



A SWOT Analysis of Agricultural Trade between Tanzania and China

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Abstract

Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Tanzania's economy, offering employment opportunities, ensuring food security, and generating revenue through exports. In recent years, China has emerged as one of Tanzania's key trading partners. The primary exports from Tanzania to China include agricultural products such as tobacco, cashew nuts, coffee, and sesame. Despite the optimistic prospects, the trade relationship encounters strategic and structural challenges that necessitate further analysis. This research utilizes a SWOT analysis to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with agricultural trade between Tanzania and China. The analysis is grounded in data derived from a review of trade reports, government publications, statistical databases, and other relevant literature. The results indicate that Tanzania possesses numerous advantages, including fertile land, a favorable climate, and China's increasing demand for food. However, issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited processing capacity, and an inefficient bureaucracy continue to undermine competitiveness. Opportunities arise from China's escalating food requirements, investments in agro-processing, and the exchange of technology between the two nations. Conversely, fluctuations in international prices, stringent quality standards, and competition from other exporting countries pose significant threats to sustained growth. The findings of this study suggest that the agricultural trade between Tanzania and China holds considerable promise. Nevertheless, to fully capitalize on this potential, strategic reforms, value-added investments, and enhanced collaboration between the two countries are essential.

Subject Areas

Business Analysis, International Economics

Keywords

Tanzania-China Trade, Agricultural Trade, SWOT Analysis, Bilateral

1. Introduction

Over two-thirds of the workforce in Tanzania is engaged in agriculture, which significantly contributes to the nation's GDP and export revenues [1]. Essential crops such as cashew nuts, sesame, tobacco, and coffee are vital not only for the livelihoods of the population but also serve as the foundation for Tanzania's international trade. Despite ongoing efforts to diversify the economy, agriculture remains the primary sector driving economic growth and alleviating poverty [2]. Furthermore, China has emerged as a key trading partner for numerous African nations, including Tanzania, and ranks among the largest importers of agricultural products globally. In the last two decades, the trade relationship between Tanzania and China has expanded considerably, facilitated by bilateral agreements and initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) [3]. Agricultural trade has become a crucial component of this partnership, linking Tanzanian farmers and exporters to one of the largest consumer markets worldwide (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. China imports from Tanzania.

China Imports from Tanzania	Value
Total	\$704.41 M
Oil seed, oleagic fruits, grain, seed, fruits	\$233.36 M
Copper	\$195.24 M
Ores slag and ash	\$70.11 M
Fish, crustaceans, molluscs, aquatics invertebrates	\$49.66 M
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$29.31 M
Wood and articles of wood, wood charcoal	\$22.13 M
Vegetable textile fibers not specified elsewhere, paper yarn, woven fabric	\$18.78 M
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$14.92 M
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$11.26 M
Residues, wastes of food industry, animal fodder	\$10.53 M
Tobacco and manufactures tobacco substitutes	\$9.78 M
Aluminum	\$9.19 M

Source: comtrade data.

The trade relationship between Tanzania and China is expanding; however, numerous issues remain unresolved. Tanzania benefits from access to China's vast market and possesses significant agricultural potential, yet it struggles with com-

petitiveness due to regulatory challenges, insufficient processing capacity, and infrastructural deficiencies [4]. Additionally, fluctuations in international prices and competition among suppliers pose genuine risks.

This research aims to assess the agricultural trade between Tanzania and China utilizing SWOT analysis as a methodological framework. Specifically, the study intends to explore the following research questions:

- 1) What are the primary strengths and weaknesses associated with the trade of agricultural products between Tanzania and China?
- 2) What opportunities exist for the enhancement and expansion of this trade?
- 3) What threats could jeopardize the sustainability of this relationship?

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: Following a review of pertinent literature on Tanzania-China relations and agricultural trade, the methodology will be outlined. The main body of the paper will present the SWOT analysis, and the subsequent discussion will contextualize the findings within the broader landscape of trade and policy [5]. The conclusion will offer recommendations and insights regarding the future of agricultural trade between Tanzania and China.

2. Literature Review

In recent decades, global agricultural trade has experienced consistent growth. This trend is attributed to increasing food demand, advancements in logistics, and the globalization of supply chains. Developing nations, particularly those in Africa, now contribute significantly to the supply of raw and semi-processed agricultural products, including oil-seeds, coffee, cocoa, and others. Factors such as price volatility, health regulations, and quality standards influence the ability of countries to access and maintain their positions in markets [6]. Concurrently, international trade has become increasingly competitive.

In this manner, China has emerged as a significant participant in the global agricultural trade. As the nation rapidly urbanizes, its population continues to grow, and its dietary preferences evolve, there is an increasing demand for imported food [7]. China's engagement with Africa has been particularly crucial due to the China-Africa partnership, which encompasses trade and investment in the agricultural sector. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China has enhanced its trade relations with African nations. These initiatives have facilitated infrastructure development and streamlined the entry of African agricultural products into Chinese markets.

Tanzania has reaped benefits from these initiatives, as China ranks among its largest trading partners. The Chinese market is witnessing a rise in agricultural exports, including sesame seeds, cashew nuts, and tobacco. The growth has been made feasible by bilateral agreements and policies, such as technical cooperation, investments in logistics, and reduced tariffs [8]. Nevertheless, the partnership continues to expand, while Tanzania grapples with challenges related to its infrastructure, insufficient value addition, and susceptibility to fluctuations in international

market prices.

Prior research has utilized SWOT analysis to assess the competitiveness of agribusiness and agricultural trade. The SWOT framework has been applied to examine smallholder farming practices, national trade policies, and coffee exports from Africa [9]. These investigations illustrate that SWOT analysis can be utilized to identify external opportunities and threats affecting trade performance, as well as internal strengths and weaknesses. However, this body of research has predominantly concentrated on crops or general trade patterns, with scant attention paid to the bilateral agricultural trade between Tanzania and China.

This distinction underscores the significance of the present study. There is a dearth of studies that have systematically applied SWOT analysis to Tanzania-China agricultural trade, despite the growing interest in China-Africa relations. By addressing this gap in knowledge, the research improves the comprehension of Tanzania's agricultural exports to China, including their potential and challenges [10].

3. Methodology

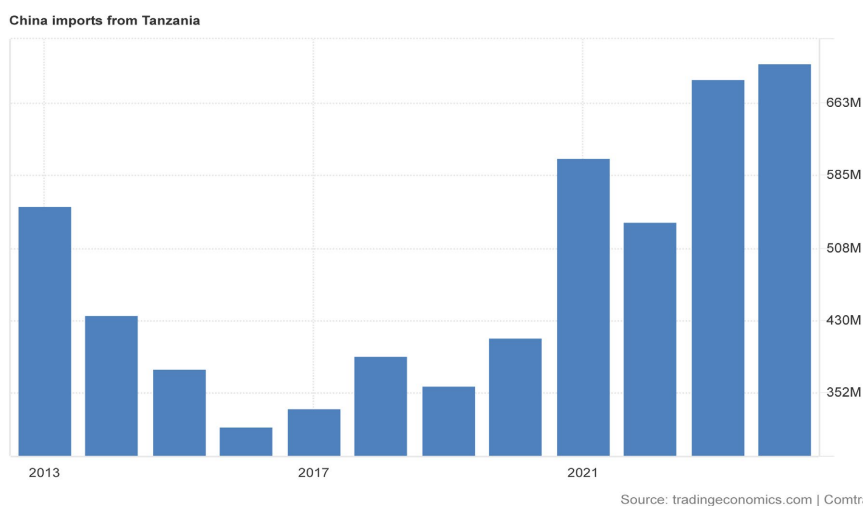
This research primarily utilizes the SWOT analysis framework to assess the agricultural trade between Tanzania and China. SWOT represents strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is a widely recognized tool for strategic analysis. This framework facilitates the examination of both external (opportunities and threats) and internal (strengths and weaknesses) factors. It is particularly beneficial in trade and agribusiness research as it allows for a systematic evaluation of competitive advantages, existing limitations, and external factors influencing market dynamics [11]. This approach simplifies the understanding of the strategic position of agricultural trade between Tanzania and China.

Data for this study was sourced from various locations. Trade statistics were collected from international databases such as the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UN Com-trade from the year 2013-2024.

In order to contextualize trends in agricultural production and exports, reports from the Bank of Tanzania and the Tanzania Ministry of Agriculture at the national level were examined [12]. To gain insight into China's perspective on agricultural imports, we also analyzed Chinese customs data and policy documents. Furthermore, to enrich our understanding of Tanzania-China trade relations and the wider global trade landscape, pertinent scholarly articles, policy briefs, and research papers were scrutinized.

The methodology employed is predominantly descriptive, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative components. Quantitative data, such as trade values and export volumes, are utilized to illustrate trends within the SWOT analysis. Qualitative data, including trade agreements, policy frameworks, and institutional challenges, elucidate the fundamental factors influencing trade performance [13]. Collectively, these pieces of evidence provide a comprehensive and equitable assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with

Tanzania-China agricultural trade (see **Figure 1**).



Source: comtrade data.

Figure 1. China imports from Tanzania.

4. SWOT Analysis

The agricultural trade between Tanzania and China presents both advantages and disadvantages, as well as opportunities and risks. By gaining a deeper understanding of these factors, Tanzania can enhance its current position and improve its competitiveness in the Chinese market.

4.1. Strengths

Tanzania's agricultural sector is bolstered by an abundance of fertile land and a climate conducive to the year-round cultivation of a diverse array of crops. This natural advantage facilitates the production of key export crops such as tobacco, cashew nuts, coffee, and sesame, which are highly sought after in China. With its large population and increasing demand for a variety of agricultural imports, China offers Tanzania a reliable market [14]. Additionally, initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) have fostered trade relations by reducing certain barriers and creating new avenues for collaboration. The forum is essential in enhancing cooperation between China and Africa in the agricultural sector by facilitating dialogue, investments, technology transfer, capacity building, policy alignment, and collaborative research.

A notable instance is the China-Tanzania Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center located in Dar-es-salaam, which was established through the forum and serves as a center for research, training, and the demonstration of Chinese agricultural technologies.

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by China in 2013, seeks to improve infrastructure and economic collaboration across Asia, Africa, and Europe. In Tan-

zania, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) plays a crucial role in bolstering the agricultural sector by enhancing transportation infrastructure (for example, the Standard Gauge Railway), optimizing export channels through improved ports, investing in modern farming equipment and irrigation systems, developing agro-processing industries, and offering training to farmers.

Overall, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) contributes to heightened productivity, increased income, and enhanced food security within Tanzania's agricultural landscape. The robust diplomatic relations between the two nations further strengthen this partnership, fostering a favorable political environment for trade and investment.

However, despite these advantages, Tanzania's competitiveness is hindered by structural challenges. Poor infrastructure raises the costs and reduces the efficiency of transporting goods to China, particularly concerning ports, storage, and transportation.

Most agricultural exports are shipped in their raw form due to insufficient investment in value addition, resulting in missed opportunities to achieve higher prices in international markets. Additionally, exporters face bureaucratic hurdles such as prolonged clearance times and frequently changing regulations.

Moreover, Tanzanian traders aiming to establish long-term business relationships with Chinese buyers encounter difficulties stemming from language and cultural barriers, which often result in lost opportunities and ineffective communication.

4.2. Weakness

Between 2013 and 2024, Tanzania has made remarkable progress in its infrastructure, especially in the areas of roads, ports, and energy, significantly driven by initiatives like the Belt and Road. However, challenges remain regarding rural connectivity, logistics, and sustainability. Like many other countries, Tanzania has successfully attracted a multitude of donors to launch, improve, and manage a wide range of infrastructure projects, which encompass the building of roads and airports, the supply of water and electricity, and the functioning of ports such as the Port of Dar es Salaam, Tanga, and Mtwara. In contrast to countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, which have accelerated their infrastructure projects with the support of both regional and international partners, Tanzania's development continues to encounter difficulties, particularly in its rural areas and port capacity. For instance, when considering the limitations of the construction sector in Tanzania, the Construction Industry Policy of 2003 stipulates that, among other objectives, the Government of Tanzania (GoT) will 1) establish mechanisms to enhance the capacity and performance of local contractors and consultants, 2) bolster the delivery capacity of the public sector, 3) elevate the performance of the informal construction sector, 4) encourage the export of goods and services, 5) enhance quality and productivity, and 6) foster technological advancement.

Nevertheless, the construction industry continues to encounter numerous chal-

allenges, including the prolonged process for registering engineers and the need for effective strategies to implement the policy framework. This situation necessitates that the new construction policy addresses these constraints and, among other priorities, formulates a more efficient institutional framework for the sustainable development and maintenance of infrastructure within the construction and civil engineering sectors, particularly concerning buildings and transportation.

The country also encounters several other challenges, including a lack of transparency in infrastructure projects, corruption, a heavy reliance on donor funding, inadequate project management, and a shortage of skilled personnel to supervise these initiatives. Inadequate infrastructure increases the costs and reduces the efficiency of transporting goods to China, particularly regarding ports, storage, and logistics.

Tanzania primarily exports unprocessed agricultural goods such as cashew nuts, coffee, fruits, and spices, leading to minimal value addition and reduced income. Conversely, nations like Vietnam, India, Ethiopia, Colombia, Mexico, and Sri Lanka have established domestic processing sectors—processing nuts, roasting coffee, branding fruits, and packaging spices—which greatly enhance export value, generate employment, and boost market competitiveness. In summary, investing in local value addition enables these countries to achieve higher earnings from their agricultural exports in comparison to Tanzania.

Additionally, exporters face discouragement from bureaucratic challenges such as prolonged clearance duration's and frequently changing regulations [15]. Furthermore, Tanzanian traders aiming to establish enduring business relationships with Chinese clients encounter difficulties stemming from language and cultural disparities, which frequently result in lost opportunities and ineffective communication. In summary, although Tanzania has reached important milestones, there remains an opportunity to enhance investments and reforms to fully unlock its economic potential.

4.3. Opportunities

China's middle class is expanding rapidly, presenting numerous business prospects for Tanzania. If Tanzania implements appropriate strategies, it could satisfy China's increasing demand for higher quality and more diverse food products as incomes rise and dietary preferences evolve. The agricultural exchange between Tanzania and China offers numerous prospects, such as gaining entry to China's vast market for commodities like sesame seeds and coffee, facilitating technology transfer to enhance agricultural methods, attracting investments in infrastructure including storage and processing facilities, fostering capacity building through educational initiatives, diversifying into alternative crops such as spices and avocados, and establishing joint ventures with Chinese enterprises. These prospects can assist Tanzania in increasing exports, boosting productivity, creating new products, and fostering economic development. China provides more than mere market access; it also presents opportunities for technology transfer, including agri-

cultural mechanization, irrigation systems, and enhanced processing techniques that could boost Tanzania's economic productivity [16]. Chinese investments in Tanzania's agro-processing and agribusiness sectors are likely, particularly if they facilitate the establishment of processing facilities that enhance the value of raw exports. Furthermore, Tanzania can tap into a vast and expanding Chinese market through initiatives under the Belt and Road framework. These initiatives may indirectly benefit the agricultural trade sector by improving infrastructure.

4.4. Threats

However, several threats could jeopardize this trade relationship simultaneously. Fluctuations in global prices for commodities such as cashew nuts and sesame seeds render Tanzania's export revenues highly unpredictable, placing farmers and traders in financial jeopardy. Non-tariff barriers, including China's stringent quality and phytosanitary regulations, further complicate matters for Tanzanian exporters, who may lack the resources to consistently comply with these standards [17]. Tanzania's negotiating power is diminished due to its heavy reliance on raw exports, making the country susceptible to shifts in China's import regulations or demand. Additionally, Tanzania faces stiff competition from other African nations, such as Nigeria and Mozambique, which export similar products to China and may possess superior infrastructure or processing capabilities.

5. Discussion

The SWOT analysis highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of Tanzania's agricultural trade with China. Tanzania possesses inherent benefits for farming, including fertile soil, a favorable climate, and a rich agricultural history. These advantages, coupled with China's increasing demand for products such as sesame, cashew nuts, and coffee, establish a robust foundation for trade expansion [18]. The strong diplomatic relationships and supportive initiatives like FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative further reinforce this foundation by facilitating political and economic collaboration between nations.

However, Tanzania is unable to fully capitalize on these strengths due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited processing capabilities, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The majority of agricultural exports are unprocessed, rendering them less competitive and resulting in lower earnings compared to nations that enhance the value of their products [19]. In contrast, countries like Ethiopia and Kenya have invested more in processing and branding their agricultural exports, enabling them to secure higher prices in global markets. Similarly, Mozambique has made significant strides in enhancing its ports and logistics, providing it with a competitive edge over Tanzania in exporting to China.

The identified opportunities suggest a clear path forward. The agricultural sector in Tanzania stands to benefit significantly from China's increasing food demand, as well as the potential for technology transfer and Chinese investment [20]. For instance, collaboration with Chinese investors could facilitate the estab-

ishment of modern agro-processing facilities, which would not only elevate export values but also generate local employment. The Belt and Road Initiative also presents Tanzania with an opportunity to enhance its infrastructure and access additional Asian markets.

Equally important is the need to address the threats. Tanzania must diversify its agricultural exports rather than depend on a limited range of products to mitigate fluctuations in global prices. China enforces stringent non-tariff barriers; however, enhancing quality control systems and certification processes could facilitate navigation around these obstacles [21]. If Tanzania ceases its dependence on raw exports and instead focuses on value addition, it will gain greater negotiating power and resilience against market fluctuations. Furthermore, to effectively compete with other African exporters, Tanzania must enhance its infrastructure and operational efficiency while establishing robust trade networks with Chinese buyers.

These insights carry significant implications for policy. The Tanzanian government should prioritize investments in rural infrastructure, storage facilities, and transportation networks to reduce trade expenses. It is essential to encourage and assist farmers and cooperatives in adopting improved agricultural practices and engaging in value-adding activities [22]. Exporters and traders must acquire the knowledge necessary to comply with international quality standards and navigate language barriers when engaging with Chinese markets. By implementing appropriate strategies, Tanzania can leverage its strengths into competitive advantages, address its weaknesses, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and mitigate its vulnerabilities in agricultural trade with China.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that Tanzania stands to gain significantly from engaging in agricultural trade with China; however, it must undertake strategic measures to fully capitalize on these advantages [23]. The SWOT analysis yields several recommendations.

1) A Nationwide Enhancement of Agricultural Infrastructure in Tanzania with the objective of improving agricultural productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and increase the competitiveness of Tanzanian exports—particularly in relation to trade with China—by prioritizing the development of infrastructure in rural regions. This includes the allocation of resources for the construction and maintenance of all-weather roads that connect farms to markets, processing facilities, and ports. Such an initiative will lower transportation costs and facilitate timely access to markets.

Additionally, the establishment of cold storage facilities, warehouses, and pack-houses in critical agricultural areas will help minimize post-harvest losses, preserve the quality of produce, and meet international standards. Enhancements to port infrastructure, streamlining of customs procedures, and improvements in logistics services will expedite export processes and reduce delays. Finally, training

will be provided to local stakeholders on infrastructure maintenance and effective logistics management to ensure sustainability.

Expected Outcomes include reduced transaction and transportation costs for farmers and exporters, an increase in both the quantity and quality of exports to China and other markets, enhanced global competitiveness of Tanzanian agricultural products, and stimulated rural economic growth and job creation. Implementation of this policy will require collaborative efforts among government agencies, development partners, and private sector stakeholders, with phased investments and clearly defined monitoring frameworks.

2) Highlighting the Importance of Value Addition in Tanzania's Agricultural Export Strategy that will aim to increase export revenues, create jobs, and stimulate industrial development by shifting from the export of unprocessed agricultural products to semi-processed and fully processed items. This approach will support Local Processing Industries by providing tax incentives, subsidies, and technical support to encourage the development of processing facilities for cashew nuts, sesame, coffee, and other vital commodities. Establish Agro-Processing Zones that will create specialized areas equipped with the essential infrastructure and services for agro-processing, attracting both local entrepreneurs and foreign investors.

Strengthen Capacity Building by dedicating resources to training programs designed for farmers, entrepreneurs, and workers in processing techniques, quality assurance, and business management practices. Additionally, implement Quality Standards and Certification that will establish stringent quality control and certification processes to meet international standards, thereby improving the global competitiveness of processed Tanzanian products. Finally, promote Tanzanian processed goods through effective branding strategies to penetrate international markets, especially in China and beyond.

The anticipated outcomes include an increased export value from processed goods, more job opportunities in processing sectors, the development of a vibrant agro-industrial landscape, and enhanced economic resilience with reduced dependence on raw commodity exports. The successful implementation of this policy will require coordinated efforts across various sectors, active engagement from the private sector, and the creation of supportive legal and fiscal frameworks.

3) To Improve Bilateral Trade Agreements with China for Sustainable Economic Cooperation that will aim to foster a more favorable trade environment by negotiating and implementing agreements that reduce barriers, harmonize standards, and expand access for Tanzanian products in China and other markets, while strengthening diplomatic relations. This policy will establish a Bilateral Trade Facilitation Framework that creates a dedicated bilateral trade negotiation body comprising government agencies, private sector representatives, and trade experts to engage consistently with their Chinese counterparts. It seeks to minimize Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) by negotiating the elimination or simplification of customs procedures, licensing requirements, and other NTBs that hinder Tanzanian ex-

ports to China. Furthermore, it will aim to align Product Standards and Certifications by pursuing mutual recognition of standards and certification processes to ease the entry of Tanzanian products, including agricultural goods, minerals, and manufactured items, into the Chinese market. Finally, it will leverage Multilateral Platforms while promoting Diplomatic Engagement and Relationship Development, enhancing participation in initiatives such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to coordinate efforts, attract investments, and advance Tanzania's key sectors, while also strengthening diplomatic missions and bilateral dialogues to build trust, tackle trade issues, and encourage lasting cooperation. The outcomes of such a policy will include improved accessibility of Tanzanian products in the Chinese market, increased bilateral investments along with technology transfer, strengthened diplomatic relations fostering extensive economic collaboration, and diversification of export markets combined with the reduction of trade barriers.

This policy will require active engagement from the Ministry of Trade, Foreign Affairs, industry stakeholders, and continuous diplomatic efforts, supported by persistent dialogues and mutual commitments, fostering long-term collaboration.

4) Capacity building is vital for maintaining long-term competitiveness. Farmers should be educated on modern agricultural practices, quality management, and post-harvest handling. Additionally, exporters and traders require assistance in understanding Chinese culture and language to facilitate communication and negotiations with Chinese partners. Training and exchange programs with China could help bridge these gaps.

These recommendations would not only facilitate Tanzania's agricultural trade with China, but they would also promote economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner and enhance the livelihoods of Tanzanian farmers.

7. Conclusions

This research aimed to evaluate the agricultural trade dynamics between Tanzania and China through a SWOT analysis. The findings indicate that Tanzania possesses numerous strengths, including fertile land, a favorable climate, and access to a vast and expanding Chinese market. The analysis further revealed that the country struggles with competitiveness due to issues such as inadequate infrastructure, a lack of value addition, and bureaucratic hurdles. Opportunities for growth exist in the form of increasing demand from China, potential technology transfers, and investments in agro-processing [24]. However, there are also threats to sustainable growth, including fluctuating global prices, stringent quality standards, and competition from other regions.

The study illustrates that agricultural trade between Tanzania and China holds significant potential for boosting export revenues, generating employment, and fostering economic development. To fully harness this potential, strategic measures are necessary, such as enhancing infrastructure, promoting value-added products,

providing training for farmers and exporters, and strengthening trade agreements between the two nations.

Future research could augment this study by conducting a more thorough quantitative analysis of trade flows, pricing trends, and market dynamics to provide deeper insights into the factors affecting Tanzania's agricultural exports to China [25]. Such research would support evidence-based policy-making and strategic planning aimed at enhancing bilateral trade relations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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