



2021 tralac Annual Conference

COVID-19 has changed Africa and the world – how should we respond?

22 – 23 July 2021

This year's tralac Annual Conference is, for the second year, a virtual event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At this year's conference we will consider some lessons from COVID-19. In the first instance, this is a health crisis. A third wave of COVID-19 is currently spreading across Africa, faster and with more devastating effect than the previous two waves. COVID-19 is a global pandemic and Africa is most vulnerable. But COVID-19 is much more than a health crisis. It is a development crisis. Extensive economic and social disruption require structural transformation and new governance solutions. Building differently and diversifying for resilience to future shocks, including the climate crisis, is required. The immediate effects and longer-term implications of COVID-19 will inform our discussion at this year's conference.

Africa's healthcare sector

Pre-existing challenges in Africa's fragile healthcare sector, including the infrastructure deficit, lack of healthcare professionals (compounded by the medical brain drain) and limited access to medical supplies have been brutally exposed by the pandemic. We're monitoring the developments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as member states consider the [proposed waiver](#) in respect of intellectual property rights to permit the general manufacture of vaccines for the treatment of COVID-19, for a specific period. Development of new productive capacity is complex and will take time. Immediate responses, such as vaccine donations by developed countries, some of which ordered more than national requirements, are important for Africa. The role of civil society and development partners to support the healthcare sector, including with the management of the roll-out of vaccination programmes, is essential. Collective responses are required. COVID-19 transcends national borders – and impacts us all.

Development of Africa's healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors is on the agenda of the African Union (AU). Healthcare is also an important trade in services sector for Africa. We'll discuss how healthcare fits into Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and examine aspects of Africa's medical brain drain.

Trade and gender

We are launching a study '[Trade and Gender in Africa's Trade Agreements](#)'. As we prepare to negotiate the AfCFTA Protocol on Women, Youth and SMEs, this study presents a comprehensive review of all gender-related provisions in Africa's trade agreements, including the legal instruments of the AfCFTA that have been concluded. What are the implications for the AfCFTA Protocol on Women, Youth and SMEs?

In this session we will also hear from tralac alumni, and participants in tralac's [SheGovernsTrade \(SGT\)](#) Development Programme. Women remain under-represented in policy making processes and institutions, and tralac's SGT programme focuses not only on development of technical trade skills, but supports professional skills development, change management skills and mentoring.

Women entrepreneurs face many challenges as traders – some of which cannot be addressed by a free trade agreement. Complementary initiatives are required. Empowering Africa's women traders informs important streams of work at tralac. We will share details of our collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and United Parcel Service (UPS) to support Women Traders in the AfCFTA. This support includes the [eTradeHubs platform](#) which provides information for traders, training on technical trade issues and entrepreneurship, including topics such as social media marketing and digital trade.

Update on the AfCFTA

Taking stock of the AfCFTA has, in recent years, been a standing item on tralac's Annual Conference agenda. This is again the case.

For trade in goods to take place under this free trade area, negotiated tariff concessions and preferential rules of origin are required. While notable progress has been made in the rules of origin negotiations, we are not there yet. And once all offers of tariff concessions, that meet

the agreed modalities, have been made, the negotiations process will start in earnest. An ‘interim arrangement’ to permit trade under the schedules of tariff offers, made by end of June 2021, may be agreed, but negotiated outcomes are essential for the AfCFTA.

Trade in services negotiations are also still underway – with a focus on commitments in the 5 priority services sectors (financial, transport, communication, tourism and business services). Healthcare services will be included along with other services later. Work on frameworks for regulatory cooperation is also progressing. Negotiations on investment and intellectual property rights have begun. Competition policy (also on the phase 2 agenda) is important because anti-competitive practices that transcend national borders can undermine the benefits of the AfCFTA. Protocols on digital trade (e-commerce) and women, youth and SMEs are also to be negotiated. These are indispensable for the AfCFTA to support Africa’s inclusive development. And then the implementation agenda has to be tackled.

The AfCFTA is not only about boosting intra-Africa trade, but also holds dynamic benefits: larger, integrated markets; improved customs and border management; and improvements in trade governance more generally are perhaps even more important now to, for example, attract investment to support the development and diversification of Africa’s productive capacity and improving competitiveness. COVID-19 makes the successful completion of the negotiations and the effective implementation of the AfCFTA that much more important now.

Download the programme and registration links (pdf): <https://bit.ly/3yJa8BS>

Further details will be made available on the tralac website: <https://bit.ly/tralacConf2021>