

A large, stylized map of the African continent is the central focus of the cover. The map is filled with various colors and patterns, including a prominent yellow spiral in the top left, green and orange dots, and a rainbow-like band across the bottom. The background is a warm orange gradient with faint, larger-scale spiral and dot patterns.

# **The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Women: A Pan African Feminist Analysis**

**Fatimah Kelleher**



**The African  
Continental Free  
Trade Area  
(AfCFTA)  
and Women:  
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With thanks,

**Fatimah Kelleher**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## What is the African Continental Free Trade Area?

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is arguably the most important trade-related issue currently taking place on the continent.<sup>1</sup> It proposes a free trade area among all 55 African Union nations and would be the largest in the world in terms of participating countries since the formation of the WTO. Initially requiring members to remove tariffs from 90% of goods, it would allow free access to commodities, goods, and services (UNECA, 2018). The AfCFTA also includes a protocol on the free movement of people.

Despite the existence of regional trading blocs such as ECOWAS, COMESA and SADC, Africa is the least economically integrated region in the world, with intra-continental trade accounting for only 15% of all African trade (UNCTAD, 2019). Trade liberalisation on the continent has so far largely focused on African countries liberalising at various levels within their regional blocs, and then negotiating from within them against non-continental actors such as the European Union and the United States. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AfCFTA was predicting an increase in intra-continental trade to by 33% once full tariff liberalisation has been implemented (Ibid).

## Why does the AfCFTA matter to Africa's women?

Feminist economic analysis has already demonstrated that all economic policies have an impact on women, and major transitions like trade liberalisation even more so. Trade policies affect women differently from men due to gender inequalities in access to and control of economic and social resources, decision-making, and gendered divisions of labour. The process of trade liberalisation leads to dislocations within national economies as markets are opened-up to free trade (framed as periods of "transition" or "adjustment") and this impacts lives at various levels.

At the *macro level*, women's participation in certain markets will narrow or grow as sectors either expand or contract through trade liberalisation. For example, countries with successful horticultural sectors where women are heavily employed may find themselves able to employ more women as they find newer and closer markets for flowers due to tariff liberalisation on the continent. However, an African nation with an infant horticultural industry may then find itself unable to compete with the importation of cheaper flowers from those countries more developed in the sector, thus stagnating expansion of the industry and even leading to job losses. With

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of this paper going to print, all African countries except for Eritrea have signed the AfCFTA. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt to the planned operationalisation of the AfCFTA in July 2020, now postponed until 2021, although whether this will also be achievable is still questionable.

women more likely to be on less secure contracts than men, they would carry the primary losses in such eventualities.

At the *micro level*, trade liberalisation also increases or reduces female capacities and control over household incomes and spending, depending on whether it creates or destroys sources of independent income for women. This impacts on gendered power dynamics at the household level, as well as having wider nutrition, health, and education implications. Women's unpaid care work – often three to four times that of men – is also impacted because of the dislocations that result from liberalisation. Meanwhile, the public provision of essential services that women in particular need, such as health and education, might also be undermined when the loss of government revenue through tariff reductions lead to cuts in government spending or deregulations that lead to privatisation.

This basic analysis for assessing the impacts of liberalisation provides an immediate frame for a pan-African feminist analysis of the AfCFTA. In its *Preamble* and the *General Objectives*, the AfCFTA notes the importance of “gender equality...for the development of international trade and economic but goes no further. As a result, beyond a promise of enhanced opportunities on the back of increased trade, there is still no comprehensive understanding of how African women will really fare as a result of the AfCFTA. There is great hope and expectation that the agreement will bring huge opportunities for women's economic empowerment in terms of increased jobs and income. But not only do women occupy more precarious spaces within the economy due to deep rooted resource inequality and the perpetuation of gender segregated work (making them more vulnerable to economic disruptions such as sector contractions), “a calculus of costs and benefits that focuses only on paid work and marketed outputs will always disadvantage those who have been assigned special responsibilities for unpaid work and production in none of non-marketed outputs critical to the wellbeing of families and communities” (Williams, 2007).

Where the AfCFTA is concerned, a series of questions therefore need to be asked, including:

- If women are indeed being targeted for training and employment in key sectors set for expansion, what provisions are being put into place to ensure that their labour will not be exploited, and that the work being created is decent and dignified?
- How will essential services that women need be funded when revenues drop as tariffs are removed, and how can this potentially lead increased privatisation that commodifies public goods and essential services, harmfully impacting women further?
- How will regional integration and the development of regional value chains impact local food systems, and how will the AfCFTA be any different from other free trade initiatives that prioritised high-value, male dominated crops and agricultural commodities, ultimately crowding out-women and pushing them off their land?

- In countries where social safety nets are not the norm, what economic packages are being designed to ensure that the continent's women are not further impoverished through loss of livelihoods that result?
- How will the AfCFTA acknowledge, include, and incentivise 'informal' cross border traders (ICBTs) where women tend to be the majority? This is of particular importance given the enclave nature of most African economies where the 'formal' economic sector is a small portion that exists alongside largely 'informal' sectors.

This paper will draw on these and other questions to analyse the provisions of the AfCFTA so far. It first explores the question of what kind of Pan-Africanism the AfCFTA is pursuing. The liberalisation timeframe and what that will mean for women will then be looked at. It will then look specifically at what the AfCFTA is trying to achieve in terms of intra-continental trade expansion and what that means for women as traders and workers, going beyond gender equality but also in terms of women's economic rights and broader economic justice. A focus will then be given to the agricultural sector. A feminist analysis of what the wider implications are access to universal public services will be made. The paper will conclude with recommendations for feminist engagement.

## THE AFCFTA: WHAT KIND OF A PAN-AFRICAN VISION?

The AfCFTA is being hailed as a key contributor to the Pan African vision of 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa' enshrined in the AU's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (ITC, 2018). The preamble of the agreement makes explicit reference to the aims of the AfCFTA as being in line with the objectives and principles of the Abuja Treaty of 1991, which laid out the blueprint for the African Economic Community, and of which intra continental self-reliance is a key foundation. Aside from the crippling dependence on commodity exports that have come to dominate African economies since the 1980s, the recent impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted the "vertical vulnerability" (TWN, 2020) that globalisation has also brought through dependence on global value chains. A regional integration that therefore builds internal self-sufficiency and self-reliance within Africa – and the strength this can offer in the face of future economic shocks – is certainly a desirable goal.

### **Intra-continental trade liberalisation in the African context**

However, the last three decades - throughout which neoliberal free-market economics have come to dominate accepted policy prescriptions – have led to what is now one of the most unequal regions in the world, despite the fastest growth in gross domestic product (GDP) since the turn of the millennium (Leke, 2016).

The AfCFTA is coming into being within a continent with the greatest level of income disparity than in any other continental free trade area – double the levels seen in both

ASEAN and CARICOM (Atlantic Council, 2020). Three nations – Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt – produce 50% of the continent's GDP (Akeyewale, 2018).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Africa accounts for 33 of the 47 countries classified as “least developed” globally (UNCDP, 2018). These disparities have already started to present questions around who will be the “winners and losers” within the AfCFTA, as countries with the most dynamic capitalist economies – e.g. those that are more diversified like Ethiopia – have an automatic advantage over resource dependent countries such as Chad, DRC and Zambia (Akeyewale, 2018).

The following question is therefore needed: is there a ‘policy of solidarity’ (Nanga, 2019) underpinning the AfCFTA that will address these inequalities? While the language of AfCFTA uses ‘cooperation’ over that of ‘competition’, it is still unclear what that will mean as countries enter what is still, in effect, a competitive process, particularly as the language of solidarity is a cornerstone principle of the Abuja Treaty which the AfCFTA aims to align with.

Trade liberalisation under the AfCFTA is still premised on the orthodox theory of comparative advantage, which posits that each country will find a competitive area of production with which to trade, balancing out trade inequalities in the longer term (but recognises that winners and losers will be created in the short term).

Therefore, even in countries that “do well” due to their better preparedness, casualties of readjustment will be inevitable. Although continental ‘regional integration funds’ are being discussed (such as those within the EU where primarily wealthier members pool resources to facilitate the catch-up of less developed states), even within such frameworks, a hierarchy and inequality between and within nations still persist.<sup>3</sup> With equality and inter-dependence a primary principle of the Abuja Treaty, how the AfCFTA will aim to address this reality needs greater clarity.

## **Intra-continental trade liberalisation in the global context**

Just as critically, as Africa becomes increasingly integrated, it will not just be intra-regional trade and interests that will be affected, but also extra-regional ones. So far external trading relationships with non-continental actors have been characterised by significant power imbalances. For example, the EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements have been critically appraised as an opportunity for the EU to access largely “unfettered markets” at the detriment of global southern developmental interests (Lebohang Pheko, 2007). Whether the AfCFTA will help to alter the imbalances of power that currently exist between Africa and external actors is an important outcome. Beyond the power between nations, this also includes understanding how power relationships between indigenous and extra continental private sector will fare.

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<sup>2</sup> At the sub-continental level, the disparities are even deeper; Nigeria alone has 75% of the GDP of ECOWAS's fifteen member states for example. Africa's six sovereign island nations only account for 1% of the continent's GDP between them.

<sup>3</sup> As evidenced by the fall-out of the Financial Crisis for EU countries such as Spain, Ireland, Portugal, and Greece. Those four countries – collectively called PIGS by a disparaging media in other European countries, were the most deeply impacted by the crisis. More broadly, increasing levels of inequality between and within EU nations have also persisted.



A key question coming from that is whether increased and easier intra-African trade will provide more opportunities for transnationals to further dominate the continent?

Internal liberalisation therefore also has wider implications. For example, many of the continent's major producers are themselves transnationals of extra African origin and the risk of local economic actors losing out to these are high given the reality of African SME's lack of competitiveness in relation to transnationals (Nanga, 2019). The role and influence that wider global supply chains will play on decisions taken within the AfCFTA remain in question, especially as it will still exist within a wider global economy driven and set by agendas heavily influenced by multinational corporations and international financial interests.

The levels of investment alone needed to implement the AfCFTA – a pre COVID-19 estimate of \$40 billion in trade financing was indicated (African Banking, 2019) – are enormous. African banks simply do not have that capacity, and as national debt levels deepen on the back of the pandemic, this reality – with its inevitable dependency on external investment and the compromises to African solidarity and self-reliance as outlined in the Abuja Treaty that might come with it – cannot be ignored. There also remains a question around how the AfCFTA will intersect with other regional and bilateral trade agreements, such as the EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements and the bilateral deals that Kenya is pursuing with the UK and the United States. Free trade agreements with countries and regions outside of Africa remain possible under the AfCFTA, as long as they do not “impede or frustrate the objectives” of the AfCFTA.<sup>4</sup> What this actually will mean in practice is not clear.

What kind of pan-Africanism being proposed by the underlying neoliberalism of the AfCFTA is therefore critical, and to quote Hakima Abbas and Amina Mama, “not just for Africa's women, but indeed for all those who are not part of the global capitalist elite” (Abbas and Mama, 2011).

## THE AFCFTA TIMEFRAME: RAPID LIBERALISATION AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WOMEN

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Currently the AfCFTA plans to remove 90% of tariff lines of goods and services over 5 years. Seven percent of what's left will be for products classed as 'sensitive' to be liberalised gradually over 10 years. The final 3% will be excluded from liberalisation. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will have 10 years to liberalise 90% of their tariff lines, and 13 years for sensitive products.

The rapidity of this timeframe cannot be underscored enough in terms of how huge the short to medium term impacts will be, and the dangers of dismissing this are deeply

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<sup>4</sup> Article 4 of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods.

problematic (Chang & Grabel, 2014). The resource reallocations will be significant, with the time and money needed to deliver on this has not been put in place in advance of the tariff removals that will disrupt national economies across the continent. The AfCFTA process is therefore presenting a major question mark around the *sequencing* of this trade agreement for a continent that is still significantly underprepared in terms of infrastructural and productive capacities (Africa Trade Network, 2016).

Inequalities between nations will be felt within nations by the least privileged in disproportionate numbers and by women in particular. The question of what goods and services will be fully liberalised, phased, or restricted by each country is the critical factor within the negotiations. Fully understanding what the gendered implications are to inform those decisions would require comprehensive national level gender-just/responsive social impact assessments (SIAs) of what the likely impacts of the AfCFTA will be. This would then allow a more informed breakdown of which goods and services need to be declared “sensitive” to be liberalised more gradually over ten years, and those that should be completely excluded from liberalisation.

Although each country will have varied specificities, there are certain considerations that can be explored in relation to what that then means for the continent’s women. In the first instance, how women’s livelihoods – often precarious and the most vulnerable to market forces - will be impacted by rapid liberalisation of certain products over the first five years needs focus. Women’s labour is still mainly found in the agricultural sector on the continent, contributing 70% of food production (Biteye, 2016). They also constitute the majority of small-scale farmers, but more broadly are integral to post-harvest production across the sector, with their livelihoods – both in the form of in-kind payment to the family food basket and direct income generation – often dependent on the success of diverse crops. With women’s presence in service sector jobs still comparatively low across many countries, agricultural considerations within the AfCFTA remains the main point of entry for outlining gender concerns regarding the liberalisation schedule.

Agricultural sector liberalisation remains a major focus of the AfCFTA, and this will present a challenge for women across the continent as competition is opened-up on many similar crops between nations (although the gendered patterns around crops also varies both between and within nations). In Nigeria for example, rice, groundnuts, and palm fruits are all key crops that women process and trade-in as finished or semi-finished products (e.g. par-boiled rice, groundnut paste, and palm oil). Competition from a stronger producing country in these products would have a detrimental impact on women’s livelihoods and could warrant being declared sensitive based on gendered considerations. Similarly, competition that affects key subsistence crops farmed by women – from plantains and tubers in Uganda to beans and other pulses in Tanzania – could also have gendered impacts given that women also supplement their incomes by selling any surplus they have either at the farm gate or local market. Liberalisation under the AfCFTA is also expected to provide a boost to manufacturing, and here again different countries will have varied interests pertaining to women’s

livelihoods in those nations where women's labour has already been intrinsically integrated into value chains such as textiles and apparel. The Ethiopian government for example has identified textiles and apparel as a priority industry. Internal liberalisation within the continent could provide justification for tariff lines to be protected either as sensitive or even excluded to build that base. In a country like Lesotho that has already experienced losses in women's livelihoods within the textile industry due to the removal of preferential treatment to exporting countries back in 2005, protecting this sector in order to avoid further devastation would also be important.

However, even if examples similar to the above were included within sensitive lists for these considerations, the timeframe accorded to sensitive products – 10 years instead of five – will still require an immense level of effort to ensure that women's livelihoods are subsequently "adjusted" so that the impacts are still not felt in that slightly expanded timeframe. Alternate livelihoods and income streams would need to be found, and these require training, investment, and substantial infrastructural capacity before the timeframe is completed.

The 3% of products that countries can fully protect by excluding these from liberalisation will be highly contested and subject to varied interests from different actors. The extent to which gender considerations would factor in negotiations – even if rigorous gender impact assessments are available – will depend on how committed countries are to protecting women from the adverse effects of the process. It is likely that there will be more traction where those interests intersect with wider national ones. For example, countries that are more heavily dependent on tax revenue from intra-African trade (such as many of our LDCs), the tariff lines that primarily contribute to this are more likely to be declared sensitive or potentially excluded. For women – who are more dependent on the public services that tax revenues contribute to – such an intersection of interests would be beneficial (if those taxes continue to provide those services).

Understanding the national level gender realities at play is a first step to fleshing-out the above, and this is something that each country will need to deliver through proper gender-just and women's rights responsive impact assessments. Critically, it will be important that engagement by women's rights organisations and feminist activists on the stages of liberalisation are vocal in their defence of tariff lines that are critical to women across multiple sectors, ensuring that their needs are also heard.

## **AFRICA'S WOMEN AS TRADERS AND WORKERS WITHIN THE AFCFTA**

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Work in Africa is categorised primarily by 'informality', with about 80% of production categorised as such by the IMF (Medina et al, 2016). Informal employment is a greater source of income for women than for men. One of the aims of the AfCFTA is to formalise work within the continent. Both the Protocol of Trade in Goods and Protocol on Trade in Services recognize the importance of building capacity in women

to *trade better*. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a strong focus of analysis on what the AfCFTA can do for women entrepreneurs and traders. At the sectoral level also, key sectors targeted for expansion such as manufacturing and services are being flagged as offering significant opportunities for women to improve economically.

## **The AfCFTA, women's entrepreneurialism, and cross-border traders**

Women are major actors within African trade, and particularly so in cross border trade and the movement of foodstuffs. Women entrepreneurs make up most self-employed individuals and own a third of all businesses throughout Africa (UNECA, 2020). UNECA analysis indicates that the AfCFTA will produce new trading and entrepreneurial opportunities in both the formal and informal economies, across sectors, but in particular in the traditional women-dominated agricultural sector, and also in manufacturing and services (UNECA, 2020).

Analysis presents several avenues for this, including through the development of new regional value chains that women entrepreneurs will be able to leverage. For example, provisions under the Protocol on Rules of Origin permit access to cheaper raw materials which potentially could allow women participating in value chains to produce goods with significant African content in terms of raw materials and value addition (UN Women, 2019).

For women cross-border traders, the constant challenges faced such as high transaction costs and border delays, corruption, insecurity, gender-based sexual harassment, and poor basic infrastructures could be addressed through simplified trade regimes (STR) for small traders that can accommodate small volume consignments. With women's enterprises concentrated at the micro and small level, a continental simplified trade regime (that uses for example the COMESA STR, which is also being used as a model by SADC) would be an avenue for supporting their more formalised inclusion within intra-continental export opportunities.

The above analysis – drawn heavily from both UNECA and UN Women in this area – demonstrates a strong focus of the AfCFTA on women's as individual economic actors engaged in competitive trade. When women business owners or own account producers achieve a competitive advantage, it is often in a niche market at the local level where competition is limited (Elson et al, 2007). Not only is the scope of change for more therefore limited, but it also undermines the principle of more structural changes needed. It is increasingly important to avoid the now insidious narrative of "women entrepreneuring their way out of poverty" that many women's economic empowerment initiatives now rest on. Most women's enterprises on the continent are primarily survivalist and horizontal, deeply precarious, and therefore carry huge burdens of risk for the women involved. While facilitating increased trade may improve incomes or even provide more formal access to value chains for some, unless it deals

with the structural underpinnings of women's economic inequality (e.g. access to *fixed* assets such as land and the redistribution of unpaid care), women remain more economically vulnerable than men, regardless of opportunities. More critically, the micro nature of this focus – which effectively atomises women as economic actors and individualizes their economic aspirations – is in direct conflict with feminist principles of collective action and more transformative gender and economic justice goals (Kelleher, 2017, 2020).

## **The AfCFTA, women, and labour rights in predicted growth sectors**

At present, the AfCFTA does not include a separate chapter or annex on gender with neither the structural analysis needed to understand how women will be impacted across all sectors and at all levels of the economy. Specifically, commitments towards ensuring that the common gendered experiences of trade liberalisation – such as the creation of low-wage, unprotected, gender-segregated jobs through export-oriented policies – are absent.

Not only will women's more precarious economic realities result in disproportionate losses as economies "readjust" to liberalisation, the orthodoxy of competitive advantage inherent within AfCFTA will lay in combining modern technology with cheap disposable labour in production. Women's lack of economic power (as business owners and own account producers) is likely to put them at a competitive *disadvantage* in the process of trade liberalisation and to propel them into becoming a source of competitive advantage as cheap labour for others (Elson et al, 2007).

Both manufacturing and services are two of the three primary sectors whose growth that the AfCFTA is expected to facilitate. In many countries, manufacturing has shrunk significantly in real terms in the past decades (e.g. Angola, Zimbabwe, Eswatini). However, while this may raise some questions as to whether the chosen focus of the AfCFTA resonates with the reality of the continent's economies, where manufacturing is concerned, it is expected that the AfCFTA will push intra-African trade in industrial products by up to 30 per cent by 2040 (UNECA, 2020). At present, women only represent 38 per cent of the manufacturing workforce in Africa (Li, 2017). Trade liberalisation has indeed been instrumental in creating more formal work within manufacturing expansions, as has been clearly witnessed in many developing countries. But this has also been characterised by substantial labour deregulations and the push of women's employment in low value added, contractually insecure and low wage work (Tijani & Kucera, 2014). The creation of such poor-quality jobs arguably serves to *formalise* women's economic precarity.

Such jobs are often found within special economic / export processing zones (EPZs) that are allowed to reside outside of legally acceptable employment regulations. The exploitation of women and other vulnerable groups therefore acts as an instrument

of growth under neoliberalism, exacerbating the impacts of patriarchy on women's human rights (Balaji et al, 2020). This reality is a definite cause of concern regarding the AfCFTA, which makes specific reference to the "Special Economic Arrangements" that state parties can make to accelerate their industrialisation goals. EPZs are not new to Africa and already exist in countries like South Africa where exemptions from land and other regulations have already negatively impacted women (GRAIN, 2020).

Within the services sector – set to play a major role across African economies in the coming decade – the challenge of gender segregated jobs is just as prevalent. The services sector already currently absorbs fewer overall, partially due to educational requirements and increasing automation. Male capture of service sector jobs – especially those requiring more skills and higher pay - following expansion is therefore also high.<sup>5</sup>

Given the gender biases that exists within both manufacturing and services, simply liberalising these sectors will not lead to automatic advantages for women. Indeed, import penetration of goods and services in many countries and resulting job losses among the lowest paid and most insecurely contracted, many of whom will be women, is the more likely immediate impact. Sub-sectors that are currently being mooted for potential women's empowerment – such as tourism and textile manufacturing – may therefore only expand the existing gendered inequality of women's concentration at the lower-skilled and poorly paid ends of the spectrum. Addressing structural oppressions that lead to women's exploitation must therefore be made a priority if any commitments to gender equality within the AfCFTA are to become more than rhetoric.

This automatically brings us to the issue of labour rights more broadly in relation to the AfCFTA. Recommendations around engaging women at higher levels of skilled employment – all of which would require much-needed substantial commitment to women's education and skills training along with appropriate policies tackling gender discrimination in employment – are important. However, without a targeted focus on ensuring labour rights at a continental level, they will not be enough. And while recent World Bank analysis positing that women's wages will rise faster relative to men's under the AfCFTA (World Bank, 2020), these important questions still remain unaddressed: a) how fair will those wages be in relation to a decent standard of living?; b) how secure will those jobs be?; and ultimately c) how gender de-segregated will those jobs be?

If African women are not to run the risk of exploitation within the AfCFTA as expanding sectors absorb their labour, the AfCFTA must protect industrial relations and international labour standards that most countries have already included in their national laws and legislative frameworks. Recognition, promotion, and protection of human and peoples'

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<sup>5</sup> The five priority sectors in trade in services within the AfCFTA are business services, communications, financial, tourism and transport.

rights in accordance with the African Charter is another core principle of the Abuja Treaty. The right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions is a part of that. At present, there are no clear positionings that address labour issues or working conditions within the AfCFTA, an absence that is particularly significant given the currently vague Special Economic Arrangements within the agreement.

Further, related to labour and women's rights is the Protocol on the Free Movement of people. At present it is unclear whether this will be restricted to high skilled labour, a reality that would both deepen class inequalities while also being biased against women more broadly on the continent. On the other hand, however, if the protocol leads to more unrestricted migration, the need for continental commitments to labour rights standards becomes even more pertinent if the solicitation of migrant workers in order to keep wages low is to be avoided within the African context<sup>6</sup>.

## SECTOR FOCUS: AGRICULTURE AND THE AFCFTA - AFRICA'S RURAL WOMEN AT A CROSSROAD

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The promotion of industrial development within agriculture is made an explicit aim within the AfCFTA. These will be facilitated primarily through investments in agro-industry and the development of regional agricultural value chains. Although agriculture as a GDP contributor across the continent is expected to contract in the coming decade (as newer sectors like services expand) it will still remain a major economic driver (Sivi-Njojo, 2017), and remains the largest source of livelihood for Africans, employing an estimated 70 per cent of the population (Ibid).

For most Africa's women, the planned transformations of this sector will arguably have the biggest impact. However, women's presence within agricultural production is also characterised by informality, poor value chain positioning, and deeply unequal levels of resource access, most notably land ownership.

Taking this into account, this section will explore some of the key feminist issues at play within intra-continental liberalisation of the sector through the AfCFTA.

### Opportunities or further disempowerment?

Agriculture is expected to witness the largest expansion of intra-African trade (ECA, 2018). The AfCFTA is expected to work in tandem with other initiatives such as the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Plan (CAADP), which aims to raise productivity and through increased investment in the sector to a minimum of 10% of

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<sup>6</sup> This is something that the European Union has witnessed in the last three decades. It effectively pitches workers from different countries against each other, leading to likely rises in xenophobia/nationalism and possible increased balkanisation – a far cry from the pan-African dream of cohesion and solidarity.

public expenditure. Overseeing the continent's dominant agricultural policy trajectory has been the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which commits the majority of the continent to the industrialisation and commercialisation of the sector based on similar Green Revolutions that have already occurred in the US, Europe and parts of Asia. This agro-industrial policy paradigm will likely dominate the frameworks from which most African countries will liberalise their agricultural sectors for intra-African trade.

Rural women's livelihoods have consistently suffered from the expansion of commercial interests within the agricultural space, more often leading to a decline in already low controls over land and decision making within farming practices as cash-cropping and mono-cropping (dominated by men) are incentivised at the policy level to the detriment of women's roles as farmers of more localised "low value" crops. "Higher value" commodified crop focus has led to land acquisitions, reforms, and resettlement schemes that have traditionally followed reduce women's right to hold land for subsistence and or the production of other crops for more localised markets (Akinlola, 2018). Even where women are sometimes already present in crops deemed worthy of expansion for export markets (such as the case of bananas in Kenya), male capture of the crop following incentivisation can easily result (Fischer and Quaim, 2012).

These impacts often lead to women's out migration from rural areas, and many of those who remain become absorbed into larger agribusiness complexes as workers, often on insecure terms that are more vulnerable to being cut loose as male, seasonal migrant workers become more viable from a commercial perspective within industrialised farming resilience strategies.

Despite these experiences, prevailing views see the AfCFTA within agriculture as being filled with opportunities for women, if countries are willing to mainstream gender into their implementation plans for the agreement. For example, whilst recognising that commercialisation within the sector has led to women being "crowded out" as the orientation of agricultural policies that accompany it primarily benefit male farmers, it is still hoped by many that a comprehensive approach under the AfCFTA that opens-up productive resources such as finance, market access opportunities, access to land, technology and other assets, could increase women's yields and facilitate their transition from subsistence agriculture to those higher value crops for export within regional value chains (UNECA, 2020).

However, the focus on increased production and subsequent absorption into export-oriented value chains needs to be more effectively interrogated at various levels, particularly given the *relative speed* at which the AfCFTA aims to be implemented. The inherently patriarchal nature of agro-industrialisation is already reliant on deep-rooted structural inequalities that currently exist within rural livelihoods, and it is unlikely that a focus on women's increased participation within value chains will systemically address



these for more economically just outcomes further down the line. For example, the expansion of finance credit schemes to women as a means of compensating for sexist land inheritance laws do not genuinely level the playing field – women simply become economically integrated whilst accruing higher levels of risk than men who will still retain the more secure assets. On what kind of a “power” base would women farmers and agro-processors linked into value chains genuinely be competing? Without a more radical redistributive approach to land, the structural inequality remains.

For example, can the significant policy provisions needed to create “gender inclusive agricultural trade promotion” (UNECA, 2020) under AfCFTA be designed or implemented fast enough to counter the immediate gendered impacts mentioned above? If not, tens of thousands of women will find their livelihoods ruptured. Identification of priority products and crops that favour women, training and skills that target women, improved access to land, inputs, and extension services along with many other measures needed to support participation in the new value chains being developed will take years to implement in order to address those ruptures.

Secondly, the question of how countries will mitigate against dumping has yet to be properly answered. Trade liberalisation has often led to faster import growth than export growth (Santos-Paulino & Thirlwall, 2004) and market flooding of certain goods by one country to another has been a consistent reality of trade liberalisation; this has disproportionate impacts on women’s livelihoods and wider food security. In Ghana for example, local poultry farming businesses run by women were decimated due to the dumping of chicken parts (EPA Monitoring, 2018); in Swaziland, women garment workers fell into poverty following the removal of preferential quotas, leading to the relocation of factories to countries where women’s labour was cheaper (Hickel, 2017). The evidence around this must not be ignored simply because the AfCFTA is an internal project. The extent to which even progressive liberalisation along with the use of sensitive and exclusion lists can meet considerations on women’ rural livelihoods across all members of the AfCFTA - while maintaining the liberalisation threshold of 90% and proposed timeframes - needs to be critically interrogated.

## **Feminist and ecological agroeconomic propositions: on the right to food and beyond**

Continuation of / increased economic vulnerability is one of the reasons why feminist demands for the AfCFTA must go beyond the indicators of increased value chain participation, crop yields, or even incomes as indicators of the AfCFTA delivering on gender equality or women’s empowerment. Intra-African integration should also be looking at alternatives to this dominant model. Ecological and climate dimensions are particularly critical to this sector, especially as increased vulnerabilities due to the deepening of the climate crisis - recurrent cyclones, El Nino droughts, and floods especially in regions such as southern Africa – cannot be treated separately to overall agricultural policy considerations. Trade that promotes agricultural methodologies

that work in tandem with these considerations are needed, and increasingly there is a call for ecologically sound policies that work with women farmers as knowledge holders of good agricultural practices that not only strengthen their ownership of agricultural processes but are also more climate resilient.

How the right to food will fare within the AfCFTA remains an area of speculation. Food security is a core goal of the AfCFTA, justified by the experience of the global food crisis in 2007-2008 which highlighted how vulnerable food importers are on international markets and how price shocks undermine food availability. But while the AfCFTA could potentially mitigate this vulnerability, if it results in a concentration of production in some African countries and a dependence on African imports in others, then it could create this vulnerability at the continental level (UNECA, 2017).

Food security is also currently one of the primary rationales behind the role of AGRA as the policy framework driving Africa's current agro-industrial paradigm. The food security agenda is heavily influenced by a focus on yields and the supply and movement of food as the key to addressing hunger. However, evidence has shown that the increases in supply cash crops that Green Revolutions generate do not eradicate hunger (Mkindi et al 2020), even if they decrease them; ultimately the structural causes of hunger remain even as countries overproduce (Bouton, 2019).<sup>7</sup> Loss of farmer autonomy through cash and monocropping decreases food sovereignty by undermining local food systems and creating a reliance on commodified food sources subject to market forces, potentially further impoverishing women, particularly during times of economic shocks.<sup>8</sup>

As an alternative to this, the inclusion of *food sovereignty* and more agroecological approaches into the continent's agricultural development policy frameworks is a major shift that increasing evidence indicates would provide more sustainable, equitable, and ecologically just approach to the continent's agricultural development (FAO, 2015). Food sovereignty is not only committed to ensuring secure access to food but is premised on the guarding of local community agency in the production and consumption of their food sources. Agroecology also offers as an alternative to detrimental impacts of commercialised agriculture on the environment and climate change. Women farmers, as custodians of the more diverse staple crops within household food baskets (those often categorised as low value), also play a critical role in the preservation of agricultural biodiversity. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century alone, 75% of crop biodiversity was lost globally (FAO, 2010), with much of that statistic being drawn from agriculturally industrialised countries. As commercial agriculture expands within Africa along with an increased dependence on corporate agricultural inputs (synthetic fertilisers, hybrid seeds, chemical pesticides), the more environmentally friendly controls that women have over their farming processes will also diminish.

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<sup>7</sup> Despite cyclical overproduction of food in a developed nation like the United States, in 2018 more than 37 million are believed to have struggled with hunger, including 11 million children: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/facts>.

<sup>8</sup> For example, food prices during the COVID-19 pandemic have risen consistently around the world, and particularly for import dependent countries.

Most notable within this is the relationship between African women's autonomy and the privatisation of seeds. Commercial seed penetration is just 2% in Africa, one of the lowest shares of global seed trade in the world (CTA, 2014). Women's indigenous knowledge around seeds and their selection, storage and planting of more diverse and hardier crops increases climate resilience (ABN, GAIA Foundation, AWDF; 2016; Shiva, 2016). Within the framework of deeply unequal resource allocations in most rural contexts, these roles also provide some of the only power and leverage they have in decision making processes at community and household levels. But trade liberalisation has historically disempowered local seed custodianship through seed capture by corporations along with a push towards regulations that authorise the planting of only selected seeds (Grieb, 2016; GRAIN, 2020).

Within the framework of rapid liberalisation and a targeting of the agricultural sector in particular, what space is there for the investments needed in holistic, farmer-led agroecological approaches that will provide greater climate justice outcomes alongside more meaningful opportunities for women in agricultural production without the loss of livelihoods associated with agro-industrial/commercialised expansion? Research on agroecology as an alternative to the Green Revolution paradigm has been growing in recent years, presenting viable alternatives and innovations for transitioning and taking to scale (FAO, 2015).<sup>9</sup> In 2015, the FAO chose Senegal as a pilot country for agroecology, and since then significant commitments to an agroecological transition (CIRAD, 2020) have been made. Women farmers and feminist ecological leaders have played an important role in that movement. As AfCFTA unfolds using the dominant agro-industrial paradigm, the opportunity for other countries to learn and replicate Senegal's vision in this area may be completely lost unless a significant shift across other member states can be initiated. From a gender justice, ecological justice, *and* economic justice standpoint, this would be a travesty.

## THE AFCFTA AND PROVISION OF UNIVERSAL PUBLIC SERVICES

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Universal public services are the foundation of free societies, and the relationship between women and access to essential services is already well-documented, with access to health, education, water, and energy all having disproportionate availability in terms of access and quality. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most African countries were already struggling to find the resources for publicly funded essential services that would ensure quality access for all. As the pandemic continues to impact economies,

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<sup>9</sup> These initiatives, where women often play a central role, focus on a variety of innovations from water and nutrient conservation and organic pest management to the development of local plant varieties. Transitioning to and scaling agroecological models through investments in relevant agricultural research and development, strengthening farmers access to technical and financial resources, fostering farmer to farmer knowledge exchange and the protection of domestic markets from dumping are all viable policy alternatives

the fiscal space for rights-based essential services to be publicly provided will shrink even further. What role the AfCFTA will play in this has therefore become even more an area of importance for the continent's women and most vulnerable communities.

## **On the Loss of tariff revenues**

This paper has already flagged the inevitable loss of public revenues as tariffs are eliminated on such a high percentage of goods within little more than a decade, and what this would mean for essential services. But there are differing positions on the potential impact levels of this “adjustment cost”, making it even important for African feminists to understand some of the nuances within the arguments being put forward.

UNECA and the AU noted in 2012 during the planning for the AfCFTA that the “high dependence on customs revenues poses a challenge in subregional FTAs, and will be more so in the CFTAs” (UNECA, AU, 2012, p.23). However, according to the World Bank, revenue loss from tariff elimination will be small across the region as a whole based on the argument that these will be offset in the longer term by the increase in tax revenues generated by economic growth from the AfCFTA (World Bank 2020). But the economic growth being modelled for the AfCFTA is far from guaranteed and neither are the tax policies needed to genuinely offset the losses.

Another argument posits that because reliance on trade revenues has been decreasing (and because due to low integration current intra-African trade revenues are already small), the impact will therefore be small even in the short term (OECD 2019).<sup>10</sup> However, the same report also acknowledges that revenues in trade vary widely across the continent, with countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, and Togo all close to 5% of GDP. But what is more important are what trade taxes currently contribute to a country's total tax revenue mix. Across 26 African countries the average was 11.8%. This is already significant, but again when disaggregated down to country level we see that at least four countries more than double this (Uganda, Togo, Mauritania, Cote d'Ivoire) while a further 12 were between 10 – 20%. All ten of the LDCs within this data set were above the average, further highlighting how existing inequalities within the continent will be exacerbated.

For the longer term there is a critical area that must be interrogated. Aside from the growth-led projections of increased revenues from liberalisation not offering any guarantees, countries will be forced to recoup taxes from the other sources including taxes on income, profits, and consumption. While progressive taxation on income and profits when underpinned by a just framework that also effectively captures the wealthiest is welcomed, in the current climate of significant tax evasion by those with the means on the continent (such as transnational corporations), an increase in these two tax measures to offset tariff losses will be felt most deeply by workers

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<sup>10</sup> The OECD's Revenue Statistics in Africa 1990 – 2017 Report found that total revenues from trade were equivalent to 2.1% of GDP in 23 of the African countries that participate in their analysis.

and indigenous SMEs with the least liquidity (Kelleher, 2020). This will impact women workers and traders/entrepreneurs even more. Tax on consumption is even more clear-cut, with women more likely to be negatively impacted by increases in VAT and other methods (Tadesse, 2017; Kelleher, 2020).

Such vulnerabilities cannot therefore be summarily dismissed either in the short or the longer term, especially as at present there is nothing in place for those deficits to be immediately addressed.

## **Essential services and the free movement of people**

The protocol on the free movement of people has only been signed by 32 countries so far, and only 4 ratifications indicating that – despite its integral nature within the Pan-African vision of a united continent – this is an area that will remain contentious within the AfCFTA going forward.<sup>11</sup> More than just an opportunity for cross-border traders, facilitation of people's movement between African countries could have significant transformations for women overall, including their ability to migrate between countries and regions in pursuit of work. The extent to which economic disruptions from liberalisation through AfCFTA – including loss of jobs and livelihoods as the agricultural sector in particular contracts – will drive intra-continental migration requires much further economic, social, and cultural analysis.

More specifically, the consequences of free movement on essential services such as health and education needs highlighting: teachers and health practitioners moving from poorer to richer countries could create a loss of skilled workforce in exiting countries on the one hand, and increased competition/decreased salaries in receiving countries) on the other. In each instance the impacts on women and girls will be significant (both as staff within those sectors, but also as patients / students).

Free-movement rules may also allow people to access government-funded health services in any member country, increasing the number of foreign patients seeking treatment in countries having stronger health-care systems, putting already underfinanced medical services under further strain.

A growth in private health care is therefore also expected, including medical tourism (Singh, 2019). But rather than alleviating pressures on public systems, private health services and medical tourism may only lead to more clinicians migrating from poorer to richer countries, but also from public to private health care provision (Ibid, 2019). This can lead to the creation and compounding of a two-tiered system of access to health, where public health systems that many Africa's women are dependent on

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<sup>11</sup> Compared to the AfCFTA Agreement itself, which has 54 signatories (only Eritrea still has yet to sign), with 28 countries having deposited their ratification instruments (22 were needed for it to enter into force, which it did in 2019). For the Protocol on Free Movement, fifteen ratifications are needed for it to enter into force.

become further neglected over time. This reality will also provide a greater privatisation impetus and entry for essential services such as health. Other public services such as energy and water are also potentially also under threat.

## **Essential services and privatisation through liberalisation**

Financing essential services through private investment in areas like health, water, energy, education is becoming common, particularly in the form of public private partnerships (Simeoni, 2019; Kelleher, 2020). In the continent's budget strapped countries this is also seen as an opportunity to move fiscal responsibility for such services off government books, also giving an appearance of lower debt levels (Engel et al, 2014).

But the privatisation of public services has consistently had detrimental impacts on women more broadly. For example, the privatisation of water has led to price hikes, deepening inequality as people living in poverty lost larger shares of their income to pay for water than the wealthy did, while a rise in negative health outcomes and malnutrition on the back of this also increased women's unpaid care burdens (Fall, 2011).

Trade liberalisation has played an instrumental role in the push towards privatisation of public goods and essential services (Kirkpatrick & Parker, 2004). Struggling public services (known as state-owned enterprises – SOEs) are often targeted for privatisation based on the basis of inefficiencies, while the removal of barriers to private sector involvement (tariffs, but also non-tariff barriers such as licensing, and the deregulation of consumer and producer prices) facilitates the process.

But the arguments around wholesale private sector – and in particular public-private partnership - efficiencies are not only empirically a mixed-bag (Estache and Phillippe, 2012), commercial corporations tend to operate strictly according to profit-making rationales (Vander Stichele, M, 2006). This not only risks deepening inequality in access as essential services become subject to market price fluctuations, but also “efficiency” becomes defined by private sector bottom-line concerns such as shareholder value (so for example, job cuts can be deemed a necessary efficiency). Trade liberalisation agreements have been criticized for reducing the policy space afforded to national initiatives in general (Kiratu & Roy, 2010). The extent to which the AfCFTA recognises the right of a country to regulate services for legitimate purposes will need observation; at present this is acknowledged within the agreement, with States Parties having their right to regulate for legitimate policy objectives in areas including health, among some others. What this will mean in practice must be rigorously monitored. For example, will government regulations designed to ensure equal access to good quality healthcare or education be seen as a trade barrier?

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEMINIST ENGAGEMENT

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The AfCFTA is promising a continental-wide regional economic integration that has been absent since the independence era. Trade liberalisation – with an immediate focus on rapid and extensive tariff liberalisation – is how the AfCFTA plans to achieve this. But that the process will produce “winners and losers” in the short-term is generally not disputed; the adjustment costs facing each country will be significant. What this means in terms of the AfCFTA’s alignment with the Abuja Treaty’s principles of equality and solidarity therefore must be highlighted. Overwhelmingly, evidence has shown us that trade liberalisation of this nature has major de-stabilizing impacts on the poorest within society, including women. How the AfCFTA therefore plans to deliver tangible social and economic benefits to the majority of Africans and ensure that gains are not concentrated in the most comparatively advantaged countries, within a few large firms, and for the wealthiest in society, is still unclear.

At the heart of questions that need asking is the sequencing of the AfCFTA, where tariff removals are being prioritised in advance of countries’ having their infrastructural capacities and competitive strategies in place. What kind of genuine political unity exists is also critical, especially given the reality of extra-continental dependencies that will still be in place to facilitate the liberalisation process, and what that then means for the principles of self-reliance within the continent (and how that relates to wider global power imbalances), especially in the early stages of implementation. And with civil society and even indigenous private sector having been left out of much of the processes thus far, the question of what kind of pan-Africanism the AfCFTA is offering under the auspices of the AU’s Agenda 2063 has yet to be convincingly answered.

For Africa’s women, the adjustment costs of liberalisation will be felt disproportionately, and deeply. While opportunities for some women being able to leverage provisions within the AfCFTA have already been presented, these are heavily dependent on country level commitments to gender equality and women’s economic rights in national implementation strategies (with all the investment and reorganisation/ reforms that entails). Meanwhile, the three key target sectors of the AfCFTA – agriculture, manufacturing, and services – will likely all have varying and immediate gendered impacts, including: disrupted rural livelihoods and power relationships at community and household levels; crowding-out from agricultural value chains that deprioritise women’s contributions; crowding-in to manufacturing and service sector jobs, possibly under the auspices of EPZs that could exploit women’s labour through low wages and abscond from labour rights provisioning; and losses in the public provision of essential services that women in particular are dependent as tariff revenues are lost and a commercialising logic and approach to those services gain even greater ascendancy.

Opportunities for women being predicated on country level commitments in AfCFTA implementation to the “gender equality” mentioned within the agreement itself

remains the most obvious challenge going forward. Without anything more from the language of the AfCFTA, countries are being left to take the decision on whether to invest in substantive and rigorous gender impact assessments at national and sub-national level, and then plan accordingly. This effectively leaves everything to chance. With the start of AfCFTA trading planned for 2021, countries would need to work fast if negative impacts were to have a hope of mitigation, *and* the opportunities being purported were to ever be realised. They would also need to be willing to commit significant amounts of investment to realise them within ever decreasing fiscal and monetary policy spaces.

The options open to countries, such as gender-responsive scheduling and exclusion of tariff lines to protect women's sectors, along with possible access to centrally pooled integration funds for the preparations needed to weather the expected adjustments (rapid upskilling of women, reforms to land inequality, developing efficient social protection nets to catch the many whose incomes will be impacted, among many other needs) – are unlikely to be delivered in time, if at all.

But beyond the immediate impacts over the next decade, what the AfCFTA will also herald in the longer term for economic justice and women's rights are the questions that African feminists need to also be asking. Understanding the role that privatisation of essential services will come to play on the continent is needed. The crippling debt crisis across much of the continent – exacerbated by the fallout of COVID-19 - will also impact the AfCFTA's implementation and will likely have consequences on privatisation decisions in this area. Similarly, how tax systems will be impacted – and the gendered consequences of that – at different stages of AfCFTA implementation must also be interrogated.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a temporary hold on the AfCFTA in 2020, and will be a significant factor in determining the economic performance of most countries on the continent, especially given how the manufacturing and industrial sectors in some countries have been significantly impacted by lockdowns. More broadly, the full and real impacts of the pandemic have yet to be felt. The assumption that the AfCFTA will be an automatic answer for the continent's challenges must be reviewed more soberly – there are still many questions that remain unanswered.

### **With that in Mind, the Following Recommendations for Engagement by African Feminists at this Stage of the Process are Offered:**

- 1. On a call to rethink the AfCFTA:** An ask that may be viewed as highly unlikely now, but one that should not be dismissed, nonetheless. Firstly however, it is important to reiterate and stress that from a Pan-African feminist perspective, African economic integration in itself is a necessary and desired goal. Rather, the call for a rethink is based on fundamental questions around the neoliberal model of rapid and aggressive liberalisation that the AfCFTA appears to be following. This



can be done by highlighting the problematic nature of the AfCFTA's sequencing, where rapid tariff liberalisation in countries that are simply not prepared is being fast-tracked, nonetheless. The overarching question for policy makers must be: What kind of a pan-African vision the AfCFTA is proposing, how does this process marry with pan-African principles of genuine solidarity that puts trade at the service of Africa's people first, and not African people at the service of the movement of commodities around the continent? More specifically, women's rights organisations and feminist activists must identify and engage with and/or call for greater national and regional level consultation processes, working in solidarity with workers, farmers, traders, producers, enterprises, wider civil society and indigenous private sector to participate in a transparent process.

- 2. On rigorous impact assessments at various levels:** More analysis is desperately needed at the national, regional, and continental level (see Annex II for more on this). Gender and economically just Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) are desperately needed at the national level. National level research and analysis that go beyond gender mainstreaming into the AfCFTA (currently mainly focused on women's productivity and participation) and looks critically at impacts on women's economic rights and the longer-term economic justice outcomes should be prioritised. Only with this knowledge can it be properly ascertained how the liberalisation timeframe – and how this correlate to sensitive and protected tariff lines – will impact women in each country. A harmonised framework for these – possibly managed by the AfCFTA Secretariat in equal collaboration with a cohort of African feminist gender specialists - would be an important step towards ensuring all countries get to benefit from a similar standard and quality of SIA. Funding for these could be drawn from any continental integration/adjustment fund established.
- 3. On agro-industrial expansion through the AfCFTA and the impacts on rural women's livelihoods:** New opportunities for women to join more sophisticated value chains through liberalisation are again predicated on intense country level commitment and sufficient preparatory capacity towards these, both of which most countries are currently lacking in. This sector requires rigorous feminist engagement at all levels to continuously highlight the likely consequences of the prevailing Green Revolution policy paradigm facilitated by liberalisation. Beyond the mitigation of impacts, feminist advocacy should also be focused on realignment of that policy towards less harmful and more sustainable agricultural development alternatives.
- 4. On the AfCFTA and diminishing local food systems that compromise food sovereignty and longer-term food security:** Important alliances towards realising the above recommendation with agroecological movements committed to food sovereignty on the continent are needed. These are intrinsically aligned with the preservation of ecological boundaries and are therefore in alignment with the wider ecological and climate justice movements. Pan-African feminist-ecological activists are already prevalent across the continent – identifying and pulling their expertise

together to agitate specifically around the agro-commercial aims of the AfCFTA is now essential.

- 5. On safeguarding labour rights within the AfCFTA:** Bringing the abuse of workers' rights to a halt in global and African supply chains is a feminist priority. Legalised exploitation of workers through EPZs – many of whom will be women targeted specifically because they are lower waged – cannot be tolerated within the AfCFTA. Inclusion of workers' rights and decent work through a pan-African harmonisation of labour legislation, as protected by the ILO (that most countries have ratified and domesticated) in AfCFTA documents and instruments are a commitment that can be advocated for.
- 6. On the protection of public goods and essential services from privatisation:** That trade liberalisation has consistently led to increasing privatisation of public goods and services is a concern that African feminist action must prioritise. Subsequent AfCFTA gender analysis must include detailed integrations of this at national levels, with clear advocacy messaging around key areas including health, water, energy, land, and education. Ultimately, essential public services and goods that are critical for gender just economies and women's rights must be protected.
- 7. On the proposed mechanisms that seek to mitigate "adjustment costs", most of which will disproportionately impact women:** Any continental integration/adjustment fund established as a means of assisting the poorer members cannot be gender blind, and neither should it pay lip service to gender equality with sound-bites and platitudes. Informed women's rights analysis – led by African feminist economic thinkers – should be at the heart of such a mechanism. Similarly, a key instrument of the AfCFTA – the African Trade Observatory (set-up to strengthen information across the continent) should have a women's rights analytical framework established as a key pillar within it.
- 8. On a comprehensive analysis of the impacts on women within official documentation of the AfCFTA:** Two mentions of "gender equality" within the AfCFTA agreement itself are meaningless without an unpacking of a) what the AfCFTA even means by this, and b) how it sees this being achieved. At present the onus on delivering gender equality through the AfCFTA is through country level implementation, and there is nothing binding about that. That leaves Africa's women's futures to the fortunes of individual countries' capacities and interest. A rigorous, gender analysis of the AfCFTA must be called for within the AfCFTA Secretariat itself, developed not just by gender consultants, but in collaboration with African feminist and women's rights organisations, particularly those with established experience in women's economic rights/justice analysis and advocacy.

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## Annex I: Glossary of Key Trade Terms

| Glossary of Key Trade Terms            |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Economic globalisation</b>          | The growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services, free international capital flows, and more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology. (IMF definition)   |
| <b>Trade liberalisation</b>            | Removal of obstacles to free trade, such as quotas, nominal and effective rates of protections and exchange controls.   |
| <b>Regional trade agreement (RTA)</b>  | An agreement to support regional trade arrangements. The coverage and depth of preferential treatment varies from one RTA to another.   |
| <b>Bilateral trade agreement (BTA)</b> | An agreement between two countries to support their trade arrangements. It gives the two countries favoured trading status between them.  |
| <b>Privatisation</b>                   | transfer of ownership of publicly owned goods and services (and state-owned enterprises) to the private sector  |
| <b>Comparative advantage</b>           | Comparative advantage is an economic term that refers to an economy's ability to produce goods and services at a lower opportunity cost than that of trade partners. A comparative advantage will give a country the ability to sell goods and services at a lower price than its competitors and realize stronger sales margins. |
| <b>Protectionism</b>                   | Advocacy of trade barriers such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers such as quotas or health and safety standards to restrict the import of goods and protect domestic producers and workers from competition  |
| <b>Free trade</b>                      | Free trade is a trade policy that does not restrict imports or exports. It can also be understood as the free market idea applied to international trade.   |
| <b>Fair trade</b>                      | Fair Trade is an alternative approach to conventional international trade. It is a trading partnership, which aims at sustainable development for excluded and disadvantaged producers. It seeks to do this by providing better trading conditions, by awareness raising and by campaigning.                                      |
| <b>Ethical trade</b>                   | Ethical trade is driven by concerns around workers in global supply chains and brand image in a destination country. It involves codes of conduct implemented due to pushes by consumers.   |

## Glossary of Key Trade Terms

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Subsidies</b>                         | Grants, low-interest loans and other forms of assistance that governments provide to industry – some permissible, some prohibited under WTO or other regulations   |
| <b>Tariff</b>                            | A tariff is Customs duty on an imported product at the time of import. Used for reasons of revenue, protection, or to ease/ rationalise use of limited foreign exchange  |
| <b>Non-tariff barriers (NTBs)</b>        | A non-tariff barrier (NTB) is a measure other than tariffs used by governments to restrict imported goods, e.g., variable import levies, import quotas, labelling and package requirements, domestic content requirements.   |
| <b>Market deregulation</b>               | The removal of government controls from an industry or sector  |
| <b>Export promotion</b>                  | A strategy for economic development that stresses expanding exports, often through policies to assist them such as export subsidies. The rationale is to exploit a country's comparative advantage, especially in the common circumstance where an over-valued currency would otherwise create bias against exports.   |
| <b>Multilateral Trading System (MTS)</b> | The set of rules, processes and frameworks governing the cross-border movement of goods, services, and capital globally – the traditional framework of agenda setting, rule-making and governance and the settling of disputes.  |
| <b>World Trade Organisation</b>          | The WTO is the operational arm of the MTS and the chief vehicle that creates and enforces the rules governing international trade  |
| <b>Bilateral investment treaty (BIT)</b> | An agreement establishing conditions for private investment by companies of one country in another, i.e. foreign direct investment (FDI)   |
| <b>Foreign direct investment (FDI)</b>   | A foreign direct investment (FDI) is an investment made by a firm or individual in one country into business interests located in another country. Generally, FDI takes place when an investor establishes foreign business operations or acquires foreign business assets in a foreign company. However, FDIs are distinguished from portfolio investments in which an investor merely purchases equities of foreign-based companies. |
| <b>Rules of origin</b>                   | Rules of origin are the criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and restrictions in several cases depend upon the source of imports. There is wide variation in the practice of governments with regard to the rules of origin.   |

## Glossary of Key Trade Terms

### **Most favoured nation**

This is a principle of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It means that WTO members cannot discriminate between their trading partners and must, with a few exceptions, offer access to their market on the same terms for all WTO members. It means that a favour offered to one country must be offered to all. However, members can go further and offer better trading terms to some countries if, for example, they agree a free trade agreement or they give developing countries better terms.

### **Simplified Trade Regime**

Simplified Trade Regime (STR) is an arrangement implemented by member states within a trading area to formalise and improve the performance of cross border trade that aims to simplify and streamline documentation requirements as well as import and export formalities towards significantly reducing transaction costs associated with trade. Such measures are especially important for small-scale cross-border traders who often do not have enough financial resources or human capacity to deal with complex administrative requirements.



## Annex II: Further Research Areas

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While various pieces have been written on what the possibilities and challenges might be of the AfCFTA, more analysis is desperately needed. The following areas are being proposed for further immediate further research. This list is by no means exhaustive, particularly given the unfolding nature of the agreement, but provides an initial outline of pressing areas.

1. **Rigorous social impact assessments and feminist research at continental, regional, and national levels:** Granular national level research and analysis in particular that goes beyond gender mainstreaming into the AfCFTA towards women's productivity and participation but also looks critically at impacts on women's economic rights and the longer-term economic justice outcomes should be prioritised. These should include sectoral analysis around the liberalising areas in both phases of the agreement. Analysis of the macroeconomic impacts is a major gap, and this should also be prioritised.
  - a. **Analysis of the ongoing Phase 1 of the AfCFTA:** These should focus on the three key sectors within the first Phase of the AfCFTA – Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Services. All three areas warrant prioritisation, although the demographic importance of the agricultural needs no further highlighting. Within manufacturing, a focus on how women's low-wage unskilled labour will factor in the AfCFTA is important, but also more nuanced research that looks at how gradual upskilling may also lead to male capture in the longer term as job quality improves – a trend that has been seen elsewhere following liberalisation. In services, an area that would benefit from feminist analysis would be the impacts of financial service liberalisation.
  - b. **Analysis of Phase II:** Phase II of the AfCFTA looks at investment, competition, and intellectual property rights. Gender research in each of these areas is already currently low to non-existent; a feminist lens is therefore urgently needed.

### More broadly:

2. **Research on the impact on public goods and essential services within the AfCFTA:** Subsequent AfCFTA gender analysis must include detailed integrations of this at national levels, with clear advocacy messaging in particular around key areas including health, water, energy, land, and education. Ultimately, essential public services and goods that are critical for gender just economies and women's rights must be protected. Research that looks at this area is currently paramount.
3. **The AfCFTA, extractives, and the degradation of natural resources:** The AfCFTA is expected to work in tandem with the African Mining Vision (AMV), which is essentially a strategy for expanding mineral and other natural resource extraction for use in manufacturing within the continent. Impact analysis on women is absent within

the AMV, although an ecofeminist critique has been conducted by the organisation WoMIN. Looking more deeply at the planned relationship between the AfCFTA and the AMV is a much-needed area of research.

4. **The AfCFTA and impacts on fiscal and monetary policy spaces:** A broad macro level feminist analysis of how the AfCFTA is likely to impact fiscal and monetary policy is needed. Monetary policy in particular remains an area that remains quite opaque from a gender and feminist perspective. Strong African feminist economic analysis in this area would provide a lot of tools for advocacy and engagement within technical spaces that are currently dominated by orthodox positioning.
5. **The AfCFTA and Africa's Debt Crisis:** Partially related to the above, the issue of the continent's deepening debt crisis – particularly in the wake of COVID-19 – is increasingly contending with and has implications for women's economic justice. What this means in relation to the AfCFTA also needs to be fully explored. Some see the AfCFTA as an opportunity for the continent to trade its way out of debt. However, as the continent moves towards AfCFTA implementation, the need for further financial resources, in the short term at least the likelihood is that debt will increase even further. This analysis should make a comprehensive review of all areas of African debt, including expanding Chinese debt on the continent.
6. **The Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons:** All migration has gendered patterns both within and across countries. Women's increased migration over the coming decade is already expected, particularly from rural areas the agricultural sector contracts. Increased urbanisation will also be accompanied by greater fluidity of movement between urban, peri-urban and rural areas as cities expand. How the Protocol on the Free Movement – in tandem with the industrialisation planned across key sectors – will intersect with women's migration is another important analytical area in need of urgent research.





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