

# Chapter 9

## Perspectives on post-Brexit Africa-UK trade: Opportunities and Challenges

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### Introduction

On 23 June 2016, mostly British and Welsh voters tipped the referendum in favour of Britain leaving the European Union (EU). Since then there has been growing discussion on what Brexit (shorthand) will mean for these communities as well as the consequences for regions beyond the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe. Brexit was supposed to have gone through by 31 October 2019 (after a series of postponements), but a UK general election called for the 12 December 2019 further delayed the move. Ahead of this election, there were five possible actions: Brexit, as it had been negotiated, would go through on the 31 January 2020; there would be a renegotiation; a new referendum could be called; Brexit could be cancelled; or there could be a no-deal Brexit by 31 January 2020 (Barnes 2019). Following the elections and the overwhelming win for the Conservative Party and its pro-Brexit stance, a transition period ensued during which the future relationship between Britain and the EU will be negotiated.

The debate around Brexit and its potential consequences on trade, among other things, sawed over a hard or soft exit from Europe. Those in Britain who would have preferred to stay in Europe leaned towards a soft exit. Those who wanted out preferred a hard break. The former aimed to minimise disruption and keep Britain aligned with EU regulations as much as possible, practically speaking having Britain stay within the EU single market and customs union. But this would mean that Britain would have effectively no chance at making trade deals with third countries. The latter implied a complete break with EU regulations and the opportunity, despite the disruption and high costs in the short-term, to branch out and make free-trade deals across the world (*The Economist* 2018). Ultimately, as negotiations during the transition period develop, it is more likely that Brexit will end up being a combination of both.

In terms of British-Africa relations, it is a chance for Britain to re-engage with its former African colonies and current Commonwealth partners. Since 1973, when the UK became part of the then European Economic Community (EEC), a natural and general trading disengagement began, according to Soyinka (2016: 587), since all trade decisions and powers were transferred away from London to Brussels. Indirect trading continued of course, but through EU-negotiated agreements such as the Lomé Convention (later refreshed in the Cotonou Agreement) and then through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). EPA's are negotiated agreements involving trade and development between the EU and states in Africa committed to building regional economic integration (regional groups across the Caribbean and Pacific too).

## Implications for Anglophone Africa

Given the result of the 2019 elections, the question of post-Brexit UK-Africa trading relations has raised mixed responses. Langan (2016) contests that Brexit has implications beyond Europe in the sense that it lends favour to the argument against long-term successful regional economic projects elsewhere including those in Africa. It could swing the debate away from common economic agendas and back towards heavy mercantilist nationalism. There are those who argue that Brexit presents a learning opportunity for African regional economic integration in terms of process and pace (see Ansorg and Haastrup 2016). For example, Sumbai (2019: 55) suggests that thanks to Brexit, the East African Community (EAC) can learn from the struggle between nationalism and supranationalism and can balance its approaches to regional challenges as a result. Others suggest that Africa should use Brexit as a sign that the continent should develop its own economic script going forward and not rely on supposedly successful European examples of integration (Simura and Asuelime 2017: 25). Moreover, Van der Merwe (2019) contends that Brexit could indirectly promote the value of the new African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which now covers the world's largest free trade area and a potential market of over 1.3 billion people. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa spent time at the August 2019 G7 summit in Biarritz, France, promoting this continental agreement and the opportunities for trade in Africa. In light of this, a post-Brexit Britain may consider playing a more prominent trading and investor role in Africa. Lopes (2017: 84) asserts that Brexit could mean a more inward-looking UK, and this would not serve Africa well. He suggests that 'it is up to African businesses and governments to refocus Britain's attention' away from Europe and towards Africa.

Despite these extreme negatives or positives, Kohnert (2018: 119) identifies key aspects that will

characterise the post-Brexit UK, EU and Africa trilateral: Foreign direct investment (FDI); market access; aid and the nature of the relationship, amongst others. In terms of political influence, the African anglophone countries will lose their main arbitrator in the EU when the UK leaves Europe, leaving the power to France and Portugal to manoeuvre on behalf of their former colonies (Kohnert 2018: 121). There is historical legacy for African states as many were former British colonies and have maintained trading relations and diplomatic ties post-independence with the UK and the Commonwealth of Nations. This link may, however, need to be reinvented post-Brexit if the UK is to compete against other investors on the continent. Over a ten-year period, UK investment in Africa more than doubled moving from nearly 21 billion British pounds in 2005 to nearly 43 billion in 2014 of which South Africa will likely take the largest chunk. After all, in 2014 alone, South Africa accounted for nearly 30 per cent of UK foreign direct investment in the continent (Hardie in Kohnert 2018: 122). In 2017, former UK Prime Minister Theresa May announced that post-Brexit the UK planned to promote further FDI in Africa and to implement trade enhancing programmes such as 'aid for trade'. A percentage of the UK's gross national income (GNI) is earmarked for spending on aid, however, according to Kohnert (2018: 123), there is a real possibility that Brexit could mean a decline in UK aid for Africa. This is dependent on numerous reasons including the realisation that the UK has effectively regarded the EU as a platform through which its own aid could be enhanced and without this platform at its disposal 'Britain's willingness to fulfil its aid pledges could decrease significantly' (Kohnert 2018: 123).

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This relationship though, could be dead in the water if the current UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson continues to insult African 'partners' with abhorrent and backward descriptions of Africans as he did on a visit to the continent in 2002 when he labelled locals as 'flag-waving piccaninnies' with 'watermelon smiles' (quoted by Ebrahim 2019). Johnson apologised for his offensive remarks but the condescending tone creeping into his later speeches is telling.

Połośska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi (2017: 325-326) have reflected on Johnson's take on Africa while performing the role of the UK's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (2016-2018). During this time, he entertained promoting a Global Britain that sees Africa as a 'blot' or problem that needs to be developed or 'civilised' and by imposing Western-style liberal democracy, promoting free markets and protecting human rights as the most appropriate track for growth. This strategy would entail the credible presence of British aid and development industries on the continent. Incidentally, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was set to spend four days in Ghana in late August 2019 to meet the President Nana Akufo-Addo and other senior government members, but he later cancelled his plans in favour of holding urgent talks on blocking a no-deal

Brexit with fellow opposition parties (Devlin 2019).

More charitably, Cargill (2018: 8) believes that there is a core 'Africanist' group within the leadership of the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office that has 'significant Africa experience'. This group recognises the opportunities and threats emerging in and from Africa that could impact the UK. After all, Africa will soon be home to well over a third of the world's population and this has growing significance for trade and investment plans after Britain leaves the EU. The UK's Minister for Africa, Andrew Stephenson, declared at a 14 October Financial Times Africa Summit 2019 that after visiting Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, among other countries, and meeting people from all walks of life, he found the 'people receptive to the UK's desire to a build modern, future-focused, mutually beneficial partnerships for prosperity' (Stephenson quoted in Department for International Development 2019). Stephenson was keen to convey that under Prime Minister Boris Johnson, 'the UK has a vision of working together with African countries on innovation, forging new investments with sustainable impact that creates jobs and boosts prosperity for all through an enduring partnership' (Stephenson quoted in Department for International Development 2019). In January 2020, a UK-Africa Investment Summit was hosted in London with these goals in mind.

However, as Mthembu (2018: 15) reflects, apart from the EU, 'China, India, . . . Turkey, the United States, South Korea, and Japan . . . have their own regular summits with their African counterparts to discuss trade, development, and security matters affecting the continent and its partners . . .'. The UK is not the only option for African states, and this may mean more leverage for stronger African economies who can negotiate well enough to capitalise on future deals with partners other than the UK.

In August 2018, UK Minister for Africa at the time, Harriet Baldwin, declared that Brexit would have no negative effect on UK-Ghana trade. Baldwin indicated that, through the EU, Ghana had very good trading access to the UK and that post-Brexit the UK would maintain those relations in the interim with every intention of bolstering longer-term trading commitments with Ghana (BusinessGhana 2018). Botswana too has been heavily involved in negotiating post-Brexit relations with the UK, and the EU-SADC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (Ramadubu 2019). Since the SADC EPA will no longer apply to the UK after Brexit, arrangements needed to be made to ensure continuity in trade relations. The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) (which includes South Africa and Botswana), together with Mozambique, appointed Botswana's Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry, Bogolo Kenewendo, as coordinator of the negotiations. In August 2018, the UK's Minister of Trade and Policy, George Hollingbery, and Botswana's Kenewendo jointly declared the assurance of maintaining continuity of trade relations between the UK, SACU (and Mozambique)

by replicating the existing EU-SADC EPA in a future UK, SACU, and Mozambique EPA. This new EPA would be used to 'promote development and support the integration efforts of the African Continent' (Joint statement on UK, SACU and Mozambique EPA 29 August 2018).

The journey of this agreement has been bumpy. By March 2019, negotiations remained unresolved over how 'cumulation' would be managed in a new trade deal as well as on sanitary measures related to disease-carrying animal and plant exports, according to South African Minister of Trade and Industry at the time, Rob Davies (*Daily Maverick* 2019). Nevertheless, by September 2019 Britain had agreed to an EPA with South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and eSwatini which, when formally accepted and actioned, will mean business as usual with Britain post-Brexit with no additional hindrances (Bavier 2019).

As part of the former UK Prime Minister Theresa May's 2018 tour 'to woo' Africa, May indicated that Brexit would prove to be the impetus for new long-term strategic partnerships between the UK and African countries (Suess 2019). This would entail new 'skill sharing programmes' and 'innovation partnerships' where British legal minds and financial wizards would share their expertise and prowess with African partners across financial, business and technology sectors in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa amongst other African countries. Notably, the UK's drive to strengthen its presence on the African continent has stretched to include the Francophone countries in West Africa and not simply to its former colonies or Commonwealth partners. In August 2017, Uganda and Tanzania refused to sign a new EU-EAC EPA on the grounds that it would have a negative effect on development and democracy in the region (Crawford 2017).

South Africa is one the UK's largest trading partners in Africa. In 2017, bilateral trade reached around R173 million (Mthembu 2018: 14). Within a day of the British referendum, the South African rand suffered an 8 per cent decline in its value against the US dollar indicating that there is a significant link between the British and South African economies. After all, several South African companies are listed on both the London and Johannesburg stock exchanges (Tan 2016). Whereas Tan (2016) suggests that South Africa will 'bear the brunt of Brexit', as it is the UK's largest African trading partner, Ombok (2019) suggests the impact of Brexit on African businesses will be marginal. Around 115 (8.8 per cent) African companies are listed on the London Stock Exchange (LSE). According to the LSE's Director of Emerging Markets and International Markets, Ibukun Adebayo (in Ombok, 2019), only 9 per cent of investors in companies listed on the LSE are European, 40 per cent are from the UK and 30 per cent from the US.

Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia are all members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Zimbabwe withdrew

in 2003, though it has since officially applied to re-join the group in mid-2018. As members of the Commonwealth, these African states are part of a mechanism that espouses political and economic advantages for members states. A November 2016 Commonwealth Trade Policy Briefing document succinctly summarised the salient issues around Brexit for Commonwealth member states. It suggests that since EU trading policies have long since governed the relationship between the UK and individual Commonwealth member states, a post-Brexit world implies wide-ranging implications for new trading deals between members and the UK and between members and the EU as separate entities. This junction creates space for the Anglophone African countries to initiate substantial new trade and investment plans as well as the potential to draw on the trade advantage created by virtue of being part of the Commonwealth family in pursuing better trade and investment flows between members (Gonzalez 2017: 12).

A cautionary tone should be applied here though. Henning (2018: 25) warns that it would be a mistake to assume that the Commonwealth will step up in a coherent way to safely manage post-Brexit UK trade in large part because of the diversity of the current trading relationships within the Commonwealth. UK trade negotiators would essentially be starting anew on trade deals based on a post-Brexit globalist strategy. This could clash with an historical trade legacy of Commonwealth states being incorporated into 'the EU's system of preferences in 1973 and by the subsequent evolution of the trade relationship between the EU and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries from the Lomé Convention to the EPA negotiations' (Murray-Evans 2016: 496). Similarly, Walsh (2019) asserts that the Commonwealth is not a practical replacement for the EU and lacks the capacity to be transformed into a meaningful trading bloc.

Indeed, the very real downside of Brexit for Africa, is that potentially Africa's market access into the UK and EU could be significantly interrupted by shifting trade policies post-Brexit. How would African markets deal with a possibly weakened or depreciated pound after Brexit? See Table 1 for trading statistics (2018) between the listed countries and the UK. According to Mold (2018: 3), from the 'UK's perspective, Africa is a strategic but in absolute terms not a major trading partner . . . representing an identical share of just 2.6 per cent of both imports and exports'. From the African perspective, in general, 'the UK is a strategically important but still relatively minor market, representing 3.2 per cent of total exports from Sub-Saharan Africa in 2015' (Mold 2018: 3).

The UK may not be the primary trading partner for the listed countries, but it nevertheless still features as a main trading partner. Trade, post-Brexit could be boosted and European countries could also feature, especially France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Malawi's main trading partner, for instance, is the EU while Botswana exports over 10 per cent of its world exports to the

UK and Kenya sends over 80 per cent of its vegetable exports to the EU (Dowson 2017). About US \$9 billion worth of Commonwealth exports are to the UK alone. The UK imports precious and/or semiprecious metals from South Africa, Zambia and Botswana. South Africa is also the number one Commonwealth importer into the UK of edible fruit and nuts (56 per cent share in Commonwealth imports into the UK) and shares in the market for apparel and accessories, both not knitted (0.2 per cent) and knitted (0.1 percent) (Mitchell, Zaman and Raja 2016: 23).

Mitchell, Zaman and Raja (2016: 4) assert that:

‘The eventual impact of Brexit is partly dependent on the success of trade negotiations, and will affect countries differently, depending on their UK exposures. Specifically, the degree of impact will depend on countries’ level of openness, their balance of payments and the volume/value of their transactions with the UK’.

African Commonwealth states’ relationship with the EU could benefit them more in a post-Brexit world considering an EU market of 27 states (just under 450 million people) as opposed to a single UK market (over 65 million). Many of Africa’s Pan-African institutions are funded by the EU and in 2016 the EU gave 21 billion € (Euros) in development cooperation and 32 billion € in private investment to Africa (European Commission 2019).

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**Table 1. Anglophone Africa and Trading Statistics** According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade (Trading Economics 2019)

Country	Imports (UK)	Exports (UK)	Trading partners
Botswana	\$58.03M (2018)	\$54.60M (2018)	Main import partner is South Africa (75% of total imports)
Ghana	\$604.14M (2018)	\$491.54M (2018)	Main import partners: China, United States, Belgium, UK and France.
Kenya	\$310.31M (2018)	\$396.75M (2018)	Kenya main import partners: India, China, UAE, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, United States and Japan
Malawi	\$135.07M (2017)	\$32.68M (2017)	Malawi’s main export partner is the European Union (50% of exports)

Country	Imports (UK)	Exports (UK)	Trading partners
Nigeria	\$1.09 Billion (2018)	\$2.28B (2018)	Main trading partners: India, Spain, Netherlands, South Africa and France
South Africa	\$2.89B (2018)	\$4.81B (2018)	Main export partners are: China (9.7% of total exports), the United States, Germany, India; Japan, and Botswana
Tanzania	\$170.47M (2018)	\$60.07M (2018)	Tanzania's main export partners: India, Japan, China, United Arab Emirates, Netherlands and Germany.
Uganda	\$81.14M (2018)	\$9.66M (2018)	Uganda's main export partners are Sudan (15%), Kenya (10%), DR Congo, Netherlands, Germany, South Africa and UAE
Zambia	\$185.47M (2018)	\$352.91M (2018)	Zambia's main export partner is Switzerland (45 % of total exports). Others: China (20%), South Africa, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe and Congo-Kinshasa.
Zimbabwe	\$226.22M (2018)	\$3.05M (2018)	Zimbabwe main export partners are: South Africa, China, Congo and Botswana.

## Resurgent Russian-African relations

Like a post-Brexit UK, Russia too has a globalist agenda under President Vladimir Putin, and this extends to wooing the African continent with condition-free trade and investment deals. Most especially Russia is keen to invest in nuclear power, oil and gas. Russian state corporation, Rosatom, has signed deals with Uganda, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria, for whom it is helping to build a nuclear reactor, and has feelers out in Zambia as well as offering educational training programmes in Kenya (Burke 2019). Russian investor Lukoil invested \$900 million in oil exploration in Ghana and the Ivory Coast in 2010. Russian interest extends to minerals too. In two examples, Russian company Norilsk Nickel invested \$2.5 billion in the nickel mining industry in Botswana in 2007 (Olivier and Suchkov 2015:157) and Zimbabwe's Pen East Ltd has joined with Russia's JSC Afromet to develop platinum group metals and gold in Zimbabwe (Neethling 2019).

Olivier and Suchkov (2015: 147) argue that although the Soviet Union played a role in Africa during the Cold War, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the country had not left much of

a mark on the continent. However, this could work in contemporary Russia's favour as, unlike the UK, which has a decidedly Eurocentric cultural hold over its anglophone former colonies, Russia has the advantage of engagement with the continent 'without the debilitating colonialist chip on the shoulder'.

That is not to say that Russia has had full success in Africa since 1990. The R1 trillion Russia South Africa nuclear deal, under former South African President Jacob Zuma, was eventually declared unlawful and unconstitutional in South Africa's Cape High Court and cast aside in 2017. More recently Russia hosted the first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi in late October 2019 where 47 African state representatives were in attendance (Fabricius 2019). Russian President Vladimir Putin took the opportunity to promote Russia as Africa's ally in sovereignty, nuclear energy and economic growth prospects, as well as maintaining its role as a global arms dealer. Without being specific, he labelled Africa's former colonial powers as intent on re-imagining their colonial pasts and warned Africa against this influence. Competition in Africa, for Africa, is not new, and Russia is late to the game. Indeed, China has been holding Sino-Africa summits for more than 15 years.

## China in Africa

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A post-Brexit Britain would need to cut in on Chinese competition in Africa. Since 2010, China's investment in Africa has almost trebled and its influence on the continent grows with it. A study undertaken by the Pew Research Center (quoted in *The Spectator* 2018) asserts that 'Africans now have a more positive view of China than people anywhere else in the world'. Cheru and Obi (2010: 2) warn that China's

' . . . growing engagement in Africa can become a positive force only when African states are prepared to negotiate . . . from a stronger and more informed platform. In the absence of deliberate and proactive African action, the outcome of China's . . . involvement in Africa could turn out to be "neocolonialism by invitation".'

However, China insists that its involvement in Africa comes with no strings attached. In 2018 Chinese President Xi Jinping promised \$60 billion dollars towards project financing in Africa to build on a long-standing commitment to the continent (*The Telegraph* 2018). For example, China has been involved in business in Zambia since the 1970s. Sino-Zambian relations have recently become strained, however, over Zambia's growing debt crisis. Uganda too has a large national debt of over \$10 billion in 2018, of which \$3 billion is owed to China. Ugandan Finance Minister Matia Kasaija wrote of his concern that Ugandan sovereignty was being threatened by Chinese

influence, in a letter to Ugandan long time President Yoweri Museveni in 2018 (Muhumuza 2019). Nevertheless, solidarity with China is clear, at least in a recent statement by Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which it declared its support for China's sovereignty over the situation in Hong Kong. Though, some suggest that this solidarity is a no-cost way to build support and goodwill with Beijing since it does not compromise Uganda's national interests (Olander 2019).

For three consecutive years China has been Tanzania's largest trading partner. Despite this, there has been disagreement over a \$10 billion Chinese-backed port project between the state-run Tanzania Ports Authority (TPA) and China Merchants Holdings International. TPA's Director General, Deusdedit Kakoko bemoaned the conditions outlined by the Chinese company as 'commercially unviable'. He demanded that a compromise be reached and argued: 'It would have been a loss . . . they shouldn't treat us like schoolkids and act like our teachers' (Ng'wanakilala 2019). Although the Botswana-China bilateral trade is relatively low compared with China's trade in Africa overall, in 2018 \$296 million, Botswana's new administration under President Mokgweetsi Masisi is actively seeking bettering economic relations with China (Cong 2018).

## **Climate change and the renewable energy game post-Brexit?**

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An area of potential investment for Britain in Africa, post-Brexit, would be green energy. Green energy is a trillion-dollar opportunity for investors. Tanzania, for example, produces enough solar energy equal to fourteen US states combined. Off-grid solar energy, that is small systems or standalone systems that are used to power communities, has real growth potential (Lawson 2018). In August 2018, Theresa May promised that by 2022 the UK would be the largest G-7 investor in Africa and that a large part of that investment would go towards climate change and natural resource management projects (Suess 2019). An example of such an investment is the funding of renewable energy projects such as £22 million going towards off-grid solar energy in Zambia. This investment would be mutually beneficial as the UK's national security objectives would be met by a stable and developed Africa as well as increasing opportunities for British companies. Another consideration for the UK is food security implications in the light of climate change challenges and the fallout from a no-deal Brexit such as higher costs or shortages and delays related to potential import troubles. After all, 40 per cent of the UK's food is imported and close to a fifth of the fresh food imported comes from countries threatened by climate change (Harvey 2019).

Ugandan Minister for Water and Environment Sam Cheptoris met with Rory Stewart, before the latter resigned from his role as the UK's International Development Secretary in mid-2019, in an

effort to lobby for control of climate aid given to African countries. The mantra is that money for climate projects in poorer states is an obligation on the part of developed states responsible for global warming and not a donation. Cheptoris' view is that there should be a partnership between the developed and developing world to resolve climate challenges (Sauer 2019).

Another possible avenue of environmental exploration in Africa for the British government may be the use of a relatively popular asset, its Royal family. In September 2019, Britain's Prince Harry and his family including his wife, the Duchess of Sussex, visited southern Africa on what some referred to as a diplomatic charm offensive to boost Britain's relations in the region. Their first day ended with a reception at the British High Commissioner's Residence to mark the 'rich and diverse nature of the UK's modern partnership with South Africa' (Winning 2019). Between them, the couple visited South Africa, Angola, Botswana and Malawi. Prince Harry dedicated a forested area near the border with Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe to the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC). Countries committed to the QCC and its goal of conserving indigenous forests for future generations include South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana and Malawi. Tanzania is also expected to join. Previously, in 2010, Prince William and Prince Harry visited Botswana to promote, among other things, the Coaching for Conservation Project which is a charity that links soccer to wildlife protection efforts. In 2018, the heir to the British throne, Prince Charles and his wife the Duchess of Cornwall visited West Africa and Prince Charles gave a public lecture in Ghana on preserving the environment. Monarchy is not new to African societies and there are those who are not impressed by Royal visits. However, there is goodwill, good works and of course the benefits of capitalism as there is business, and therefore money, to be made from the mutual publicity inevitably accompanying such visits.

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## Conclusion

The question of life after Brexit for Africa has mixed responses. There are those who argue that the change will make no real difference to Africa and others who suggest that if the UK becomes more inward-looking, economic Africa could be severely and negatively affected. However, there is also a real possibility that Anglophone Africa has an opportunity to strengthen its ties with Britain post-Brexit and that a mutually beneficial relationship is a possible outcome. These are 'ties' that bind including language, history, cultural overlaps and similar legal and trading systems and regulations due to direct colonial links. It could also mean that African agency is somewhat amplified in terms of African states' choice of economic partners going forward. Although China and Russia are certainly

viable options going forward, the relationship between African states and these two powers has not always been smooth sailing. Potential avenues for British investment, post-Brexit, on the continent could be green energy or solar energy systems and this could bode well for Africa too in terms of sustainable development initiatives. We may also see an increase in diplomatic charm offensives in the form of increased visits to Anglophone Africa by members of the Royal family – considered by some to be the country's most lucrative asset.

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