

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA



MAGAZINE

SECOND EDITION | 2024



**DARE TO
INVENT**
THE FUTURE OF THE
AFCFTA



AfCFTA's Role in Redefining Africa's Trade and Economic Landscape



Inventing the Future of Africa's Trade: A Vision for Trade in Services



Relevance Of Customs In The Operation Of Free Trade Areas (FTAs)



A NEW ERA OF TRADE IN AFRICA



**The AfCFTA:
A NEW ERA OF TRADE**

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EDITOR'S NOTE “

▲ **Grace Khoza**

Principal Communications Advisor

It is an honour and privilege to present the second edition of the AfCFTA Magazine for 2024. The AfCFTA Communications Unit is committed to fostering an environment where the objectives, successes, and challenges of the AfCFTA are clearly communicated to empower the continent and its people. Our mission is to advocate for this aspirational vision while facilitating the essential dialogue needed on the journey towards the continent's One Market.

As I reflect on what we must convey to inform, educate, and inspire through this magazine, I am honoured to introduce the theme of this edition and provide an overview of its background.

The theme for this edition is "Dare to Invent the future of the AfCFTA," a noble and inspirational call to action, reminding us of the hopes and dreams of those who came before us. This powerful theme was recently echoed by the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA, H.E. Wamkele Mene, during his speech in Morocco in June 2024.

The theme draws inspiration from a quote by the founding President of Burkina Faso, the late Thomas Sankara: "You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. It took the mad men of yesterday for us



to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those mad men."

From a young age, my parents instilled in me the principles of Pan-Africanism, introducing me to visionary leaders like Thomas Sankara, Robert Sobukwe, Julius Nyerere, Samora Machel, Kenneth Kaunda, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Jomo Kenyatta. These teachings continue to inspire my work today. My upbringing in a Pan-African household, rooted in the values of Ubuntu, shaped my understanding of Africa's rich heritage and the limitless potential of our people.

The introduction to these great leaders, the founding fathers, and mothers of our continent's independence, became a proud part of my identity. The mention of this Thomas Sankara quote by H.E. Wamkele Mene not only resonated deeply within me but strengthened my resolve to ensure that every form of communication

reflects the creation of the AfCFTA Secretariat and its objectives.

As Thomas Sankara says, "it takes mad men" to dare to invent a prosperous and independent continent. This quote not only highlights the origins of the AfCFTA Agreement but also illuminates its role in achieving Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want.

In this edition, we provide a status update on the progress made by the Secretariat, but more importantly, we shine a spotlight on the vision of a fully implemented AfCFTA Agreement. An agreement that will turn the tide for Africa, transforming it from a continent reliant on others to one that is independent, moving from political liberation to full economic freedom.

Thomas Sankara believed it was possible, and through this engine of change, the AfCFTA, we are not only defining the road ahead but also articulating the possibilities.

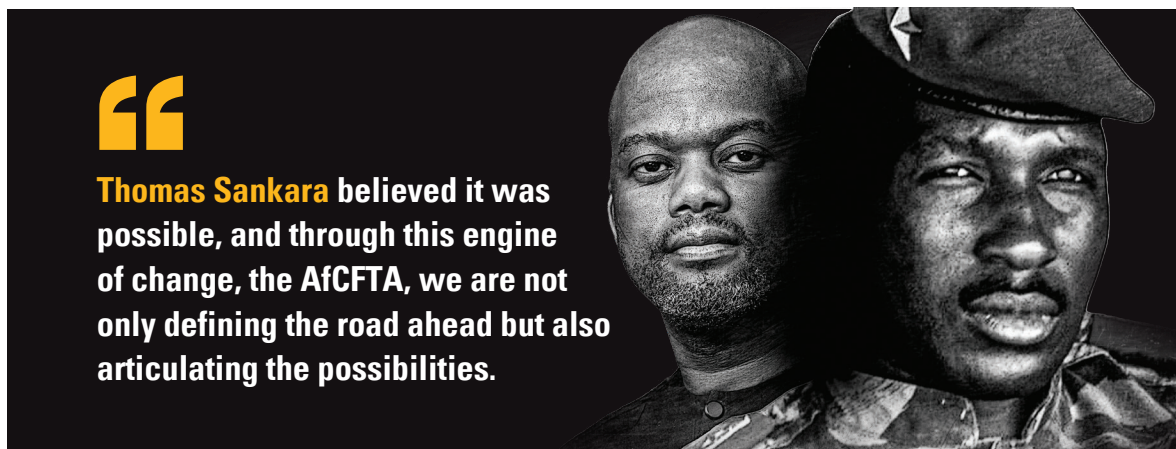
Through this edition, we invite you to explore the realm of possibilities as we work to realise this Agreement in its entire-

ty. Let us show you the potential of Africans trading with one another, celebrating our unity, and reflecting on a past that created artificial borders and sowed division, leading to an inability to recognise our shared responsibilities and accomplishments. A past that left us dependent on external markets, relegating us to the periphery of the global economy.

Looking ahead, we hope to inspire you, our reader, to recognise the value in one another as fellow Africans. Let us show you that the dreams of our Founding Fathers are not deferred, but vibrantly alive with possibility. Let us ignite within you a sense of African pride, a collective mindset that has achieved the extraordinary. Above all, let us encourage you to take your own steps as we walk together towards the Africa we desire, a continent that stands as a global economic force.

We are honoured to present this edition to you and look forward to your continued engagement as we build the Africa we want, together.

As you explore this edition, remember, this is not merely a dream, it is a shared responsibility to make it a reality. Together, we will achieve the Africa we want.



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From the Desk of the Secretary-General

The Honour Bestowed Upon Us... and the Future We Create Together

As the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, it is both an honour and a responsibility to reflect on the remarkable achievements of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement while acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead.

First, I extend my sincere appreciation to the political leadership of this continent for entrusting me with a second term as head of the AfCFTA Secretariat during the 37th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly.

The importance of the continent's political leadership cannot be overstated. The political backing from Africa's leadership has been pivotal in advancing the AfCFTA's objectives. Through the African Union, our leaders have continuously emphasised the importance of the AfCFTA in their summits and resolutions, urging member states to ratify and implement the agreement swiftly. The unwavering commitment of Africa's leaders has reinforced the AfCFTA's significance as a cornerstone of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions a prosperous and integrated continent.

The AfCFTA is not just a trade agreement; it is a bold commitment to economic integration, sustainable development, and the creation of a unified African market. With the full support of the African Union (AU) and its member states, we are paving the way for a prosperous and resilient continent. Since its inception, the AfCFTA has made significant strides towards achieving its objectives. The agreement aims to reduce tariffs on 90% of goods, fostering intra-African trade. Many countries have already begun eliminating tariffs, creating a more competitive marketplace. Early data indicates a positive trend, with increased trade flows among member states. The AfCFTA emphasises the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), providing them with opportunities to access larger markets. This empowerment is vital for job creation and economic resilience.

Additionally, the agreement encourages the development of regional value chains, enabling African countries to collaborate in producing and exporting goods. This not only enhances productivity but also strengthens economic ties among nations. The establishment of various protocols, including the latest on Investment, Intellectual Property, and Digital Trade, lays a solid foundation for comprehensive economic integration.

A Fully Implemented AfCFTA: A Glimpse into the Future

A fully implemented AfCFTA would transform the landscape of intra-African trade, creating a more integrated and dynamic economic environment. With the elimination of tariffs on 90% of goods, African countries would experience a dramatic reduction in trade costs. This would make African goods more competitive in regional markets, encouraging cross-border commerce. The harmonisation of trade regulations and standards across member states would



The AfCFTA is not just a trade agreement; it is a bold commitment to economic integration, sustainable development, and the creation of a unified African market.

facilitate smoother trade flows. Businesses would no longer face the complexities of navigating different regulatory environments, leading to increased efficiency and reduced transaction costs.

SMEs would gain unprecedented access to larger markets across the continent. This would enable them to scale operations, diversify product offerings, and create jobs, contributing to economic resilience and growth. The enhanced collaboration among countries would lead to the establishment of regional supply chains. By sourcing materials and components locally, African businesses can reduce reliance on external suppliers, fostering economic self-sufficiency. The AfCFTA would also create a more attractive investment climate by providing a larger, more integrated market. Increased foreign and domestic investment would lead to infrastructure development, technological advancements, and job creation.

Moreover, the AfCFTA would empower marginalised groups. Targeted initiatives could help women and youth access financing, training, and mentorship, enabling them to participate actively in the economy. The increased competition resulting from a unified market would drive innovation among African businesses. Companies would be incentivised to develop new products and services, boosting productivity and economic growth. The economic interdependence fostered by the AfCFTA could also contribute to greater political stability across the continent. By creating shared interests among nations, the agreement has the potential to promote peace and cooperation.

Embracing Boldness and 'Madness' in Realising the AfCFTA Agreement

Thomas Sankara's powerful words resonate deeply in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement. To transform this visionary initiative into a tangible reality, we must harness the courage, creativity, and a touch of "madness" that Sankara alludes to—embracing bold innovation as we navigate the complexities of economic integration. Creating a future that embodies Sankara's vision requires an environment where collaboration thrives. Partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society can drive innovation. Collaborative platforms facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge, and technology, leading to new solutions for trade barriers. Joint projects across countries—such as regional infrastructure developments or trade fairs—can promote unity and shared goals, reinforcing the idea that collective action is essential for progress.

A future shaped by boldness must also prioritise education and capacity building. Encouraging entrepreneurship through targeted training and funding initiatives can empower a new generation of "mad men" and women. Innovative startups can lead the charge in transforming trade practices and exploring new markets. Investing in skill development programmes tailored to the needs of the AfCFTA can equip individuals with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of a unified market, fostering a culture of innovation and resilience. Technology is a key enabler of transformation and must be at the forefront of our efforts. Developing digital platforms that facilitate trade, such as e-commerce marketplaces, can enhance access to goods and services across borders, making the AfCFTA more accessible.

Ultimately, the realisation of the AfCFTA hinges on strong political commitment. Visionary leadership must embrace the "*madness*" of bold ideas, championing radical reforms that push the boundaries of traditional politics and trade agreements. Ongoing dialogue among member states, civil society, and the private sector can cultivate a shared vision, ensuring that all stakeholders are invested in the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. Finally, Thomas Sankara's call for a "*certain amount of madness*"—the courage to break from old paradigms and innovate—provides a vital framework for fostering an enabling environment that benefits all African citizens. By embracing transformative leadership, we can ensure the successful implementation of the AfCFTA and unlock its full potential.



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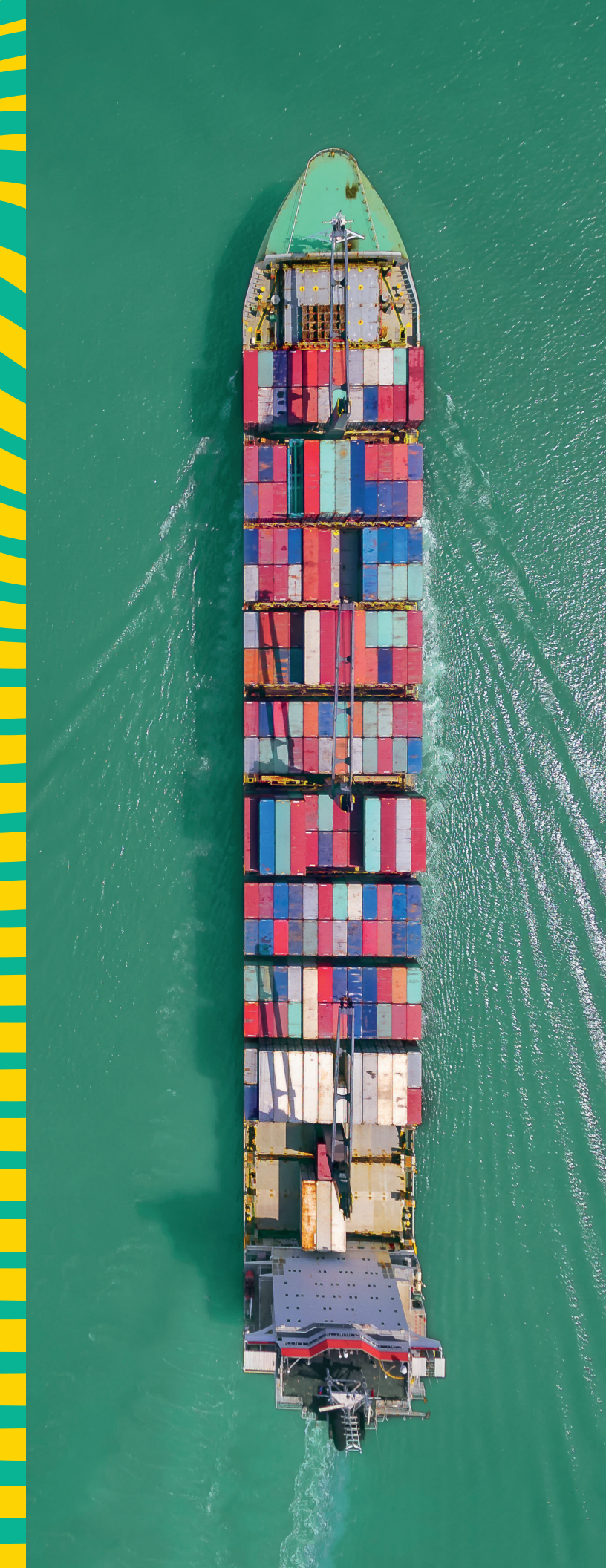


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AfCFTA's Role in Redefining Africa's Trade and Economic Landscape

≈ Mohamed Ali

Director Trade in Goods and Competition

What has happened so far under the implementation of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods?

The current phase of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) implementation in 2024 is crucial for advancing the continent's development agenda. It is anticipated that by 2035, trade liberalisation within the AfCFTA framework will lift more than 30 million Africans out of poverty. A 2019 UNCTAD report estimated that progress towards the AfCFTA could create welfare gains of \$16.1 billion and to boost intra-African trade by 33%.

Since the AfCFTA's establishment, significant advancements have been made, with 54 out of 55 African Union (AU) Member States having signed the agreement. Additionally, 47 countries have ratified it, and 47 State Parties have opened their economies to preferential trading of goods under the 90% threshold of category A. Further developments have also been made regarding the AfCFTA Rules of Origin, with the current agreement standing at 92.43%, indicating that goods complying with the AfCFTA rules of origin qualify for preferential tariff treatment.

Trading under the AfCFTA officially commenced on January 1, 2021. However, no trade transactions took place that year due to several implementation hurdles, such as the need to finalise negotiations on rules of origin and market access tariff offers, compounded by the ongoing recovery of African economies from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, the AfCFTA Secretariat launched the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative, involving six eligible State Parties, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, and Rwanda who volunteered to initiate trade amongst themselves. Additionally, Tanzania, Tunisia, and South Africa, also engaged in trade activities.

In 2024, there has been a notable rise in interest regarding participation in the Guided Trade Initiative, with 39 State Parties expressing their intent. The AfCFTA holds the promise of unlocking significant

economic opportunities and revitalizing African economies, positioning it as a potential transformative force for the continent. Since the launch of the Guided Trade Initiative in October 2022, the initiative has played a crucial role in enhancing trade among State Parties within various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) across Africa. Furthermore, the initiative's scope has been broadened to facilitate trade and investment opportunities across a wider array of products and nations.

Importantly, the role of the GTI extends beyond simple trade facilitation. It enhances the export capabilities of State Parties and their enterprises, offering specialised support and guidance. This includes comprehensive export readiness assessments, which examine production capacity, quality standards, regulatory adherence, and market intelligence.

What is the Future of Trade and Trade Liberalization under the AfCFTA Framework?

The World Bank's forecasts suggest that AfCFTA could boost Africa's exports to other regions by 32% by the year 2035. Additionally, it is expected to significantly increase foreign direct investment, with estimates ranging from 111% to 159%. The AfCFTA Agreement holds the promise of enhancing Africa's trade and growth prospects.

By 2026, five years after trading commenced in 2021, it is anticipated that African developing



nations will have completely liberalised all goods within the 90% threshold category. Additionally, they are projected to achieve a 50% level of trade liberalisation for sensitive goods, which represent 7% of the total. For the least developed countries in Africa, it is expected that by 2031, they will have fully liberalised goods classified under category A threshold, and by 2033, they will have entirely liberalised sensitive goods.

The complete liberalisation of the African market by 2033, covering at least 97 % of total tariff lines, combined with fully agreed AfCFTA Rules of Origin, presents a distinctive opportunity for Africa's trade and industrialisation to transcend the colonial model of resource extraction. At present, Africa's annual average imports include \$46 billion for vehicles and parts, \$30 billion textile, apparel, and leather products total, \$19 billion for pharmaceuticals, and \$29 billion cereals.

The AfCFTA can promote the diversification of growth and export pathways, resulting in a sustainable cycle of robust economic development and an expanded tax base, which will, in turn, strengthen Africa's fiscal stability and debt management.





Empowering the Private Sector

At the heart of this transformation lies the private sector – the engine of job creation, economic diversification, and intra-African trade. Africa’s private sector is estimated to account for about 80% of total production, 67% of the investment and employs 90% of the working-age population. In light of this, it is imperative to empower business leaders, to provide them with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in the borderless landscape of the AfCFTA.

Private Sector engagement, alongside governmental efforts, is vital for the successful implementation of the AfCFTA and for ensuring sustainable development under the Agreement. However, insights so far reveal the need to create trade aggregators, in the form of national trading companies or continental trading companies, to leverage on the economies of large scale. These companies would manage the aggregation, consolidation, and distribution of exports and imports, offering support services such as warehousing, shipping, marketing, financing, and insurance. It is important to emphasise the private sector’s critical role in production and trade within the context of the Agreement.

By fully embracing the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA, African countries can drive a new era of industrial transformation. In doing so, we must place the AfCFTA at the heart of Africa’s manufacturing efforts. By aligning policies and initiatives with the AfCFTA’s objectives, Africa can position itself as a manufacturing powerhouse for the entire world.

A Call to Action and Conclusion

Rethinking Africa’s transformation is not just an option; it is a necessity. The AfCFTA presents a historic opportunity for Africa to redefine its economies, making them more competitive, innovative, and sustainable. By leveraging the AfCFTA, the African countries can unlock new growth avenues, create jobs, and enhance the overall economic well-being of the continent’s people.

The path ahead is not without its challenges, but with collective determination and vision, Africa can transform and catalyse a new era of prosperity for all. This is the time to break down the barriers, shatters the silos, and build bridges that connect markets, industries, and people. The AfCFTA provides a platform to foster an Africa where the flow of goods, services, and ideas knows no borders, and where creativity of our people fuels collective rise.

Leaders, innovators, and the dreamers across the continent are now called upon to dare to invent, to reshape the future of Africa, and to build a united, prosperous, and globally competitive continent.

The time for action is now. The spirit of Thomas Sankara reminds us of the power of self-reliance and determination. With that spirit we can forge a brighter, more equitable, and sustainable future for all Africans. Together, we can and will create the Africa we want, an Africa where innovation, entrepreneurship, and the power of the human spirit drive our collective success.



AfCFTA Competition Policy as a Catalyst for African Trade Transformation

By **Malick Diallo**, Head of Trade Remedies

Competition is a cornerstone of a successful market economy. Firms often seek to maximise profits through strategies that may be deemed anti-competitive, such as forming cartels, imposing restrictions on suppliers, charging excessive prices, avoiding competition through mergers and acquisitions, or abusing their market power. These anti-competitive practices can negatively affect intra-African trade by partitioning markets and concentrating market power among a few large firms.

The AfCFTA aims to create a single market for goods and services across the 55 African countries, thereby promoting intra-African trade and reducing dependence on external markets. The AfCFTA's effective elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers among its State Parties creates new opportunities for competition in a broader continental market. Companies must be able to take advantage of the single market to scale-up and innovate without being hindered by anti-competitive practices. Therefore, Competition Policy within the AfCFTA plays a vital role in promoting fair competition, improving market efficiency, protecting consumers, and encouraging economic advancement.

The AfCFTA Protocol on Competition Policy (Protocol) is instrumental in the promotion of competition in Africa. The adoption of the Protocol signifies a vital step forward in Africa's integration process. The Protocol is designed to eliminate anti-competitive behaviours

and restrictive business practices to enhance market efficiency and facilitate inclusive growth. It ensures that the benefits from trade liberalisation are not jeopardised by anti-competitive activities. By ensuring fair competition throughout the continent, the Protocol promotes a reduction in consumer prices and enhances business practices that are essential for Africa's socioeconomic progress.

The Protocol applies to all economic activities conducted by individuals or entities either within the AfCFTA or that have a substantial impact on it, particularly those with a continental scope. It includes provisions related to restrictive agreements, abuse of dominance, mergers and acquisitions, and exploitation of economic dependence. These practices are prohibited to the extent that they prevent, distort, or restrict competition in the AfCFTA market and are incompatible with the effective operation of the AfCFTA market. The Protocol does not extend to cases where national competition authorities have jurisdiction.

The Protocol establishes the AfCFTA Competition Authority and the AfCFTA Competition Tribunal. The Authority will operate as an autonomous institution mandated to implement and enforce the provisions of the Protocol, including the approval of mergers. The Tribunal is an independent body tasked with adjudicating appeals arising from the decisions made by the Authority.



A unique aspect of the AfCFTA competition policy is its ambitious goal of harmonising competition laws and practices across all African Member States. This alignment ensures consistent rules for businesses operating across borders, promoting fair competition, and eliminating unfair advantages or barriers to entry. By standardising competition regulations, the AfCFTA aims to create a vibrant and competitive marketplace that allows businesses to thrive. The ultimate goal is to establish a harmonised and integrated competition regime for African, in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Another unique feature of the AfCFTA competition policy is its emphasis on capacity-building and technical assistance for African countries. Recognising the varying levels of development and resources in different countries, the policy provides support to State Parties in building their institutional capacity to enforce competition laws. This assistance includes training programs, sharing best practices, and promoting cooperation among member states. By focusing on capacity-building, the AfCFTA ensures that all countries are equipped to effectively implement and enforce competition rules.

Africa has made considerable strides in technology, with internet adoption increasing by 17% annually since 2013. These advancements have spurred growth in fintech, digital inclusion, and financial inclusion. However, there are still significant opportunities to improve affordable internet access, digital employment, digital services, and digital enablers. The shift towards digitalisation in economic activities and the growing prominence of digital platforms, including online platforms, present fundamental challenges to the current regulatory frameworks governing markets, competition law, and industrial policy.

The Protocol signifies a positive development in addressing the challenges associated with the substantial power imbalances between dominant enterprises and their dependent counterparts, including dominant firms in online or digital markets. It explicitly prohibits dominant entities, referred to as "gatekeepers," from exploiting their economic advantage over customers or suppliers. The Protocol aims to create an environment that fosters innovation, balances the influence of large digital platforms, and protects the interests of smaller





firms and start-ups. By establishing a level playing field for digital companies of all sizes, it seeks to enhance the choices available to consumers.

Additionally, the AfCFTA competition policy considers the specific challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are a crucial driver of economic growth in Africa, but they often face barriers to entry and unfair competition from larger companies. The competition policy aims to create a level playing field for all businesses, including SMEs, by addressing issues such as unfair trade practices and restrictive regulations. For example, during a merger assessment, the Protocol requires the continental Authority to evaluate how the proposed merger will impact the ability of SMEs to compete effectively, as part of its public interest considerations. This focus on promoting fair competition among businesses of all sizes is another aspect that sets the AfCFTA competition policy apart.

In conclusion, the AfCFTA competition policy is a unique and innovative approach to promoting fair competition within the African free trade area. By establishing continental bodies to enforce competition, providing capacity-building support to State Parties, and addressing the specific challenges unique to Africa, including protecting the competitiveness of SMEs, the policy aims to create an enabling environment for business growth and economic development. As the AfCFTA continues to evolve and expand, competition policy will play an essential role in shaping the future of trade in Africa.

With its focus on innovation, competitiveness, and economic development, the AfCFTA competition policy has the potential to pave the way for a prosperous and inclusive future for the continent. It is essential for African governments and regional organisations to prioritise the establishment of robust competition enforcement mechanisms and collaborate at all levels to foster a competitive environment that benefits both businesses and consumers alike.

Dismantling Trade Barriers And How The AfCFTA Can Unlock Africa's Economic Potential

By **Poonam Mohun**, Head of NTM Division



As we strive to shape the future we want and build a better tomorrow, the nature of continental trade is changing. It will no longer be dominated by tariffs, but will instead focus on quality, standards, and compliance with market requirements. This shift will particularly impact exporters and importers, especially from smaller and more vulnerable economies, who often struggle with non-tariff measures (NTMs) in their daily business operations.

NTMs are defined as “policy measures on export and import, other than ordinary customs tariffs, that can potentially affect international trade in goods. These are mandatory requirements, rules, or regulations imposed by governments in exporting, importing, or transit countries.” NTMs become non-tariff barriers (NTBs) when exporters and importers perceive them as overly complex and burdensome.

Although NTMs are often implemented with good intentions, such as public health purposes, their complexity and frequency disproportionately affect the trade flows of more vulnerable countries. In some cases, they are seen as protectionist measures. Regardless of intent, NTMs often impose additional costs, reducing trade competitiveness, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies. The issue is not always the measures themselves, but the procedural obstacles associated with them, which can have severe consequences for trade.



The ultimate goal of the AfCFTA is to eliminate such barriers, improve the business environment, and foster growth, all while mobilising efforts to alleviate poverty. A key focus is to increase transparency by disseminating relevant information on NTMs to stakeholders across the continent.

Barriers Affecting African Trade

NTMs include measures like conformity assessments, technical requirements, rules of origin, and the related certificates of origin, which are used to determine whether a product is eligible for preferential treatment under the AfCFTA. These are often seen as cumbersome by businesses. In the agricultural sector, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), meant to protect human, animal, and plant life (e.g., requirements such as tolerance limits), often present significant challenges. Many nations continually update their quality and food safety standards, sometimes without adequate notice or transparency.

Conformity assessments refer to control, inspection, and approval procedures (such as testing) that confirm a product fulfils the technical requirements and mandatory standards imposed by the importing country.

These two categories are generally known as SPS measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). They are inevitable for most agricultural products, as they are put in place to meet public policy objectives, such as consumer protection. Businesses, especially SMEs and women-led enterprises, usually find such regulations burdensome due to associated delays and costs.

Additionally, language requirements for product labelling given the diversity across the continent (e.g., Arabic, Portuguese, English, and French) pose another challenge. African businesses also face infrastructure gaps and significant delays in both local and partner administrations, which can have serious implications, especially for

perishable goods.

Who Applies NTMs?

Many trade obstacles are linked to partner countries within existing free trade agreements (FTAs) or regional trade agreements (RTAs). For example, between Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), or between Tanzania and its neighbours within regional frameworks such as the East African Community (EAC) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Landlocked countries, like Rwanda, experience particularly severe obstacles, including transit-related delays and charges. In addition to government requirements, exporters sometimes face onerous standards imposed by private clients, such as Fair-Trade certificates for products like coffee or tea. The costs and delays associated with these certificates cause significant hindrances for exporters.

The Future We Want

Addressing trade obstacles is essential for deeper trade integration across AfCFTA State Parties. Several AfCFTA initiatives are tackling these challenges. For instance, mutual recognition agreements between conformity assessment bodies will simplify trade through cooperation on standards, technical regulations, and accreditation.

The AfCFTA Secretariat is also developing an Electronic Notification System for State Parties to share timely updates on SPS and TBT measures, risk analysis or scientific opinions, pest or disease status, official controls, food safety risks, and quarantine restrictions. This will enhance transparency and reduce procedural delays.

Additionally, results-oriented dialogues with regional partners and neighbouring countries are key to resolving trade obstacles. Local authorities must continue to engage with trading partners

and address internal trade barriers. Effective dialogue between policymakers and the private sector is crucial to crafting sustainable policies and addressing concerns. Establishing one-stop shops and single windows to process documentation, as well as single enquiry points for trade documentation, can significantly ease trade processes.

Eliminating trade barriers will enable AfCFTA State Parties to take significant steps toward improving the trade environment. We must dare to invent a future without NTBs, a future where trade flows smoothly across the continent.

AfCFTA's Secretariat Launches NTB Mobile App

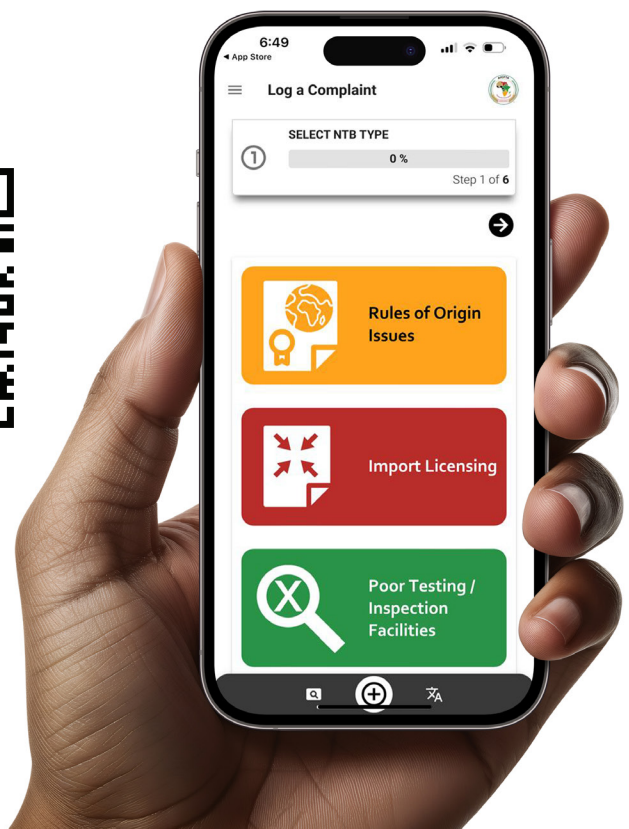
In a ground-breaking move to streamline trade across Africa, the AfCFTA Secretariat has launched a mobile application version of its Non-Tariff Barriers (NTB) Online Mechanism. This innovative app allows users to report trade barriers in real-time, providing faster intervention and resolution.

The mobile app, compatible with both Android and Apple devices, enables traders and businesses to report issues such as cumbersome border procedures or delays, directly from their smartphones. By offering an on-the-go solution, the app makes it easier for the private sector to engage with the AfCFTA Secretariat, accelerating the resolution of trade obstacles.

The AfCFTA NTB Online Mechanism has already played a critical role in identifying and addressing trade barriers across the continent. The mobile app further enhances this platform by making it more accessible and efficient, allowing for quicker responses and more accurate data collection.

To download the app, users can visit <https://www.tradebarriers.africa/app> or access it directly from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. This tool is a testament to the AfCFTA's commitment to leveraging technology to improve trade flows and remove non-tariff barriers across Africa.

Download the NTB Reporting App





Accelerating Africa's Future: The AfCFTA's Role in Shaping a Dynamic Automotive Industry in Africa

⌄ Themba Khumalo

Senior Advisor, Value Chains

The AfCFTA is at the forefront of reshaping the future of Africa's automotive industry. Through policies, strategic partnerships, and leadership, the continent is not merely participating in the global automotive landscape but advancing it with significant strides. This approach is influencing how Africa manufactures, trades, and competes globally, setting a new course for industrialisation, job creation, and economic growth.

In the context of the AfCFTA, the automotive sector holds great potential to drive industrialisation, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth across the

continent. However, achieving this potential depends on addressing complex challenges that hinder large-scale production and trade. These challenges stem from the global nature of automotive production and trade.

However, the AfCFTA's economies of scale are helping Africa prioritise the automotive industry and coordinate local production investments. Key areas of focus include reducing the importation of second-hand vehicles, improving access to finance for production and consumers, developing regional value chains, and enhancing logistics. The Rules of Origin remain a crucial point in negotiations, reflecting the difficulty of defining "made in Africa" within an industry marked by complex supply chains and varying manufacturing capacities.

The globalised nature of the automotive sector presents distinct challenges. In many African countries, the industry relies heavily on imported components, with only final assembly taking place on the continent. This raises important questions about how to define the origin of a vehicle or component in a way that promotes local production without discouraging investment or trade.

The automotive sector's potential under the AfCFTA is compelling. In 2019, Africa produced approximately 1.3 million vehicles. The AfCFTA Secretariat estimates that the continent's vehicle market could grow to 5 million units annually by 2035. Achieving this target will require a harmonised trade environment and an agreeable Rule of Origin that encourages local manufacturing and supports regional value chains.

The AfCFTA Secretariat is addressing today's challenges while also preparing for the future through initiatives like the AfCFTA Automotive Strategy. This strategy seeks to build a more integrated and competitive



The AfCFTA is not just addressing today's challenges; it is shaping tomorrow's opportunities for Africa's automotive industry, paving the way for local production, investment, and growth.

The AfCFTA is at the forefront of reshaping the future of Africa's automotive industry. Through policies, strategic partnerships, and leadership, the continent is not merely participating in the global automotive landscape but advancing it with significant strides. This approach is influencing how Africa manufactures, trades, and competes globally, setting a new course for industrialisation, job creation, and economic growth.

In the context of the AfCFTA, the automotive sector holds great potential to drive industrialisation, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth across the continent. However, achieving this potential depends on addressing complex challenges that hinder large-scale production and trade. These challenges stem from the global nature of automotive production and trade.

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The AfCFTA Secretariat is addressing today's challenges while also preparing for the future through initiatives like the AfCFTA Automotive Strategy. This strategy seeks to build a more integrated and competitive automotive industry in Africa by focusing on regional value chains, increasing local content, and attracting investment. It also highlights the importance of clear Rules of Origin. Afreximbank supports this initiative with a \$1 billion facility to boost the sector.

The delay in concluding the Rule of Origin for the automotive sector reflects the complexity of balancing the interests of various countries and industries.

However, these negotiations are key to ensuring that the AfCFTA's benefits are realised. The automotive sector offers immense potential, but this will only be unlocked if Africa can create a conducive trade environment supported by clear and fair rules.

Moving forward, it is essential for the AfCFTA to address the remaining issues and involve the private sector in the process. Businesses in the automotive sector must be ready to operate in a more integrated and competitive market. This involves understanding the rules and finding ways to take advantage of new opportunities. As negotiations continue, governments, businesses, and institutions need to work together to ensure that the AfCFTA fulfils its potential to transform Africa's economic landscape.

A key aspect of this transformation is the partnership between the AfCFTA and the African Association of Automotive Manufacturers (AAAM). This collaboration aims to review and develop automotive policies that align with the AfCFTA Automotive Strategy. It also seeks to foster an environment that supports local production, attracts investment, and ensures the sustainability and competitiveness of Africa's automotive industry.

As Africa embraces the future, the AfCFTA is leading with vision and innovation, carving a new path for the continent's automotive sector. This effort goes beyond adapting to change; it is about shaping a future where Africa drives its own industrial development with the AfCFTA guiding the way.

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VISION





Inventing the Future of Africa's Trade: A Vision for Trade in Services

Emily Mburu- Ndoria

Director Trade in Services, Investment, Intellectual Property Rights and Digital Trade

The year is 2063. Across the vast expanse of Africa, a network of interconnected markets hums with activity, from bustling urban hubs to rural centres. The once-fragmented economies of Africa now operate as a singular network. Roads, railways, shipping lanes, and digital highways knit the continent together in a way that was once thought impossible. This is the new Africa, powered by the seamless trade in services—the dream of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) fully realized. The continent's coordinated elimination of barriers and harmonized regulatory frameworks are fostering unprecedented growth and collaboration among African nations.

A Glimpse into 2063: The future of Trade in Services, the Africa we want

Tapiwa, a financial advisor based in Harare, no longer worries about complex cross-border procedures. He services clients in Accra, Port-Gentil, and Ouagadougou with the same ease as he would his next-door neighbour. Thanks to the AfCFTA's Protocol on Trade in Services, his professional credentials are recognized continent-wide. No longer bound by physical borders or complex regulations, Tapiwa has tapped into a growing network of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) seeking expert advice on managing their investments in an Africa that is on the rise.

Across the continent, in Dakar, Aisha, an ICT entrepreneur, collaborates effortlessly with colleagues from Cairo to Cape Town, Luanda to Naivasha. Her company specializes in cybersecurity solutions and software, and the demand for her services has exploded as African businesses become fully digitized and integrated into the global economy. Her country's innovative policies to support flow of intra-African trade and investment are built on the regulatory frameworks on services sectors established by the AfCFTA, notably in Communications and Financial services, which have harmonized ICT policies across Africa and support the further development of the sector, making it easier for businesses like hers to thrive without worrying about inconsistent regulations or unfair market practices. Additionally, through the implementation of Pan African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), Aisha is able to receive and carry out financial transactions from various consumers all over the continent swiftly, affordably, and efficiently.

Meanwhile, in the heart of Addis Ababa, transport logistics expert Mulenga oversees a fleet of autonomous

delivery drones, which crisscross Africa's skies, carrying packages and goods from one corner of the continent to another. These drones traverse the once formidable natural barriers—such as deserts, rivers, and mountains—delivering everything from medicine to luxury goods. What seemed like science fiction in the early 2020s is now part of daily life, all made possible by the liberalization of trade in transport services and the development of a robust, integrated regulatory framework in the transport sector.

A New Era of Trade in Services

This bold vision of an Africa where services flow freely is rooted in decisions being made today. The AfCFTA is laying the groundwork for a vibrant, interconnected services market through its Protocol on Trade in Services, a comprehensive policy designed to liberalize 12 broad sectors: Business Services, Communication Services, Financial Services, Transport Services, Tourism Services, Distribution Services, Educational Services, Environmental Services, Health and Social Services, Recreational, Cultural and Sporting Services, Construction and related Engineering Services and Energy related services. The Protocol aims to progressively dismantle barriers to trade in services, opening up unprecedented opportunities across the continent.

The Protocol on Trade in Services takes a hybrid approach to progressively liberalise services, first through State Parties' schedules of specific commitments, alongside the development of regulatory frameworks. The Protocol also provides for the development of mutual recognition agreements.

Through their schedules of specific commitments, State Parties have pledged to provide market

access in priority sectors, starting with business, communication, financial, transport, and tourism services. These commitments are more than just promises; they are practical steps that ensure African service providers have the freedom to operate across borders. With 22 adopted schedules and two more submitted for adoption this year, the AfCFTA is unlocking doors to a single, seamless African services market. To support and fast-track implementation of these commitments, the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) has also been extended to include services to launch the start of services trade under the AfCFTA regime.

Simultaneously, the development of regulatory frameworks across the services sectors is progressing. These AfCFTA Regulatory Frameworks aim to (i) enhance predictability for African service providers, (ii) establish common regulatory principles, (iii) reduce or eliminate arbitrary regulations that could hinder market access, and (iv) create a comprehensive structure for further sectoral development. These frameworks, which cover key regulatory principles, will complement and facilitate the implementation of market access and national treatment commitments, driving increased intra-African trade in services. The focus has moved beyond merely enforcing rules to instead creating facilitative instruments that actively promote and simplify trade in services. This shift means that instead of regulations being seen as barriers, they now serve as enablers, designed to support the seamless movement of services and service providers. These frameworks in complementing the market access and national treatment commitments already established in the schedules, will ensure that businesses and service providers are not just following rules but are being empowered by them. This transition reflects the continent's ambition to make Africa a global leader in services trade,

¹The Republic of Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Republic of Malawi, the Republic of Mauritius, the Republic of Namibia, the Republic of Seychelles, the Republic of Zambia, the Republic of Zimbabwe, the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Chad, the Republic of Congo, the Gabonese Republic, and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

²Republic of Botswana and Union of Comoros

creating an environment where collaboration, innovation, and economic interdependence flourish across sectors, paving the way for a truly integrated African services market.

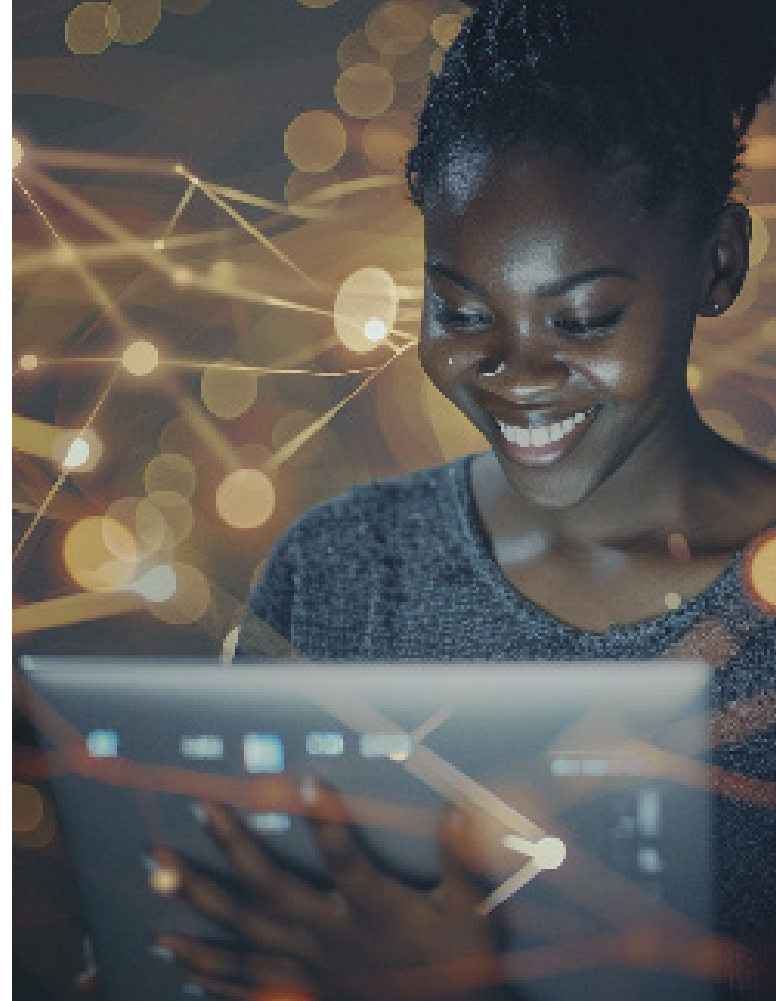
The Power of a Single Services Market

The AfCFTA's vision of a Single African Services Market is reshaping the continent's economic landscape. With harmonized regulations and open markets, African businesses are thriving in ways that were unimaginable just decades ago.

In the Business Services sector, the landscape will soon be transformed dramatically. Professional services, such as legal, accounting, and consulting firms, will operate seamlessly across borders, providing expertise to clients from Cairo to Cape Town, from Dakar to Djibouti. ICT companies, bolstered by the AfCFTA's facilitative regulatory frameworks, will deliver cutting-edge solutions in cybersecurity, software development, and data management to a rapidly digitizing continent. The real estate sector will also expand, with developers and property managers engaging in cross-border projects that reshape Africa's urban environments into dynamic, globally competitive cities.

Meanwhile, research and development services have emerged as a key driver of innovation, with African businesses and universities collaborating continent-wide to develop new technologies, solutions, and products tailored to Africa's unique needs. The stability, predictability, and transparency provided by the AfCFTA's regulatory frameworks will create an environment where business services can thrive, encouraging investment, fostering innovation, and driving the development of a highly skilled workforce across the continent.

In the Financial services sector, once dominated by a few regional players, fintech firms, banks, insurance providers, and investment managers now operate across Africa, driving unprecedented



financial inclusion. Cities across the continent will become global financial hubs, thanks to the stability and predictability to be provided by the AfCFTA's regulatory frameworks. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) on the continent taking advantage of the availability of PAPSS in many commercial banks across the continent and routinely use PAPSS tools in their myriad business transactions under the AfCFTA.

In Communication services, Africa's digital transformation will be complete, with high-speed data centers, satellite networks, and fiber-optic infrastructure linking every corner of the continent. Telecommunication giants and innovative start-ups will thrive under a fair, competitive regulatory system, providing affordable, cutting-edge services to all Africans. Alongside this, postal and courier services will undergo a remarkable evolution. Once slow and inefficient, these services will now be integrated into the digital economy, with automated sorting hubs and drone deliveries

revolutionizing logistics. They will also bridge the gap between urban centers and remote areas, ensuring reliable delivery and fostering deeper connectivity across rural regions from the plains of Samburu in Kenya to Ntcheu district in Malawi. The necessary infrastructure for digital trade will firmly be in place, enabling seamless cross-border e-commerce, digital transactions, and global connectivity, positioning Africa as a leader in the global digital economy. This seamless integration of communications services paves the way for a "continental village," where even the most remote corners of Africa will be connected to the broader economy, further fueling growth and inclusion.

The Tourism industry has also been revolutionized. Visa-free travel across much of the continent and a vast improvement in infrastructure will make Africa the world's premier travel destination particularly through mode 2 (consumption abroad), mode 4 (temporary presence of natural persons) enabling the movement of businesspersons. Tour operators will offer pan-African experiences that take visitors from the pyramids of Egypt to the beaches of Zanzibar, seamlessly integrating natural beauty, culture, and adventure. This sector alone generates billions in revenue and employs millions, empowering local communities and fueling sustainable development.

The Transport sector too, will undergo a complete transformation, becoming the backbone of Africa's interconnected markets. New transport corridors, supported by advanced multimodal hubs, seamlessly link rail, road, maritime, and air transport, enabling goods and people to move efficiently across borders. These hubs have become crucial nodes in the continent's logistics network, enhancing trade by drastically reducing transportation costs and transit times. The integration of transport systems will not only revolutionized logistics, making it easier for businesses to access new markets, but it will also foster the exchange of ideas, culture, and innovation. Cross-border mobility will become a reality for





entrepreneurs, students, and professionals alike, leading to a vibrant exchange of knowledge and creativity. Additionally, improved transport infrastructure will support the growth of Africa's tourism industry, connecting remote natural wonders and cultural landmarks with major urban centers, further driving economic and social integration across the continent. This evolution of transport will position Africa as a truly connected region, where the free flow of goods, people, and ideas propels sustainable development and solidifies the continent's status as a global trading power.

Conclusion: A Future of Boundless Possibilities

The future of Africa's trade in services is one of boundless possibilities. The AfCFTA's transformative power lies not only in the removal of trade barriers but in its ability to foster collaboration, innovation, and growth across borders. As Africa continues to invest in its people, its infrastructure, and its regulatory frameworks, the continent is poised to become a global leader in services trade.

The dream of a connected, prosperous Africa is not just a possibility—it's a reality. The story of Tapiwa, Aisha, and Mulenga is not an isolated one. It is the story of millions of Africans who have been empowered by a trade regime that puts people and services at the center of economic growth. The future of trade in services under the AfCFTA is a future where Africa leads the world in innovation, creativity, and sustainable development.

Africa's journey, driven by the AfCFTA, is a story of ambition and transformation. The free flow of services across borders will create new economic realities that will reshape industries, building wealth, and transforming lives. In this future, Africa is not only a participant in the global economy—it is a leader, a continent where the possibilities for growth, creativity, and sustainable development are truly boundless.

THE AfCFTA PROTOCOL ON INVESTMENT: Taking the wheel in inventing a future of accelerated inflow of sustainable investments in Africa

By **Patience Okala**, Expert Investment Advisor



Over the past few years, Africa has been a hub of innovative regulatory reform aimed at advancing the African Union Agenda 2063, on a shared framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development on the continent. The AfCFTA presents itself as a critical non-conformist venture to change the trajectory of the continent's economic fortunes, percolating into other critical areas of Africa's development aspirations. It provides the platform for stimulating accelerated economic growth for over 1.4 billion people, forming a critical market mass that will catalyse exponential investments. With 54 signatories, it towers as the largest free trade area, not only by the number of member states but also by population and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). With the potential to drive sustainable and inclusive investments in Africa, the AfCFTA provides the most comprehensive regulatory framework in Africa.

It is trite knowledge that investments are crucial to the development of the African Single Market. However, a worrisome conflation of global trends paints a bleak picture in a variety of areas, including investments. UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2024 indicates that Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) fell by 2% to \$1.3 trillion in 2023, occasioned in part by rising geopolitical tensions. In particular, FDI inflows into Africa declined by 3% to \$53 billion, with a fall across most of Africa. Similarly, FDI flows to developing countries have fallen by 7%, to \$866 billion, with varying levels of decline across regions. High sectoral concentration of investments, particularly in the extractive sector and in a few sets of primary commodities, are perennial features of the African investment landscape. These trends paint a dim prospect of global investment flows. Regardless of the downturn, Africa stands hopeful in the thick of the pervading hopelessness, owing largely to the AfCFTA, which holds great promise for fostering sustainable FDI into Africa.

This hope is predicated on the AfCFTA's development of concrete regulatory and policy foundations, set as building blocks for the actualisation of an economic future for the continent, which Pan-African advocates like Thomas Sankara dared to imagine.

In its recently adopted Protocol on Investment, the AfCFTA has demonstrated the requisite gumption for redirecting the economic fortunes of the continent. Adding to an already dynamic investment landscape at national levels in many states, the Protocol provides the regulatory framework to trigger accelerated sustainable economic growth under the AfCFTA. It embeds targeted reforms across four core pillars: investment

promotion, investment facilitation, investment protection, and sustainable development. The pillars cover a multi-faceted range of innovative elements for the attraction, retention, and expansion of the right quality of sustainable investments for Africa's economic development. These range from targeted investment promotion, expansion of investment facilitation dimensions of the landscape, provision of circumscribed investment protections, and the rights of states to regulate for sustainable development.

The Protocol represents the AfCFTA's bold step in providing homegrown Africa-focused solutions to evolving global concerns around the interface between investments and climate change, the environment, public health, labour, and investment-related human rights issues, as well as the empowerment of women, youth, and other underrepresented groups. In so doing, it sets the stage for an upsurge in qualitative investments responsive to the developmental aspirations of our heroes' past.

Furthermore, investors on the continent can rest assured that the new regulatory landscape for investments under the Protocol prioritises coordination, cohesion, and institutionalisation as much-needed elements for improving Africa's ease of doing business. In this regard, the Protocol presents itself as the single uniform standard for investment regulation across the continent. This ameliorates investor frustrations in dealing with the 'spaghetti bowl' of fragmented investment regimes and regulations from country to country, ultimately providing the requisite predictability that facilitates investment decisions in Africa's favour as the preeminent destination for global capital.





Beyond the rhetoric of a hyped reform-oriented regulatory landscape, the Protocol introduces self-implementing mechanisms and a clear matrix for investment coordination in member states through the establishment of one-stop shops, national focal points, and investment ombudsman mechanisms for dispute prevention, grievance management, and mitigation. Equally important is the establishment of the first-ever continental investment promotion agency to handhold the investing community in Africa through the guided implementation of the regulatory framework and ensure that the benefits thereof inure on a continent-wide basis. The agency will exceptionally complement the efforts of member states on image building, investment promotion, investment facilitation, and policy advocacy for Africa as a bloc. This is in addition to building the capacities of national IPAs and the investment stakeholders in general.

The period 2023 to 2028 will be for consolidating the Common African Market, according to the timelines for continental integration in the Abuja Treaty. With a combined GDP of \$ 6.7 trillion at purchasing power parity, making it the fourth-largest economy in the world if it were one country, it is the second-fastest-growing region in the world. Even at that, the AfDB reports that Africa's GDP growth is expected to average 3.8% and 4.2%, outpacing the projected global averages of 2.9% to 3.2%. This growth is indicative of Africa's evolution under the AfCFTA as the frontier of largely untapped latent investment opportunities beyond the traditional extractive sectors to sectors that guarantee value addition on the continent. Already, the prospects of improved investments under the AfCFTA are becoming visible. For instance, at the World Economic Forum in 2024, investors unveiled plans for investing an estimated sum of \$130 billion in Africa. These are indeed exciting times for Africa.

With a clear path towards inventing the future for the Africa we want, the AfCFTA stands at the cusp of driving the invention of Africa's investment prospects with innovative formulas and Africa-specific solutions in the Protocol on Investment. This new investment framework is poised to translate the decades-long quest for qualitative investments for sustainable development on the continent to reality, meeting both the developmental aspirations of member states as well as the yearnings of the investors for improved investment experiences that boost Africa's attractiveness, making it the preferred investment destination in emerging markets.

The AfCFTA Digital Trade Deal: The Dawn of a New Trading Era in Africa

By **Talkmore Chidede**, Digital Trade Expert



Over the years, Africa's trade has transitioned from a barter trade system, informal markets, and regional trade to continental trade. Africa is moving towards a continental trading system that is more digitised, interconnected, and anchored on the internet and digital technologies. This is signalled by the adoption of the Protocol on Digital Trade to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Trade Area, the AfCFTA Digital Trade Deal, in February 2024.

The swift conclusion and adoption of this digital trade deal demonstrate Africa's commitment and aspiration to become a digital powerhouse worldwide and use digital technologies to foster sustainable economic development.

The digital trade deal is a significant milestone in redefining Africa's economic landscape and development trajectory. It offers Africa the opportunity to leapfrog traditional development paths and create a digital trade-based economy, as well as a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for its people. Currently, Africa's digital economy is valued at \$115 billion and is projected to grow to \$180 billion by 2025, reaching \$712 billion by 2050, according to estimates by IFC and Google. This growth reflects the enormous potential that the AfCFTA

Digital Trade Deal can harness, driving digital transformation across

the continent. Africa's digital trade deal offers immense opportunities for governments, small and large businesses, and consumers across the continent. The deal creates a unified continent-wide digital market for goods and services. It harmonises digital trade laws and regulations across State Parties and will facilitate digital payments and cross-border data flows to foster a thriving digital economy across the continent.

By embracing the digital trade deal, Africa can create new quality jobs, diversify its economy, and provide micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), women and youth, rural communities, and persons with disabilities, among others, with unprecedented opportunities to reach new markets and compete on a continental and global scale.

The deal creates new and large markets that offer a wider choice of better-quality goods and services sold and bought online. It also makes cross-border trade easier through digital payments, electronic signatures, invoicing, and authentication. The implementation of the deal will significantly reduce the costs of doing business across borders, reduce transaction times, and create legal certainty for businesses and consumers.

The deal is a significant game-changer for Africa's economic development and integration. Establishing a vibrant and unified

single digital market will create millions of quality jobs, empower small businesses, women, and youth entrepreneurs, and propel Africa towards a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for its people. The digital trade deal is not only about connecting people but also about empowering everyone to participate in the digital economy.

African youth and small businesses are increasingly shopping online. This digital trade deal will further accelerate this by creating a level playing field for large and small businesses and establishing the African continent as a single digital market.

The vision of an Africa trading digitally is no longer a distant dream but a tangible reality. Imagine a small business in Zimbabwe selling its products to customers directly in Tunisia, an entrepreneur in Kenya accessing a wider pool of suppliers and buyers from Egypt, a small-scale farmer in rural Mozambique selling their produce directly to consumers in urban Tanzania through digital platforms, or a fashion designer in Ghana showcasing their creations to an audience through digital platforms, reaching customers across the continent and beyond.

Imagine an Africa that is digitally enabled and empowered, where all citizens, including MSMEs, women, youth, and other underrepresented groups, participate in the digital economy and compete with other entrepreneurs in the continental



and global market through digital platforms and technologies. Imagine an Africa that is not a consumer, but the biggest producer of digital technologies consumed by other people around the world.

Africa has a wealth of burgeoning, youthful, and tech-savvy population, talent, growing entrepreneurial spirit, untapped resources, and a rich cultural heritage. These are ingredients for economic growth, development, and innovation. It is, therefore, imperative to create an environment that nurtures the development of African small and large enterprises, digital platforms, and high-quality African digital content and protects the intellectual property rights of African content creators.

The new deal recognises the need to promote African enterprises, digital platforms, and content in the African digital economy. By implementing the digital trade deal, Africa can unleash its full potential and become a global leader in digital trade, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The success of the AfCFTA digital trade deal depends on many factors. There is an urgent need to drive investments in high-speed internet and broadband connectivity, reliable electricity

supply, digital innovation and entrepreneurship, and digital literacy programmes. This is necessary to bridge the digital divide between and within African countries and equip African citizens with the required digital and financial skills for a vibrant digital economy. Further, access to capital for African entrepreneurs through venture capital, angel investors, grants, and strengthening intellectual property rights would be a prerequisite to encourage digital innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital growth.

The AfCFTA digital trade deal is not just another trade instrument. It stands out as a unique opportunity that requires the collaborative and concerted efforts of governments, the private sector, development partners, and civil society.

These combined efforts can help Africa navigate any complexities and build a digital economy that benefits all.

The future of Africa's trade is digital. The big question is, are you ready to dare to invent?





Harnessing The Power Of Africa's Private Sector To Drive AfCFTA Success

📌 Cynthia E. Gnassingbe

Senior Advisor, Private Sector Engagement

Africa's private sector holds the key to unlocking the vast potential of intra-African trade and investment. With its resilience, innovation, and resourcefulness, the private sector is set to drive the continent's economic transformation through the AfCFTA. The opportunities presented by the AfCFTA are immense, offering the chance for businesses to expand across borders, create jobs, and build a more integrated and prosperous Africa.

One of the most significant platforms for this engagement is Biashara Afrika, an annual event

created by the AfCFTA Secretariat to facilitate unmediated dialogue between key private sector actors, policymakers, and innovators. This event exemplifies how the AfCFTA is fostering direct engagement and collaboration, enabling businesses to explore new opportunities across the continent. By bringing stakeholders together, Biashara Afrika allows for practical discussions on how to break down barriers and implement solutions that accelerate trade and investment.

Collaborative Solutions for Africa's Economic Growth

Africa faces unique economic challenges that require coordinated efforts from all sectors. The private sector, as both a catalyst and beneficiary of the AfCFTA, has the potential to be a transformative force. Through technological innovation, digital transformation, and the development of regional supply chains, the private sector is laying the groundwork for long-term growth and sustainability.

As seen through platforms like Biashara Afrika, businesses are already embracing the opportunities provided by the AfCFTA. These gatherings offer invaluable insights into how African companies can lead in value-added manufacturing, sustainable development, and the creation of regional economic hubs. The integration of these industries into global markets will not only benefit the continent but also strengthen Africa's position in the global economy.

The AfCFTA Private Sector Network: A Platform for Collective Action

To fully realise the benefits of the AfCFTA, the creation of the AfCFTA Private Sector Network is crucial.

This network will bring together businesses, associations, and institutions from across the continent, fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration under the AfCFTA framework. By promoting business connectivity, compliance, and strategic partnerships, the network will play a central role in the success of the AfCFTA.

This platform will serve as a bridge between the AfCFTA Secretariat and the private sector, enhancing dialogue and cooperation on issues that matter most to businesses. Through strategic initiatives such as policy advocacy, capacity building, and innovation support the AfCFTA Private Sector Network will drive technology transfer, build capacity, and strengthen Africa's competitive edge in the global marketplace.

A Call to Action for Africa's Private Sector

The private sector's role in Africa's economic future cannot be overstated. Business associations, chambers of commerce, youth and women-led enterprises, and academic institutions all have a role to play in shaping the continent's trade landscape. By uniting under the AfCFTA Private Sector Network, these stakeholders can redefine the future of trade in Africa.

As demonstrated by initiatives like Biashara Afrika, the success of the AfCFTA relies on collective action, and the private sector is at the heart of this movement. Together, we can create a future where African businesses thrive, trade barriers are a thing of the past, and the continent's vast resources are harnessed for the benefit of all.





Introducing The AfCFTA

Origin Certification

System

➤ Mrs. Demitta Gyang

Director of Customs Administration;

What the Traders can expect from Digitalisation and Connectivity of Origin Certification Procedures across the Continent

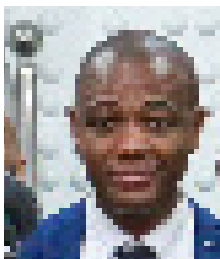
In a world where global supply chains are increasingly interconnected and digital, Africa is making strides to streamline its trade processes through the AfCFTA. At the heart of these efforts lies the implementation of the AfCFTA E-CO System, a digital Continental Origin Certification System that promises to revolutionise trade across the continent by replacing outdated manual systems with a more efficient, secure, and harmonised digital framework.

The certificate of origin is a cornerstone of preferential trade agreements, confirming the country of origin of a product and determining its eligibility for preferential treatment. Without it, a product cannot benefit from reduced or zero-duty rates. Currently, many African countries still rely on manual systems, which are prone to errors, delays, and security concerns. This inefficiency often results in missed opportunities for businesses seeking to tap into the continent's growing intra-African trade market, which is poised to increase significantly under the AfCFTA.

Recognising these challenges, the AfCFTA Secretariat has taken a proactive step in launching the AfCFTA E-CO System. This digital platform aims to streamline the issuance and verification of certificates of origin, ensuring compliance with established rules of origin. The goal is simple: to make trade smoother, more cost-effective, and secure for businesses across Africa. But why is this important? The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the vulnerabilities of traditional, manual trade systems. With restrictions on movement and mandatory social distancing, business operations ground to a halt, and global trade faced unprecedented disruptions. In response, companies and governments were forced to adopt digital solutions such as virtual meetings, digital contracts, and e-commerce. Trade, too, needed to evolve. The AfCFTA



➤ Dr. Willie Shumba
Customs Expert



➤ Mr. Pedro Gomes Estevão
Principal Programme Officer,
Trade Facilitation



E-CO System is part of Africa's effort to future-proof its trade infrastructure, ensuring that the continent is better prepared for any future disruptions.

The system was first introduced to AfCFTA member states during the 6th Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Trade Facilitation and the 7th Heads of Customs DGs in Cairo, Egypt, in November 2023. These discussions laid the groundwork for the system's development. Following this, a key session was convened in Nairobi in April 2024, where trade experts and customs officials debated various implementation models. Ultimately, they agreed on a hybrid approach, balancing centralised and decentralised elements to accommodate the diverse needs of AfCFTA member states.

This decision marks a significant turning point for the continent's trade framework. The hybrid model combines the best of both worlds: a centralised platform to ensure security and accountability, while allowing flexibility for states not yet connected to regional economic systems. The AfCFTA E-CO System will not only automate the exchange of essential trade documents but also ensure that all information is available in real-time, even before goods arrive at their destination.

The advantages of the system go beyond efficiency. By reducing the administrative burden on businesses and customs authorities, it lowers costs, boosts trust among trading partners, and significantly diminishes the potential for disputes over the authenticity of certificates. In the long run, this will contribute to fostering goodwill among member states and create a more predictable and reliable trade environment across Africa.

Moreover, the AfCFTA E-CO System aligns perfectly with the continent's broader ambitions to accelerate intra-African trade. By addressing non-tariff barriers and facilitating easier cross-border transactions, the system could prove to be a game-changer in unlocking the potential of the African market, which is expected to be worth trillions of dollars in the coming years.

As the 8th Meeting of the Heads of Customs Director General's in Accra, Ghana, endorsed the roadmap for the AfCFTA E-CO System, it signalled a decisive step in transforming Africa's trade landscape. By removing cumbersome manual processes and building a foundation for efficient, transparent, and secure cross-border trade, the system offers tangible benefits for businesses across the continent. More than just a technological upgrade, the AfCFTA E-CO System represents a long-overdue shift toward a streamlined, modern trade environment that will bolster intra-African commerce and enhance Africa's position in global markets.



A Candid Conversation with the New AfCFTA Chief of Staff: Inside the Office, in the Heart of Africa's Trade Ambition

Grace Khoza, Principal Communication Advisor

At the heart of this transformation lies the private sector – the engine of job creation, economic diversification, and intra-African trade. Africa’s private sector is estimated to account for about 80% of total production, 67% of the investment and employs 90% of the working-age population. In light of this, it is imperative to empower business leaders, to provide them with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in the borderless landscape of the AfCFTA.

Private Sector engagement, alongside governmental efforts, is vital for the successful implementation of the AfCFTA and for ensuring sustainable development under the Agreement. However, insights so far reveal the need to create trade aggregators, in the form national trading companies or continental trading companies, to leverage on the economies of large scale. These companies would manage the aggregation, consolidation, and distribution of exports and imports, offering support services such as warehousing, shipping, marketing, financing, and insurance. It is important to emphasise the private sector’s critical role in production and trade within the context of the Agreement.

By fully embracing the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA, African countries can drive a new era of industrial transformation. In doing so, we must place the AfCFTA at the heart of Africa’s manufacturing efforts. By aligning policies and initiatives with the AfCFTA's objectives, Africa can position itself as a manufacturing powerhouse for the entire world.

Q1: With your extensive experience as Angola's chief trade negotiator and a key player in the AfCFTA negotiations since 2012, and at a global level with your role at the World Trade Organization, how do these experiences shape your approach as Chief of Staff at the AfCFTA Secretariat?

A: My experience as Angola’s delegate to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the International Trade Centre (ITC) exposed me to the complexities of multilateral trade. This shaped my understanding of how global frameworks influence national trade policies and the industrial development of developing countries.

Navigating the Doha Development Agenda alongside some of the best African trade negotiators has deeply informed my vision for the continent's development, ensuring that the policies we create are tailored to the needs and goals of our people. As part of the leadership team, we must deliberately instil a work culture focused on Africa's development. It is critical to foster a strong, inclusive, and active private sector supported by the AfCFTA as we work towards Agenda 2063 and beyond.

Q2: Who has been your biggest inspiration in your professional journey, particularly in trade negotiations and international diplomacy? What core values guide your work ethic and decision-making process, and how have they influenced your career?

A: My greatest inspiration was my late grandmother, Madalena Livramento, the matriarch of our family. She was tough, yet the most loving person I've known. Incredibly solution-oriented, she always found a way to make a plan, no matter the challenge. Even though she's no longer with us, her quiet strength and ability to guide our family through difficult times continue to influence how I approach leadership today. Her lessons in perseverance, resourcefulness, and bringing out the best in others have shaped my career and instilled in me the discipline to deliver results that truly matter for our people.



Q3: What kind of culture do you want to create in the AfCFTA Secretariat, and why?

A: The AfCFTA Secretariat represents the aspirations of 55 countries aiming to overcome the post-independence fragmentation of Africa's markets. We need a culture of collaboration, discipline, and a Pan-African vision, where agility and a solution-oriented approach are central. Creating such an organisational culture requires buy-in from all employees, regardless of their position. I believe in fostering excellence, driven by shared values and collective goals. As the African proverb goes, "It takes a village," highlighting the importance of collective achievement.



Q4: Your top four:

Favourite authors and why: Pepetela, for his exploration of Angola's societal roots; Prof. Jean-Michel Mabeko Tali, for his insights into MPLA guerrilla life; Gabriel Garcia Marquez, introduced to me by my wife, for his deep dive into Latin America's rich, complex societies; and Dr. Walter Rodney, essential reading for understanding Africa's economic trajectory.

Inspirational leaders and why: Samora Machel, Amilcar Cabral, and Sekou Touré, for their relentless dedication to their people's well-being and sacrifices for Africa. The mantra "A Luta Continua e a Vitória é Certa" remains deeply ingrained in me.

Life's mantras: "God Above All"; never make promises you cannot keep; and always empathise with others.

Do you believe in a balanced lifestyle or a priority-driven lifestyle? I have always strived to maintain a balanced life. It is crucial to understand how much we depend on family, friends, and work to ensure a fulfilling and meaningful existence. Balance keeps me grounded, but I also recognise that, at times, certain priorities need to take precedence depending on the situation.

Q5: How would you describe your leadership philosophy, and how do you plan to leverage your experience to drive innovation at the AfCFTA Secretariat?

A: I am solution-oriented, maintaining a positive and disciplined outlook in every situation. I believe everyone in an organisation has a role to play and unique potential to contribute. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day, reminding us that every individual can add value. I prioritise using innovative management tools to track our strategy's execution and ensure full staff involvement. Shared responsibility in implementation is key to fostering a high-performance culture.

Q6: What is your long-term vision for the AfCFTA, and how do you anticipate it transforming intra-African trade and economic development?

A: My vision for the AfCFTA is to establish it as a reference point within the African Union system, not only in achieving its objectives but also in fostering a Pan-African mentality. We need to transform neighbouring countries into our primary trading partners and increase Africa's global trade share through enhanced export capacities. The AfCFTA is the realisation of a long-studied diagnosis. Eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers is only the first step towards economic convergence and raising incomes through increased investments.

Q7: What specific goals have you set for your tenure to ensure effective and innovative implementation of the AfCFTA?

A: My goals are aligned with the Secretary-General's vision of establishing a Common African Market. A priority is improving the Secretariat's organisational culture so that everyone speaks the same development-focused language instilled by our forefathers. Achieving the AfCFTA's objectives will require a collective commitment over the coming years.

Q8: How do you assess the current progress of AfCFTA implementation, and what notable achievements stand out?

A: The Agreement itself is the most significant achievement. Twelve years ago, few believed Africans could conclude a detailed legal framework for a Common Market. The dedication of Heads of State gave negotiators the confidence to produce the innovative instrument signed in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2018. A standout programme is the Guided Trade





improvement.

Q9: How do you intend to strengthen collaboration among State and Non-State Parties to promote a unified approach to AfCFTA implementation?

A: Ideally, we will soon eliminate the concept of “Non-State Parties.” In the interim, we must maintain inclusivity while ensuring a smooth transition period that avoids disadvantaging any countries. The AfCFTA’s inclusiveness is key to its long-term success.

Q10: How will you ensure the long-term sustainability of AfCFTA initiatives and their impact on African economies?

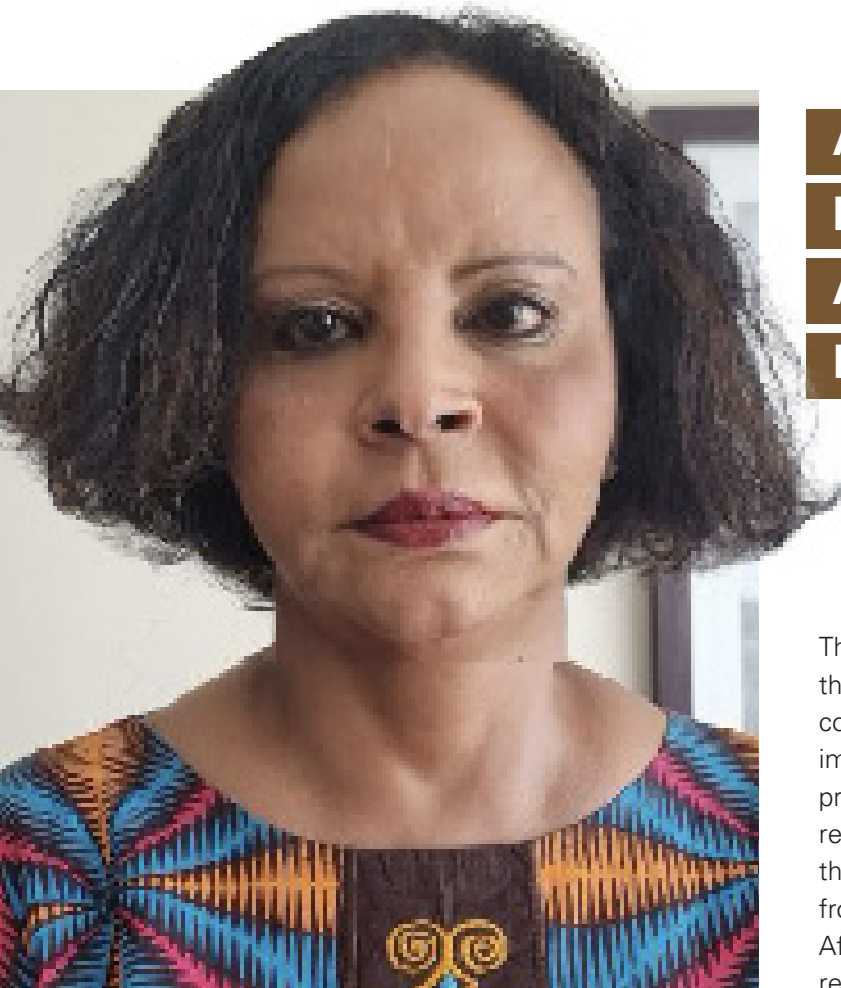
A: Long-term sustainability relies on structured actions aligned with the Agreement’s objectives. Full private sector involvement is essential, and we must engage academia to instill a mindset focused on Africa’s development. Our children should grow up understanding our trade routes and comparative advantages, securing a prosperous future.

Q11: What metrics and evaluation methods will you implement to measure the success and impact of AfCFTA initiatives?

A: Currently, we have the African Union Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Tool (AMERT), which supports monitoring and evaluation within the African Union. However, there is room to establish our own Internal Control Unit dedicated to strategic planning and goal setting, ensuring we track execution effectively.

Q12: What excites you most about the future of the AfCFTA and its potential to transform the African continent?

A: The most exciting prospect is seeing Africa’s markets grow to the point where we break the poverty cycle and create globally competitive economies. Prosperous economies generate stable societies, and that is the vision we are working towards the Africa We Want.



AfCFTA Implementation Review Mechanism (AFIRM): Africa is Ready to Be Held Accountable

Dr. Halima Noor Abdi

Senior Advisor AfCFTA Implementation and Policy Review

The momentum for implementing the first phase of the AfCFTA Agreement is growing. The agreement covers a range of measures that governments are implementing at the national level, including preferential tariffs, trade facilitation, non-tariff barrier resolution mechanisms, and transit facilitation. As these initiatives are put in place, the AfCFTA moves from a bold vision to practical execution, providing African nations and businesses the opportunity to realise the benefits of this historic trade agreement.

Preferential tariff concessions, for instance, are significant. By 1 January 2025, marking the fifth year of implementation for tariff concessions, tariffs should either be half of the normal rate (e.g., for exports to countries in customs unions such as EAC, CEMAC, ECOWAS, and SACU) or even zero (e.g., in the case of Algeria or Zimbabwe). Commitments in trade facilitation and transit, which build on those already operational at the REC level, further reinforce efforts to boost trade across the continent.

Mr Tarek Mejaouel, Counsellor Administrator and Africa Manager in charge of development and international cooperation with African countries, explains: "We at the Confederation are actively encouraging companies to take advantage of the AfCFTA and increase imports from other African countries." Mr James Chigwenda, CEO of Chemplex Corporation Ltd, adds that the company is investing in local production, including goods such as IV fluids, cattle tick medicine, and fertiliser, with exports to the Sub-Saharan region supported by the AfCFTA framework.

To maintain and accelerate this momentum, the 14th Council of Ministers adopted a Directive on the AfCFTA Implementation Review Mechanism (AFIRM) in June 2024. The AFIRM's primary objectives are to assess State Parties' compliance with AfCFTA commitments, increase transparency in the implementation of AfCFTA provisions, and promote adherence to rules and commitments under the AfCFTA Agreement. Moreover, the AFIRM will identify challenges in implementation and help find solutions to these challenges, ensuring that the agreement's potential is fully realised.

Sierra Leone is the first country to undergo an AFIRM assessment. Mr Kamara from the Ministry of Trade and Industry states: "Our National Trade Strategy aims to reposition trade for the African Continental Free Trade Area. AFIRM is exactly what we need. We hope it will galvanise actions to fully implement the AfCFTA and break down trade barriers with major trading partners, including within the ECOWAS subregion."

AFIRM also emphasises cooperation and coordination at the REC level, as RECs are the building blocks of the AfCFTA. As such, assessments for Member States of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the East African Community (EAC) are planned. AMU Secretary General H.E. Tarek Ben Salem confirms: "Our member states are ready to play a constructive role in the review process and are committed to strengthening regional trade integration under the AfCFTA."

Mr Rui Livramento, Chief of Staff of the AfCFTA Secretariat, emphasises that implementation is key to the success of the AfCFTA: "Adoption of AFIRM reaffirms the commitment of State Parties to maintain and accelerate the momentum of the AfCFTA and implement all of its provisions. Ultimately, this will increase the continent's economic interdependencies and resilience, paving the way for an African renaissance."

AFIRM serves not only as a monitoring tool but also as a platform for transparency and peer learning. By reviewing compliance, it fosters best practices across State Parties, helping to realise the goals of economic integration and resilience under the AfCFTA framework.



The Strategic Role Of National Implementation Committees In Driving AfCFTA Success

By **Yafika Chitanda** and **Jose Luis Tavares Semedo**



Yafika Chitanda
Programme Management Officer



Jose Luis Tavares Semedo
Programme Management Officer

As Africa embarks on a transformative economic journey through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the real story lies beyond the headlines of tariff reductions and market access. The future of the continent under the AfCFTA will be shaped not just by the agreement's text but by how effectively National Implementation Committees (NICs) and other national frameworks deploy strategic leadership to harness learning, innovative tools, and economic policies to drive action in adopting the AfCFTA's provisions. These under-the-radar efforts are the linchpin of whether the AfCFTA can fulfil its promise of transforming Africa into a global economic powerhouse.

Often overlooked in discussions of the AfCFTA, NICs are quietly becoming the architects of Africa's economic future. Tasked with translating the AfCFTA's broad objectives into actionable national strategies, these committees or their equivalents are where high-level diplomacy meets on-the-ground economic realities. As highlighted in a recent AfCFTA-ODI publication, in some cases, this role can also be filled by National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), which have a wealth of knowledge and experience in aligning national trade policies and regulatory frameworks.

These bodies allow the AfCFTA to build on existing structures, minimising the need for entirely new institutions while leveraging their expertise. What makes NICs and their equivalents particularly powerful is their composition, which brings together a diverse range of national stakeholders, from government officials and private sector leaders to civil society organisations and academic experts. This cross-section of voices is essential for ensuring that the implementation of the AfCFTA is comprehensive and inclusive.

However, the success of these committees or their equivalents hinges on their ability to fully utilise this diversity and perform a range of essential functions such as planning private sector engagement and monitoring implementation. If they fail to engage all relevant stakeholders effectively, they risk undermining the very goals they are meant to achieve, potentially stalling the AfCFTA's progress at the national level.

NICs and their equivalents play a critical role in aligning national economic policies with the broader goals of multilateral agreements like the AfCFTA. This alignment is crucial for ensuring that the commitments made at the continental level are effectively adopted and implemented at the national

level. By bridging the gap between policy formulation and practical application, these committees ensure that national strategies not only comply with AfCFTA provisions but also support broader economic development objectives.



Scaling the Guided Trade Initiative

The Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), launched as a pilot, has quickly gained momentum as a catalyst for fostering real and actionable trade under the AfCFTA framework. The expansion of the GTI underscores its effectiveness in moving from policy to practice, with over 30 countries now showing interest. This initiative demonstrates the AfCFTA's potential to transform Africa's economic landscape.

This success would not have been possible without the concerted efforts of National Implementation Committees (NICs) or National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), which have worked tirelessly to ensure their nations meet the requirements for participation. These committees have facilitated the alignment of national regulations, streamlined customs procedures, and coordinated with the private sector to prepare businesses for the AfCFTA market. This collaborative work highlights the critical role NICs and similar bodies play in bridging policy and practice, ensuring that the AfCFTA is not just an agreement on paper but a vehicle for tangible economic growth.

Learning and Skills Development as the Cornerstone of Implementation

NICs understand that learning and skills development are key drivers of economic success under the AfCFTA. As Africa positions itself for a future of increased intra-continental trade, the workforce must be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate new industries and technologies. NICs are instrumental in driving initiatives that align with the demands of the AfCFTA, fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs and innovators.

A clear example of this can be seen in Ghana, where the Ghana National AfCFTA Coordination Office (NCO) has been instrumental in integrating vocational training programmes and workshops that are directly aligned with AfCFTA-related industries such as manufacturing and ICT. These programmes are designed to equip the workforce with the practical skills needed to take full advantage of new market opportunities created by the AfCFTA. By doing so, Ghana's NCO is setting a precedent for how NICs can directly influence national learning and skills development strategies to meet the specific demands of AfCFTA-driven economic growth. This focus on learning and skills development ensures that the benefits of the AfCFTA reach all levels of society. By promoting inclusive opportunities, NICs help bridge the skills gap that could otherwise hinder Africa's economic integration and growth.

Creating a Resilient and Competitive Africa

The AfCFTA offers unprecedented opportunities but also brings significant challenges. Success will depend on how well National Implementation Committees (NICs), National Trade Facilitation Committees, and similar bodies integrate learning, innovative tools, economic policies, and financial support into cohesive strategies that drive sustainable development. These efforts are crucial in transforming the AfCFTA from a mere agreement into a dynamic engine of growth, propelling Africa onto the global stage.

By harnessing diverse expertise and leveraging learning and economic policies, these committees are laying the foundation for a resilient and prosperous Africa. Their often unseen but highly impactful work will determine whether the AfCFTA's full potential is realised, shaping Africa's future economic landscape.



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Relevance Of Customs In

The Operation Of Free Trade Areas (FTAs)

↑ Mrs. Demitta Gyang

Director of Customs Administration;

A key principle in global trade is the most-favoured nation (MFN) rule, which establishes the fundamental concept of non-discrimination among WTO members. However, Article XXIV of GATT 1994 (hereafter referred to as Article XXIV) provides for the formation of FTAs, whose operations can deviate from the MFN rule and allow free trade among FTA members. The AfCFTA is the largest FTA in the world in terms of participating members, having been created for the 55 member states of the African Union (AU). This article explains the relevance of customs in the operation of FTAs, with the AfCFTA being a prime example.

1. Generic Functions of Customs



↑ Dr. Willie Shumba
Customs Expert



↑ Mr. Pedro Gomes Estevão
Principal Programme Officer,
Trade Facilitation

The role of customs in any country is dictated by its own priorities and national laws. Generally, the functions of customs include revenue collection, protecting national security, controlling imports and exports by ensuring that international trade complies with national laws, protecting domestic industry against imports, implementing laws to ensure compliance with international obligations, and safeguarding the security of the supply chain involved in the movement of goods in international trade. By operating at the borders and processing imports and exports, customs have a significant impact on trade facilitation. However, it must be noted that the implementation of trade facilitation measures is not the exclusive domain of customs, although it plays a major role.

Bureaucratic customs administrations with outdated or uncoordinated laws and procedures can hamper trade and undermine the very reasons FTAs are created. An efficient customs administration must thus balance its various functions, some of which may appear to be mutually exclusive. Achieving this balance requires professional expertise within customs administrations.

2. Operations of an FTA

The nature of FTA operations can be deduced from its definition. An FTA allows the movement of qualifying goods across borders without the payment of duties. These goods must originate from the member countries of the FTA, as stipulated in the agreed rules of origin. Article XXIV:4 further highlights that an FTA is designed to facilitate trade among its members without raising barriers to non-members. Thus, the primary purpose of an FTA is to expand and facilitate trade among its members.

3. Relevance of Customs in an FTA

It is clear that customs play a critical role in the successful implementation of an FTA, particularly as a key border agency. In summary, the relevance of customs includes the following:

- a. Facilitating trade liberalisation and the movement of goods across borders to ensure the FTA achieves its objective of substantial trade among members;
- b. Implementing agreed trade facilitation initiatives such as the harmonisation of trade laws and procedures, and the automation of trade processes;
- c. Cooperating with customs agencies from other parties to ensure the fast movement of goods across borders and avoid duplication of processes;
- d. Properly applying rules of origin to ensure that goods receiving duty-free treatment meet the agreed rules of origin;
- e. Correctly identifying and classifying goods using the international Harmonised System;
- f. Providing an advisory role in trade policy issues related to international trade.

These are just a few areas in which customs is involved in an FTA. The terms used in an FTA, such as customs territories, elimination of customs duties, rules of origin, and trade facilitation, show that customs is inseparable from the operation of FTAs.

4. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the relevance of customs in FTAs. An FTA represents a liberalised trading regime for qualifying goods. Customs plays a central role in trade facilitation and the movement of goods across borders, ensuring compliance with the rules agreed upon by the parties to the FTA. Customs is therefore essential to the implementation of agreed policy measures and trade facilitation initiatives. It must also cooperate with other parties to ensure that the movement of goods is not delayed. As such, customs administrations play a major role in ensuring the success of an FTA. Given that an FTA involves various customs territories, cooperation among members is crucial. Proper implementation of an FTA also requires skilled customs authorities.



Reinventing the Future: A letter to African Youth

Prudence Sebahizi

Honourable Minister for Trade and Industry,
Republic of Rwanda

Dear Leaders, Youth of Africa,

As we stand on the brink of a new era, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) emerges as a beacon of hope and opportunity for the continent. For Africa's youth, this is not just a policy or an agreement; it is a gateway to a future filled with possibilities. The AfCFTA represents a unified market of over 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion, making it the largest free trade area in the world. But beyond the numbers, it is a call to action for the younger generation to embrace, own, and drive the transformation of Africa.

The AfCFTA is more than a trade agreement; it is a bold vision for a united and prosperous Africa. For the youth of Africa, this vision represents an unprecedented opportunity to shape the future of the continent. With over 60% of Africa's population under the age of 25, the youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow they are the innovators, entrepreneurs, and change-makers of today. The time to act is now. It is crucial for African youth to embrace this opportunity, shape the future of the AfCFTA, and drive the continent towards a new era of growth and development.

The Power of Youth

Africa is the youngest continent, with over 60% of its population under the age of 25. This demographic dividend has the potential to propel the continent into a new era of prosperity. The AfCFTA provides a unique platform for young Africans to harness their creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit. By breaking down trade barriers and fostering economic integration, the AfCFTA opens new markets and opportunities for young entrepreneurs, innovators, and professionals.

Africa's youth are its greatest asset. With their energy, creativity, and resilience, young Africans have the potential to transform the continent. The AfCFTA creates a single market for goods and services, facilitating the free movement of people and capital, and promoting industrialisation and economic diversification. By leveraging the AfCFTA, African youth can dismantle barriers, create new opportunities, and drive inclusive and sustainable growth. Now is the moment to harness this potential. Delaying action would mean missing out on immense opportunities that lie ahead.

Opportunities for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The AfCFTA is a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurship. It encourages the development of new industries and the expansion of existing ones. Young Africans can now think beyond their local markets and tap into a continental marketplace. This means more opportunities to scale businesses, attract investment, and create jobs. The digital economy, in particular, stands to benefit immensely. With the rise of technology and digital platforms, young tech entrepreneurs can leverage the AfCFTA to launch start-ups that address local challenges with global solutions.

The future of the AfCFTA lies in the hands of young innovators and entrepreneurs. The digital revolution has opened new avenues for business and trade, and African youth are at the forefront of this transformation. From tech start-ups to agribusiness, young entrepreneurs are finding innovative solutions to local challenges and scaling them to continental and global markets. The AfCFTA provides the framework to support these ventures, offering access to larger markets, reducing trade costs, and fostering a competitive business environment. Seizing these opportunities will shape the future. Every moment counts in building the continent we envision.

Skills Development and Education

One of the key aspects of the AfCFTA protocol for women and youth in trade is building capacity to pioneer intra-African trade. A central element is investing in education and skills development to ensure young people are equipped to compete in a globalised economy. Vocational training, entrepreneurship programmes, and access to digital technologies are essential to enable young Africans to start and grow their businesses.



The future of work is evolving, and there is a growing demand for skills in technology, engineering, finance, and other sectors. By acquiring these skills, young Africans can position themselves as leaders in the new economy. Governments, educational institutions, and private sector players must collaborate to provide accessible and quality education that equips the youth with the necessary tools to thrive in a competitive global market.

So, my fellow young leaders, as we are always reminded by the AfCFTA Secretary-General, H.E. Wamkele Mene, "seize this moment." The time to invest in education is now, preparing for the future cannot wait.

Fostering a Culture of Collaboration

The AfCFTA is not just about economic integration; it is about fostering a culture of collaboration and unity. African youth must embrace the spirit of Pan-Africanism and work together across borders to achieve common goals. By building networks, sharing knowledge, and collaborating on projects, young Africans can create a vibrant ecosystem that supports innovation and growth. This culture of collaboration will be instrumental in overcoming challenges and driving sustainable development across the continent.



The AfCFTA Protocols on Women and Youth in Trade and Digital Trade are not just documents on paper; they are frameworks for a more inclusive and prosperous future. They recognise the vital role that young people and women play in driving economic growth and advocate for policies that unlock the full potential of the continent's youth.

Sustainable Development and Social Impact

As today's leaders of Africa, the youth have a responsibility to ensure that the continent's growth is sustainable and inclusive. The AfCFTA provides an opportunity to promote green technologies, sustainable practices, and social impact initiatives. Young entrepreneurs can lead the way in developing solutions that address environmental challenges, promote social equity, and improve the quality of life for all Africans. By prioritising sustainability and social impact, the youth can create a legacy of responsible and inclusive growth.

Your vision, determination, and creativity will shape the future of the continent and create a better world for generations to come. The time to act is now. Every moment is an opportunity to make a difference. The journey ahead is filled with challenges, but with determination, collaboration, and a shared vision, the youth of Africa can turn these challenges into opportunities and lead the continent into a new era of growth and development.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, *"It always seems impossible until it's done."* Let this inspire the youth of Africa to dream big, take bold actions, and lead the charge. The future of the AfCFTA is in your hands. Embrace the challenges, seize the opportunities, and work together to build a prosperous and united Africa.



Youth Voices

Shaping the Future of the AfCFTA

With 25% of the AfCFTA Secretariat’s staff composed of young professionals, their role in shaping the future of African trade is undeniable. These individuals work across a wide range of roles, from economics, trade law, and policy development to programme management and communications. The Secretariat is actively building a pipeline of young talent, equipping them with the skills and expertise required to ensure the success and sustainability of the AfCFTA, which is projected to increase intra-African trade by over 50% by 2030.

By working closely with Africa’s leading trade experts and engaging with key stakeholders across the continent, these young professionals are making impactful contributions in areas like digital trade, economic integration, and reducing non-tariff barriers. The Secretariat’s focus on nurturing this talent is creating a 'brain gain,' retaining skilled individuals to shape Africa’s trade future and strengthen its global competitiveness.

These young professionals, through their diverse roles, are actively demonstrating how their contributions are driving Africa's trade future. Here are a few of their voices:



Bamzi Osiko-Dede Teyegaga

As part of the Private Sector engagement team, my role contributes to the AfCFTA's future by fostering collaboration between the Secretariat and private sector stakeholders. By bridging this gap, we ensure the private sector's active involvement in driving Africa’s trade competitiveness and laying the foundation for sustainable growth under the AfCFTA.



“ **Belinda Opoku Agyemang**

In my role within the Intellectual Property Division, I help protect the works of Africa's young and local innovators, ensuring that their creativity drives future trade under the AfCFTA. By securing intellectual property rights, we're creating a space for innovation and entrepreneurship to thrive, which is key for Africa's trade competitiveness. Our work connects intellectual property policies to AfCFTA's broader goals, from improving access to healthcare to advancing digital trade and emerging technologies, all of which will position Africa as a competitive force in the global market.



“ **Dennis Owusu-Prempeh**

As a Programme Officer in the Private Sector Engagement Unit, I'm honoured to contribute to the AfCFTA, a flagship project of the AU's Agenda 2063. My role in supporting programme planning and stakeholder engagement with private sector experts directly aids in advancing the Secretariat's objectives and Africa's trade transformation.



“ **Nelly Roxane Farida TOURE**

Africa's future in global trade relies on unlocking the potential of its young talent. As a youth voice at the AfCFTA Secretariat, I'm proud to help transform Africa's trade landscape by streamlining processes and supporting initiatives that drive economic growth. My work contributes to the AfCFTA's success, strengthening Africa's position in global trade. I am African, and I love Africa.



“ **Ruth Kutorkor Kotey**

Africa needs young leaders to ignite its economic potential. My role in the Secretariat's communications Division turns strategy into story and vision into victory. I am the pulse of Africa's trade future. I am Africa.



Godfred Prebbie Mensah

As an AHRMD intern at this pivotal stage of the Secretariat, I am contributing to building our organisational foundation through advanced workforce analytics and optimising administrative workflows. My role involves designing and visualising workforce data to provide insights that inform policies and strategic decisions. By establishing strong HR and administrative structures, we are creating a foundation and an enabling environment vital to realising AfCFTA's vision of African economic integration. I am excited to contribute to shaping the systems that will support Africa's trade future.



Charlotte Tambala Kaliati

As a young professional in the Trade in Services Division, I am contributing to laying the groundwork for African firms to expand and compete globally by promoting smoother trade in sectors such as finance, tourism, and transportation. This not only supports economic growth and job creation but also enhances Africa's trade competitiveness on the global stage.





UNDP through its Regional Bureau for Africa facilitates an inclusive Market Integration under the AfCFTA

Our experience with the private sector spans inclusive business, value chains development, market-driven climate solutions and more. Through our Regional Bureau for Africa, we continue to play a pivotal role in supporting businesses across the continent, particularly those led by women and youth to seize the AfCFTA opportunities. By providing them with technical assistance, facilitating their access to finance, investing in their productive capacities and digital capabilities, while promoting an enabling policy environment, we help unlock the potential of the one African market.

<https://www.undp.org/africa/afcfta>



Daring to Invent: The Visual Story Behind AfCFTA's Bold Future

By **Elvis Yao Blewube**

The theme “Dare to Invent the Future of the AfCFTA” for Biashara Afrika 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda, is more than just a statement. It is a rallying cry for the entire continent to rise to the challenge of unlocking Africa’s boundless potential. Inspired by the revolutionary spirit of President Thomas Sankara, former President of Burkina Faso, this theme embodies the courage, innovation, and boldness needed to transform Africa into a global economic powerhouse, lifting millions out of poverty and creating new opportunities for generations to come.

For this visual, I drew on Sankara’s powerful words: “You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness.” This idea of audacity, of breaking away from the norm to achieve something greater, resonates strongly with the AfCFTA’s mission of reshaping Africa’s trade landscape. To reflect this, I chose to focus on two figures who embody this daring: Sankara, the dreamer of a united Africa, and H.E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General of the AfCFTA, the leader driving that dream towards reality.

The key visual I created a pencil sketch composition of Sankara and H.E. Mene, draws a powerful connection between these two “mad men,” both visionaries in their own right. Sankara’s intense gaze looks to the future, filled with hope and optimism for an Africa that could break free from economic dependency. In contrast, H.E. Mene’s gaze reflects pride and determination, as he leads the AfCFTA Secretariat in executing this vision of African economic integration.



Sankara, who imagined a self-reliant Africa long before it was a tangible goal, symbolises the visionary dreamer. His revolutionary leadership in Burkina Faso and his bold ideas about African unity and emancipation laid the foundation for the kind of change the AfCFTA now seeks to implement. H.E. Mene, as the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA, represents the bridge between this dream and its realisation. His leadership is bringing Sankara's dream closer to reality, as Africa takes monumental steps towards becoming an integrated economic powerhouse.

The pencil sketch technique I used serves a dual purpose: it adds emotional weight and historical depth, while also linking the revolutionary past to the present and future of Africa's economic journey. The visual is meant to evoke a sense of continuity, showing that Africa's journey towards economic integration didn't begin today, but is rooted in the aspirations of leaders like Sankara. The AfCFTA is the platform that brings those aspirations to life, and H.E. Mene is the leader tasked with steering the ship.

Through this visual expression, I aimed to encapsulate the essence of the theme "Dare to Invent the Future of the AfCFTA." It is a call for action, not just for policymakers and leaders, but for every African. It challenges us to be bold, to innovate, and to shape our future through trade and economic cooperation. By bridging the past with the present, I wanted to highlight that the AfCFTA is not just about trade. It's about realising a vision for a united and prosperous Africa.

In conclusion, this key visual symbolises the AfCFTA's mission to unite Africa economically. It serves as a tribute to both the dreamers and the doers, those who dared to imagine a different future for Africa, and those who are daring to make that future a reality. Through Sankara's vision and H.E. Wamkele Mene's leadership, Africa's journey towards economic integration is not just a dream anymore; it's happening, and we are all part of it.





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