

Where can the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) and Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) make the biggest contributions to boosting inter-African trade and responding to Africa's economic development challenges and opportunities? How can these agreements be designed to realise these gains?

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1. The Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA)

- The Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement seeks to integrate the economies of the Member States of three Regional Economic Communities (RECs); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) into an enlarged Free Trade Area (FTA).
- The aim is to reduce the existent obstacles to trade in the RECs that stand as a deterrent to industrial production and the movement of people, goods and services.
- The TFTA is based on three main pillars: market integration, infrastructure development and industrial development, and covers two phases: the first phase covers negotiations on tariff liberalisation, rules of origin and trade remedies which are still ongoing, and the second phase will aim at liberalization of trade in services and trade-related issues, such as intellectual property rights, competition policy and free movement of business people.
- The expectations of the TFTA include the increase in trade among the countries involved, and most importantly, gains to consumers, as they get access to cheaper and better quality products.

2. The rationale for a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA)

- The CFTA aims to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business people and investments, which would help turn African economies into a more coherent market.
- The African Union (AU) declaration (June 2015), has made it known that a CFTA is essential for the enhancement of intra-African trade and deepening market integration. Contributions such as sustainable growth, employment generation, poverty reduction, inflow of foreign direct investment, industrial development, and most importantly, better integration of the continent into a global economy are all expectations of a CFTA.

- Kenya's President, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta says, *"there cannot be a good reason why it is easier for us to trade with Asia, Europe and the Americas, rather than with fellow Africans"*, making it necessary for African States to drastically reduce trade barriers.

3. The Contributions of the TFTA and CFTA

The need for enhanced trade within Africa cannot be overemphasised. Both agreements seek to promote inter-African trade by focusing mainly on the following contributions:

- Curbing unemployment by creating jobs and harnessing skills and resources
- The improvement and development of trade-related infrastructure (TRIs)
- The enhancement of intra-trade within Africa for economic integration, making Africa a major giant in regional trade

4. Recommended design and structure for the agreements

Both agreements should be designed and structured to accommodate the following:

- Harmonisation of regulatory frameworks and policies, especially those relating to trans-boundary issues.
- Recognition of the private sector as an active partner to both agreements and the involvement of stakeholders, which include the private sector, civil society organizations and all strategic partners.
- Protection of weaker countries vis-à-vis the rich and resourced countries.

Conclusion

Africa can and should harness its ability through these agreements to strengthen the continent in global trade. If others adequately benefit from the wealth of African states, Africans certainly can. The TFTA and CFTA will see that the meeting of African leaders in the near future will be not be to discuss the problems of the continent but its future prosperity.