



CONCEPT NOTE

TOWARDS A PEOPLE'S AGENDA FOR INTRA-AFRICAN TRADE: AFRICAN CSO PLATFORM ON AfCFTA

What is the AfCFTA?

The [Africa Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#) is one of the most ambitious projects of the African Union. It is aimed at creating a single market for goods and services that is facilitated by labour migration. AfCFTA seeks to deepen intra-African trade by creating a single market of 1.2 billion people across the whole continent with a cumulative GDP of USD 3.4 trillion.

Proponents claim that free trade areas will level the economic playing field with the elimination of trade barriers. The increased competition from companies in other FTA countries is also expected to force local businesses to be more efficient. Moreover, the same people say that AfCFTA is supposed to bring in foreign direct investments (FDI) and multinational corporations (MNCs) that will partner with local companies to set up value chains to extract raw materials, manufacture or process goods, and sell them in the African market and elsewhere. Foreign investors and corporations are expected to flock to Africa and set-up factories and businesses in order to take advantage of the lower tariffs for intra-continental products.

The contention that foreign direct investments and multinational or transnational corporations (TNCs) are beneficial to underdeveloped countries is false. In practice, FDI and TNCs have resulted in the massive plunder of natural resources, the exploitation of cheap local labour, and undue intervention in a host country's economic policies, all in the name of profit.

The AfCFTA is being touted as the policy that will bring about economic development in Africa. The African people have a right to development; while the AfCFTA's goal to increase trade among African countries is laudable, the dominant framework behind AfCFTA foreshadows potential failure. The framework promotes exploitative capitalism by intensifying scramble for resources and in turn displacing Indigenous Peoples, among other sectors. There are also cases of overexploitation of natural resources where the natural environment and ecological balance are sacrificed. The people end up becoming victims of development aggression and suffer from diseases and untimely deaths.

With the removal of tariffs, governments also suffer big loss of revenues and therefore, are unable to service their loans and provide social services to their citizens. AfCFTA could end up exacerbating the economic crisis in Africa by increasing the levels of inequalities, especially that AfCFTA could further open the continent to multinationals that could negatively impact small medium enterprises (SMEs) because of the dumping of low-priced goods and crowding out of domestic industries.

So far, eight (8) African countries are meaningfully trading and participating in the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), such as Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Cameroon, Tunisia, Egypt, Mauritius, and Tanzania. The GTI is the first phase of trade within the AfCFTA platform and serves as a test run for intra-African trade. More countries are set to join the GTI in coming months. There is a need to inform and educate key stakeholders participating in the AfCFTA, particularly advocating for inclusion of communities as key actors in Intra-African trade. Communities have the capacity and creativity to provide alternatives to existing production and consumption patterns as well as globalisation and liberalisation that address their own needs without sacrificing resource use for future generations.

African countries are currently developing national strategies on implementation of AfCFTA at national level



while others are at advanced stages of developing their national strategies. These national strategies are crucial in translating continental commitments into national policies, plans, processes and laws.

Why join a CSO platform on AfCFTA?

Civil society organisations are raising concerns over exclusion, trade injustice and plunder of natural resources in regards to the adoption and implementation of the AfCFTA. Such neoliberal policy paves the way for the imposition of policies at the national level that prioritise commercial interests and profit of the local elite over protecting peoples' right to basic social services.

Civil society organisations push for a just and equal trade that benefits the peasants, workers, and other marginalised sectors and dismantles all forms of repression. CSOs lobby and advocate to ensure that rights are protected in production and consumption. This lays the groundwork for a people-powered sustainable consumption and production in the intra-continental trade. People-Powered Sustainable Consumption and Production (PP-SCP) entails the following principles: 1) peoples rights are protected and enhanced in the whole production and consumption chain, 2) self-sufficiency from the community to the national level is promoted through people's sovereignty, 3) social innovations and community actions toward SCP are encouraged and supported and 4) accountability of corporations and governments is demanded and ensured. These people-powered principles are adopted by grassroots communities and must be allowed to flourish. These four key components of PP-SCP are in line with the Peoples' Trade Agenda which similarly seeks to advance peoples' rights and sovereignty, democratic decision-making, solidarity, environmental sustainability, peaceful co-existence, and the accountability of states and corporations to the people.

In 2023, IBON Africa launched the African CSO Platform on AfCFTA, a loose network that coordinates African organisations working on trade and other related sectors or issues to promote and advance peoples' rights in the course of implementing the AfCFTA. The African CSO Platform on AfCFTA will engage the AfCFTA, national governments, regional economic blocs (e.g., EAC, COMESA, etc.), the African Union, and African Development Bank.

Civil society organisations and peoples' organisations play a crucial role in advocacy and working with communities. They can promote ways of mainstreaming the Peoples' Trade Agenda, influencing policymaking and agenda-setting arenas, especially amid the growing trend of closing or shrinking democratic spaces. Civil society must unite to combat this push back against their right to participate and be heard in various engagement arenas related to trade, climate, and development, among others.

Objectives

1. As a coordinating mechanism for members and partners of the platform, ensure a consolidated voice in engaging the AfCFTA and other relevant stakeholders;
2. Influence AfCFTA implementation and stakeholder policies and practices through forwarding CSO recommendations in relevant policy arenas at the national, sub-regional, and regional levels;
3. Follow and monitor progress of the AfCFTA implementation;
4. Raise awareness on the impacts of AfCFTA and promote people-powered sustainable consumption and production as alternative through forums, study sessions, trainings, and communication materials, among others; and
5. Reach out and build alliances among CSOs, peasants, workers, women groups, and Indigenous Peoples, among others, against exploitative free trade areas.



Identified Stakeholders

National	Sub-Regional	Regional
National Governments	Regional Economic Communities	Africa Continental Free Trade Area
National Chambers of Commerce		African Union
Manufacturers		African Development Bank
Labour Unions		
Civil Society, Media, Academia, Marginalised Groups		

Initial Activities and Outputs

Activities	Notes	Timeline
1. Ecosystem Mapping	map CSOs and other relevant actors working on AfCFTA and identify their positions; develop a directory https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XzRQvjJ4Y5FCAaJBVs0o7KP09cTrGrJ/edit	2023-2024
2. Promotional/Outreach Initiatives a. CSO Toolkit on the platform b. Online, introductory meetings with target members / partners c. Mailing list d. Micro-site / webpage, social media infographics, posters	develop a communications plan	2023-2024
3. Strategy Sessions	on structure, engagements, and campaigns	2024
4. Capacity Development Initiatives a. CSO Trainings b. Public Webinars		2024
5. Engagements		2024
6. Campaigns		2024

CSO Recommendations



A world trade system that truly pursues the [people's trade agenda](#) must promote alternative forms of international exchange that are based on solidarity and complementarity toward providing the needs of the population. A truly pro-people trade regime embodies equality, the utmost respect for each country's national sovereignty and must be guided by the principle of noninterference. The people's trade agenda requires laying down the foundations of a strong economic base by regulating the financial sector, advancing genuine agrarian reform and promoting the development of national industries instead of seeking to subsume entire economies and governments to the interest of profit accumulation by large corporations and rich nations. Building an alternative trade regime and advancing the people's trade agenda requires states to uphold:

1. **Sovereignty and people's rights** - the basis of genuine democracy resides in the people's sovereign will – they are the source of any government's legitimacy. Governments are thus entitled to sovereign rights as the legitimate representatives of their people only as long as they fulfill their duties to them, including the responsibility to protect and fulfill their basic individual and collective rights, among others.
2. **Democratic decision-making** - the current ruling system ensures an uneven political battleground that marginalizes the poor and oppressed. A truly democratic decision-making process that involves civil society, social movements, grassroots organizations, and all sectors of society at all levels of policy-making, implementation, monitoring and review must replace token and merely procedural participation.
3. **Solidarity, mutual cooperation and complementarity among states** – economic trade and investment must not be treated as an end in itself. States should thus pursue a socially just world where cooperation among states can be achieved on the basis of solidarity and in a manner that is compatible with each country's development strategies.
4. **Friendship and peaceful coexistence** – the people have the right to live harmoniously, free from the threat of foreign aggression in all its forms. States also have the right to defend their sovereignty if challenged or attacked.
5. **Environmental sustainability** – it is imperative for a peoples trading system to fully recognize the importance of protecting the environment and safeguarding the Earth's carrying capacity as key to sustainable development.
6. **Accountability to the people** – the state must understand that its ultimate accountability lies in its people and not to corporations. Governments must guarantee the rights of all people, particularly women, youth, indigenous peoples, workers, migrants, and the most marginalized to be part of free, prior and informed decision-making at all stages of the development process.

In order to advance the people's trade agenda, it is vital to challenge the current system and rebuild a global economy on the basis of solidarity, complementarity, and mutual cooperation. We must promote vibrant and alternative economies that support people's rights including workers, peasants, women, migrants, youth and indigenous peoples. The people's agenda demands a socially just international trading framework that allows economies and communities to exercise their right to self-determined development and creates a world trade system that truly responds to people's needs.

How to join the CSO Platform

Interested organizations may register here: <https://bit.ly/AfCFETACSOPlatform>. IBON Africa will contact interested organisations and add them to a mailing list for updates, announcements, etc.



Calendar of Events (to be regularly updated)

Event	Date	Notes
Africa Business Forums	Feb-March 2024	Brings together governments and private sector, CSOs, Media, AUC, etc. In 2023, it focused on making carbon markets work for Africa.
Africa Union Summit	Feb-March 2024	Brings together African governments to discuss issues affecting the region, especially on trade, climate, peace and governance.
AfDB Annual Meeting	May 2024 in Nairobi	Kenya to host the next Annual Meeting of the AfDB
Summit of the EAC Heads of State	Around April 2024	Member countries meet to discuss issues affecting East Africa, especially on peace, economics and trade.
Africa Economic Conference	Around November 2024	https://aec.afdb.org/en