The Guided Trade Initiative: Lessons from Cameroon’s Experience
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Launched on October 7, 2022, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) aims to operationally kick-start trade under the AfCFTA Agreement.

The legal basis for the AfCFTA GTI is provided for in Article 13 (3-j) of the Agreement which mandates the Council of Ministers to make regulations, issue directives and make recommendations in accordance with the provisions of the AfCFTA Agreement, and detailed in Ministerial Directive 1/2021 of the 7th Meeting of the AfCFTA Council of Ministers responsible for Trade of 10th October 2021. According to a release issued by the Secretariat, this initiative is considered as a solution-based approach intended to achieve its goal through matchmaking businesses and products for export and import between the interested State Parties in coordination with their national AfCFTA implementation committees. The State Parties currently involved in the AfCFTA GTI include Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tanzania, Tunisia and South Africa.

Three major objectives underpin the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative, namely:

1. To allow commercially meaningful trading under the AfCFTA;
2. To test the operational, institutional, legal and trade policy environment under the AfCFTA; and
3. To send an important positive message to African economic operators.

Prior to the launch of the GTI, the Cameroon Minister of Trade embarked on a consultative session with technical agencies that has a mandate on international trade issues to identify an agency that has the financial and technical capacity to drive Cameroon’s participation in the GTI. The Cameroon National Shippers’ Council was mandated on September 8, 2022 to host the GTI Ad-hoc Sub-committee in line with its mandate as the government agency responsible for trade data collection, capacity building of exporters and importers, trade facilitation, trade and transport infrastructure development as well as export promotion.
Lessons learned from the GTI

From October 2022, when the first shipment to formally launch commercially meaningful trade under the AfCFTA through the Guided Trade Initiative, until May 2024, significant lessons can be drawn on what it takes to operationalise the continental preferential framework.

Key amongst these lessons are the following:

• The need for other State Parties to accelerate domestic procedures such as gazetting and effective integration of the tariff phaseout into the automated customs management systems;

• Sectoral capacity building programs for various actors on import/export procedures and for businesses to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge to carry out import/export operations hitch free;

• Establish export development and promotion programs that respond to the needs of SMEs which are the majority of businesses in the private sector in State Parties;

• Development of Special Economic Zones anchored on incentives that can attract Foreign Direct Investments to boost industrial production capacity to meet the larger demand arising from the new market access opportunities under the AfCFTA;

• Allocate necessary budget funding to the AfCFTA GTI Ad-hoc Sub-committee to enable this important organ to deliver on the promises of the Agreement; and

• The Ad-hoc Sub-committee should focus on field work conducting surveys on export-ready businesses by collecting samples from distribution outlets, identifying value chains with high potential to tap into the AfCFTA market, carryout a critical analysis of exporters and importers data base to identify traditional flow amongst GTI State Parties, and direct them into the AfCFTA channel while working on new exports generated as a result the opportunities offered by the preferences of the AfCFTA.
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