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Potential impact of AfCFTA on youth in Africa

What comes to mind when you first hear the term, “AfCFTA”? To many of us, this is some sort of new foreign acronym, which started becoming popular over the last few years. This term is literally in our faces; on the NEWS, radio and newspapers. But do we really know what it is? How about you join me in the next few minutes to get a better detailed snapshot of the AfCFTA? Don't fret; this is not going to be some long mambo-jumbo boring 2 hour lecture! It's going to be super-duper fun, I promise!

Okay, so what is the AfCFTA & what does it do?

As stated earlier, AfCFTA is pretty much an acronym that stands for “African Continental Free Trade Area”. The full name is quite a mouth-full! I guess it's better to use the abbreviated version instead! Regardless, have you ever wondered why Africa's economy has not reached par, despite having the largest composition of natural resources in the world? It is a no-brainer that Africa is rich in natural resources, and houses about 30% of the world's mineral reserves, 8% of the world's natural gas and 12% of the world's reserves (UN Environment, 2021). However, the main underlying question is, why are we still lagging economically, in comparison to our Western counterparts? Let's quickly take a microscope and find out! Truth of the matter is, we as a continent mostly produce and export cheap raw goods to other countries while, we buy expensive manufactured goods that lead to, little or no proceeds of economic growth. If we as a continent could collectively incorporate more policy options such as taxing imported goods then, economic growth will increase in Africa. This is one of the primary reasons why the AfCTFA was born, to cater to such pending issues. The AfCTFA believes in economic integration of the African continent, into a strategic market that will be able to achieve economic and social development in future. I hope I still have your attention at this point? Hopefully you haven't started yawning yet!

Hold up! What's in it for me? Why should I care?

You do know we are the future leaders of tomorrow, right? I know! I know! We have been hearing this ‘future leader’ slogan from the time we started school, but to be completely honest, it does hold some truth to it! Please do not persecute me for this, but if we as African youth do not start caring about the future of our land, then who will? We are not getting any younger; our elders will not always be here to guide and direct us. So who will guide and direct the next generation after us? Do you now see the bigger picture? We as youth have a role to play; it is our sole responsibility as African Global Citizens, to learn as much as we can about such topics and organizations. I challenge you to educate yourself on these global issues, instead of always playing with those cool Snapchat filters or scrolling through your Instagram and Facebook feed. Educate

yourself and join similar organizations today! It starts with both you and me, be the change you want to see!

Please, help me understand more on this! What does the AfCTA consist of?

According to Jere (2019), during the early development stages of the AfCTA, five instruments were launched. This consists of the rules of origin, the online negotiating forum, the monitoring and elimination of non-tariff barriers, a digital payment system and the African Trade Observatory. Don't be alarmed too soon by all these new information! At first, I also didn't fully understand any of them, so you are not alone! We will break each one down for you!

1. Rules of origin: Let's dive right into the first instrument! In an attempt to accelerate industrialization in Africa, the rules of origin were created to serve this exact particular purpose. The decree serves as an aid to the AfCTA, to determine which goods are 'truly made' within each African country's border. Goods that meet the minimum requirement will be eligible for preferential tariffs. This simply leads to a creation of more opportunities for smaller businesses whilst, indirectly creating a thriving hub for potential new businesses in the process. Isn't this interesting?
2. Online negotiating forum: If you thought the first instrument was interesting then, this will certainly give you a run for your money because, of how fascinating it is! Obviously by now, we all know that Africa is the second largest continent after Asia. Each of the different nations in Africa, already have their own set of trade policies in place, which may differ from one country to another. The online negotiating forum was set up as an intermediary tool, and open-discussion amongst various African nations. It was laid for the full purpose of, allowing African countries to reach similar agreements in terms of Trade policies at the same time, wiping out any future Trade conflicts that may arise! Look at how organized the AfCTA is!
3. Monitoring and elimination of non-tariff barriers: The instrument's name already gives an easy-peasy hint on what it's all about! As previously mentioned in the second instrument, various African countries have different trade policies in place. The AfCTA aims to eliminate such trade barriers and monitor any predecessors' tariff. Eliminating these trade barriers is a way to, harmonize and establish one single African market, which is able to compete on a global scale. This is an eminent approach for the continent to, finally pick itself by the boot straps, and economically soar - just like a majestic butterfly coming out from its cocoon!
4. A digital payment system: Here comes our favorite instrument that comprises of something we use every day, technology! A digital payment that comprises of technological advancements is needed to, speed economic growth within the

continent. The Chinese economy is a primary example when it comes to digital payment gateway systems such as, WeChat and Alipay that continues to accelerate economic growth within China. Guess what? Africa is not behind in the creation of a digital payment system! Currently, a new digital payment system was launched together with the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) as of 2021 (Kolawole, 2021). It is only a matter of time before we witness the proceeds of this system! Africa is truly writing a modern-day history book that will accelerate economic growth within and beyond its borders!

5. The African Trade Observatory: So far we have touched on only four instruments; however we need a way to direct, monitor and enable a smooth transition of trade and economic integration, within Africa. The African Trade Observatory fulfills this duty! It ensures the AfCTA fulfills its goals and objectives, by not only overseeing the other four instruments, but also providing a stable transition of economic integration for African participants. An economic win-win situation for the continent, if you ask me!

I told you the AfCTA's instruments are not complicated as they first appeared! Now that we fully understand them in-depth, let's move on to the next segment of how, we as the youth can help.

How can we, as African youth drive the AfCTA's instruments?

The idea of us steering the AfCTA's instruments is quite scary for a lot of us! I agree that, a majority of us are still young and trying to figure out our lives but, that should not stop us from fully participating as youth engineers' for our continent.

We always keep singing futuristic songs of our African youth, taking the initiative and creative steps on making our continent better than before. We always hear stories of youth around the world, creating fascinating gizmos and gadgets. What about Africa? Where does Africa stand? I urge you all my brothers and sisters, to not be afraid to take a leap and utilise your gifts, talents and abilities to drive the AfCTA! You may be a bit lost and confused on how to go about it; here are a few ideas to get you started!

- **Join** the AfCTA and be updated on the latest news and opportunities it plans on offering in future. By following them on all social media platforms, you are able to get the latest scope and progress, at your fingertips.
- **Assist** this amazing organisation by offering your skills and talent, as a youth ambassador. We all possess different skills and abilities, which will be useful in driving the AfCTA's instruments. Having the knack to utilise your skills in something that you are passionate about is self-rewarding! So don't be afraid to reach out to the organisation and help in any way possible!

- **Spread awareness** via social media to your followers and friends! It wouldn't hurt to re-post and re-share information concerning! This will also give a chance to other young people to also know about the AfCTA.

No effort is too big, or too small to make a difference. These are merely a few suggestions. Be spontaneous and do whatever you can to drive these instruments!

What are the benefits of Africa's teaming youth?

They say a single bracelet does not jingle alone; we need each other regardless of our age! Advantages of us actively partaking with the AfCTA include:

- ✓ **Knowledge exchange** between the youth and older generation. The youth often have modern techniques, while the older generation has expertise and life-long lessons. Once both of them team up, it creates a knowledge exchange hub that will benefit the African continent in the long run.
- ✓ Since both the younger and older generation is working collectively, this stems a **creation of new ideas** that will re-shape the continent.
- ✓ The youth working in hand with the older generation will create an, **ever long lasting legacy** for the African continent. The youth will someday grow into exceptional leaders who will continue leading the AfCTA, when the older generation is no longer present.

Time to sum it all up!

We have read and we have learned about the AfCTA. Hopefully it wasn't all too draining! In the very first part of this segment, we were introduced to the AfCTA, and an extensive explanation of all its five operational instruments. The literature in this topic generally re-enforces the idea that, we as youth have a role to play as key participants. The potential impact of AfCTA on Africa's youth is beyond human comprehension. It is the very same youth, which will grow and continue the legacy of the organization. If we sought to reach a promising future together in Africa, we as the youth need to be active participants, who are willing to step out of our comfort zone, and drive the AfCTA towards success. We are in this together, we can do it!

References

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