



# WOMEN IN TRADE

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Gender and Trade Liberalization: What can we learn?

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- Adapted from [The African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\) and Women: A Pan African Feminist Analysis](#) by Fatimah Kelleher  
<https://www.femnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AfCFTA-Paper-Policy-Brief-English-2.pdf>

# The African Continental Free trade Area (AfCFTA)

2019 – the AfCFTA entry into force.



The AU assembly officially launched the start of trading under the AfCFTA Agreement on January 1, 2021



Currently 47 member states have ratified the AfCFTA Agreement.



On 7 Oct 2022 trade began under the Agreement for 8 participating countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tanzania and Tunisia.



# AfCFTA

- A Protocol on Women and the Youth will be negotiated and be adopted as part of the AfCFTA.
- Full implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement could lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty and 68 million people from moderate poverty. (World Bank)
- Regional output and productivity are expected to get a significant boost, with larger wage gains anticipated for women at 10.5 percent (compared to 9.9 percent for men)





# Why Trade?

Equitable trade systems and structures are fundamental to women's economic justice.

Trade is a crucial area for women and requires states to acknowledge that 'inclusive trade policies can contribute to advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment, which has a positive impact on economic development and reducing poverty'.



# Why Trade?

- Trade is known to enhance economic wellbeing...Yet, the gains from trade are not evenly distributed among the population.
- The AfCFTA has high potential to boost industrialization and position Africa as a regional giant in trade through the creation of regional value chains and improved agro-processing. However, for this to be a success women's meaningful inclusion and participation is essential in its implementation.





# Gender and Trade Liberalization

- Underpinning of trade liberalization - global free trade theory
- Just like any other economic policy, trade liberalization is not gender neutral – mostly historically it has been gender blind – even gender ignorant (as it ignored gendered impacts of policies)





# Women's experience of trade liberalization



- Multiple experiences of women in trade liberalization
  - Workers
  - Producers
  - Entrepreneurs
  - Users of public service
  - Consumers
  - Tax payers
  - Unpaid carers
- Gender impacts at macro, micro, and meso levels



# Gender and Trade Liberalization – macro level

- Sectors will narrow or expand – jobs will be created or lost
- Usually Special Economic Zones
- Race to the bottom – exemptions
- Jobs are not always decent
- women more likely to be in lower paying, vulnerable jobs, less secure contracts, precarious working conditions and informal economy.





# Gender and Trade Liberalization – micro level



- Increase/decrease on women's capacity and control over resources, incomes, spending, based on impact on women's income.
- Import inflows from liberalization have impacted women's incomes at micro level and economic autonomy
- Access to/ownership of land – land consolidation, loss of private land, communal land, power in traditional structures
- Displacement – unpaid care work linkages, breakdown of support structures.



# Gender and Trade Liberalization – meso level

- Women are primary users of public services especially in rural underserved areas.
- Tariff cuts undermine the ability of Governments to ensure universal access to public services
- Public service liberalization often results in privatization





# Beyond inclusion: towards gender-just trade



- Beyond simply including women in value chains – surface issues – some benefits.
- Addressing structural issues of inequality
- Pan-African feminist positioning – ‘inclusion’ does not address the broader structural issues and will perpetuate inequalities already existing rather than closing the gaps.



# Gender and the AfCFTA

- AfCFTA will have impacts at macro, meso and micro levels
- Impact on women's livelihoods and access to public services
- AfCFTA preamble notes the importance of gender equality in international trade and economic development but this needs to be further elaborated
- Women and Youth in Trade Protocol – closed process so far – minimal consultation with women
- A lot of discussion on opportunities AfCFTA will provide women traders and entrepreneurs, but limited discussion on the impacts beyond this individual level





# Recommendations



- Conduct a more thorough analysis on the implications of the AfCFTA on women in the economy
- Ensure protections for women within the domestication and implementation of the AfCFTA to ensure that the economic benefits materialize
- Explore the barriers to trade that are beyond the ‘trade theories’ but taking into perspective the broader goals of the Agenda 2063 under which the AfCFTA has been development.





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