**Title**: Trade and Human Development nexus in the COMESA Region (2000 to 2015).

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the trade and human development nexus in the COMESA region, using panel data of 20 member states for the 2000-2015 time span and utilizing the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model technique. The research explored the direct and interactive effects of trade, government expenditure on health, GDP per capita, and primary school enrolment on the Human Development Index (HDI). Data show that trade negatively impacts HDI in COMESA but that government health spending, GDP growth and school enrolment significantly enhance human development. Divergent impacts across income levels reveal that only high-income economies benefit from trade. Interactive models reveal that foreign aid increases the impact of education, remittances enhance schooling, and the inflation- globalization interaction positively, albeit weakly, contributes to HDI. Policy recommendations that can be adopted include investment in health and education among the poor, graduated trade policies to address inequality and optimizing remittances and aid flows for pro-poor growth. The study contributes to the limited COMESA literature, giving policymakers evidence-based advice on harmonizing trade liberalization with human development objectives in resource-rich yet unequal environments. Additionally, employing remittances and official foreign aid in education and health can foster human development gains. Regional integration should focus on capacity building to improve trade competitiveness and protect social expenditure in low and middle-income countries. Future analysis should consider sectoral trade effects and how digitalization can support bridging COMESA’s human development gap.

**Keywords**: Trade, Human Development Index (HDI), COMESA, Economic Globalization, ARDL Model, Panel Data

**Author’s Biography Notes**

Audrey Connick is a dedicated graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts in Regional Integration at the University of Mauritius, in collaboration with COMESA. She holds a Master of Science in Population Studies and a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Economics from the University of Zimbabwe. Audrey is currently employed as a Statistician at the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), where she contributes to the compilation of macroeconomic indicators, poverty statistics and GDP estimates. Her research interests include Trade Economics and Development Economics, with a recent publication on the nexus between diaspora remittances and economic growth in Zimbabwe.

As an emerging researcher, Audrey is actively seeking grants to support her ongoing research endeavors and to fund her participation in academic conferences. She is particularly interested in opportunities that will enable her to present her work, engage with the global academic community and further her contributions to the field of economics. Audrey is also a member of the Association for the Advancement of African Women Economists and the Econometric Society, reflecting her commitment to professional development and collaboration within the discipline.