy.

This growth would be stable, mutually beneficial, and would strengthen the geopolitical bonds that underpin Canada's long-term security and prosperity. The choice is clear: cling to a 19th-century extractive model and face geopolitical and economic irrelevance, or pioneer a 21st-century partnership built on shared capability, mutual security, and restorative justice. The latter path is the only one that offers a prosperous and influential future for Canada.

Canada's strategic indecision is confirmed by pertinent officials. Recent Senate testimony revealed that the government's "Africa Strategy" lacks a dedicated budget, relying instead on a mere "change in focus" of existing resources (SSCFAIT, 2025). This implementation gap highlights what we have identified as a "diversification paradox." Most notably, Canada's Special Envoy for Africa warned that the nation is "behind" and risks "missing the boat" entirely, emphasizing a concerning disconnect between rhetoric and resourcing (SSCFAIT, 2025). This testimony supports our analysis that the current approach is a strategic liability and that a major recalibration is essential for economic necessity.

4| CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: A Narrative of Reckoning and Renewal

This report set out to take an honest look at Canada's relationship with Africa and the Caribbean, and what it found is not a story of partnership, but of distance. Despite years of rhetoric about diversification, Canada's approach remains narrow and fragile, shaped more by habit than by strategy. The result is an economic posture that feels exposed, dependent, and increasingly out of step with global realities.

Too often, Africa and the Caribbean enter Canada's field of vision only when something goes wrong elsewhere. When reliance on the United States, still responsible for nearly two-thirds of Canada's trade, begins to look risky, these regions are suddenly rediscovered as alternatives. Even then, engagement tends to fall back on old patterns. Trade with Africa is still dominated by raw materials, and Canadian financial activity in the Caribbean is largely extractive, structured to move capital outward rather than help build resilient local economies. What emerges is a relationship focused on access and advantage, not long-term growth or shared prosperity.

Canada's position is further weakened by timing. It has arrived late to a landscape where China and the European Union have already made sustained investments in trade, infrastructure, and influence. Canada's own efforts have been cautious and uneven, burdened by a credibility gap rooted in the environmental damage and labor abuses associated with parts of its mining sector. At the same time, one of Canada's greatest strengths remains conspicuously absent from policy conversations: the African and Caribbean Diaspora. These communities carry lived knowledge, trusted networks, and deep economic ties, yet their role as strategic partners has been largely ignored.

What this moment demands is more than adjustment, it requires a shift in mindset. Diversification is no longer optional, and while Canada has begun to act on this reality in the Indo-Pacific, the same seriousness must be extended to Africa and the Caribbean. These regions offer more than emerging markets. They offer demographic momentum, strategic resources, and the possibility of partnerships that strengthen Canada's own economic security and autonomy.

The path forward calls for a New Covenant of Tripartite Partnership, one that breaks clearly from the extractive logic of the past. Canada now stands at a crossroads. It can continue along a familiar path that offers diminishing returns and growing irrelevance, or it can help shape a new kind of partnership for the 21st century, grounded in shared capacity, mutual security, and repair where harm has been done. The opportunity is real, and the foundation already exists. What remains is the choice to act.

4.2 A Framework for Action: Innovative Recommendations for a New Era

Based on insights from discussions, the following recommendations are proffered to Canadian policymakers and other stakeholders working to improve Canada's engagement with Africa and the Caribbean.

Recommendation 1: Capitalize on Shared Growth through the "Atlantic Partnership Fund"

Action: Establish a C\$5 billion "Atlantic Partnership Fund" as a blended finance vehicle, managed with the African Development Bank and Caribbean Development Bank, to leverage private capital for value-added projects.

Recommendation 2: Forge Direct Economic Links through "Province-to-Province/State Partnerships"

Action: Launch a federal program to fund direct economic partnerships (e.g., Ontario & Gauteng on fintech; Alberta & Guyana on energy transition).

Recommendation 3: Transform Finance from Extraction to Empowerment

Action: Mandate Canadian banks in the Caribbean to allocate a minimum of 20% of their loan portfolios to local SMEs and partner to strengthen local credit unions.

Recommendation 4: Mandate Ethical Commerce with a "Canadian Standard for Ethical Resources"

Action: Develop a legislated certification mandating Canadian-level environmental, safety, and community benefit standards for any overseas project receiving government support.

Recommendation 5: Build Long-Term Ties through a "Pathway to Permanence"

Action: Enact reforms to provide a clear pathway to permanent residency for reliable temporary workers and create a "Builders Visa" for skilled professionals.

Recommendation 6: Establish an Independent, Diaspora-Led Africa–Caribbean Policy Centre

Action: Fund an independent, Afro-Caribbean/Black-governed research and policy centre led by Diaspora experts to deliver agile, culturally grounded, and policy-ready analysis that strengthens Canada–Africa–Caribbean economic and strategic engagement.

Recommendation 7: Leverage Proximity & Scale Tourism as a Strategic Economic Buffer

Action: Capitalize on the strategic advantage of geographic proximity by launching a co-funded Canada-Caribbean Proximity & Resilience Fund. This initiative will formally

redirect Canadian tourism and investment from the U.S. toward the Caribbean, building a nearer, more resilient economic zone. The fund will de-risk private capital for climate-resilient infrastructure and niche tourism development, ensuring revenues support local economic diversification.

To translate this strategic imperative into action, Canadian businesses and the public sector must focus on high-potential sectors that align with both Canadian expertise and the developmental needs of Africa and the Caribbean. These include agri-tech to address food security, renewable energy to bridge infrastructure gaps, FinTech for financial inclusion, and sustainable mining services for the critical minerals essential to the green transition. Promising entry points exist in major economies like Nigeria and South Africa, as well as in high-growth markets like Guyana. Success, however, requires a fundamental shift in approach. Businesses must move beyond the traditional extractive model by proactively partnering with the African and Caribbean Diasporas for cultural and market intelligence, leveraging new blended finance tools like the proposed Atlantic Partnership Fund, and adopting a "Canadian Standard for Ethical Resources" to build trust and secure a durable competitive advantage.

This new covenant is not merely an ethical choice but an economic necessity. The current trade patterns, cyclical and raw-material-focused with Africa, stagnant and negligible with the Caribbean, highlight a critical failure in building balanced, value-added partnerships. While significant barriers such as a deep-seated trust deficit, infrastructure gaps, and intense global competition persist, they can be overcome. By strategically pivoting towards investments in technology, services, and green infrastructure, Canada can transform these vulnerabilities into opportunities for mutual growth, securing a resilient and prosperous economic future built on the principles of equity and shared prosperity.

The past, with its imbalances, cannot be changed. But the future is ours to shape. As Canadian citizens with deep ties to these regions, we are uniquely positioned and passionately committed to guiding this effort. We offer this blueprint and our full support to the Government of Canada.

By embracing this new covenant, we do more than secure our economic future; we build a legacy of ethical leadership for generations to come. The findings underscore the urgency of adopting a more coordinated and forward-looking engagement strategy.

From Blueprint to Action: A Managed Implementation Pathway

The recommendations presented here form a clear and actionable framework for a New Covenant, whose translation from vision to reality requires a structured, phased implementation strategy focused on building foundational trust, activating new institutions and capital, and scaling a transformed engagement model. To this end, our team has crafted a detailed, staged roadmap that identifies critical dependencies, establishes sequencing, defines key performance indicators, and outlines the governance structures necessary to move from proposal to practice. We offer this strategic implementation expertise to all interested stakeholders, and the CanAfro Research Institute is ready to collaborate as trusted advisors to adapt and execute this plan, ensuring the principled and effective shift to a partnership-based future.

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