



National University of Lesotho

WTO Chairs Programme – 2nd Annual Conference

Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho; 5-6 October 2023

Conference Theme: *The Political Economy of Regional Integration and International Trade in Africa*

CONCEPT NOTE – CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promises to be the largest free trade area in the world based on the number of prospective participating countries. According to the World Bank, the implementation of the AfCFTA will significantly facilitate international trade, lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty and boost the incomes of nearly 68 million others who currently live on less than \$5.50 a day; boost Africa's income by \$450 billion by 2035 (a gain of 7 percent); increase Africa's exports by \$560 billion, mostly in manufacturing; improve larger wage gains for women (10.5 percent) than for men (9.9 percent) and boost wages for both skilled and unskilled workers (10.3 percent for unskilled workers and 9.8 percent for skilled workers).¹ Additionally, the AfCFTA connects 1.3 billion people across 55 countries with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) valued at US\$3.4 trillion. This forecast displays that the AfCFTA is arguably the most powerful instrument that has the potential to significantly alter the politico-economic status of Africa as a whole and place her on the power map of the World.

In spite of this laudable and promising opportunity for African growth, the implementation of the AfCFTA has been slow. As of the 5th of August 2021, the Initiative for African Trade and Prosperity posited that, out of 36 states that had deposited their instruments of ratification, only Ghana, South Africa, and Egypt have met the custom requirements on infrastructure for trading. This means that only 3 of the 55 African Union nations who have signed the pact could trade effectively under the liberalized AfCFTA terms.² Since its pre-talks in the 19th Session of the African Union (AU) in 2012, its establishment in 2018, and its official trade commencement on January 1st, 2021, one would have expected to see more readiness buy-in by African countries. The AfCFTA remains a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063. This is particularly important as the current trade among African nations stands at a meagre 18%, while the continents of Europe and Asia enjoy rates of 70% and 51% respectively.³ It, therefore, becomes imperative to reassess the potential factors that may be stalling the realization of this opportunity.

Beyond the overarching goal of the AfCFTA to foster regional integration in Africa as a whole, there exist other strong regional integrations in Africa that have additional instruments which are key to improving trade and enhancing economic growth and welfare. Notably, the

¹ World Bank (2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area .

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area>

² Initiative for African Trade and Prosperity (2021). Examining the Challenges and Opportunities of the AfCFTA.

<https://theiatp.org/2021/08/05/examining-the-challenges-and-opportunities-of-the-afcfta/>

³ Dowokpo (2023). AfCFTA and Africa's economic transformation. <https://thebftonline.com/2023/05/23/afcfta-and-africas-economic-transformation/>



Southern African Development Community (SADC), as is the case with the other 7 recognized regional integrations has faced stringent challenges such as macroeconomic convergence, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other socio-political constraints. A glaring setback in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been the claws of the French on the Francophone member countries from achieving this feat. Since its conception in 2003, leaders of the fifteen ECOWAS states have postponed the launch of a single currency at least four times: In 2005, 2010, 2014, and 2020⁴.

The 2nd annual conference of the WTO research chair of the National University of Lesotho is interested in papers that critically analyze the political economy of regional integration as well as other key aspects of international trade which include, but are not limited to:

1. Regional Economic Communities and the AfCFTA
2. Trade and Gender
3. Agricultural Development and the Food Security Value Chain
4. ICT, Innovation, and International Trade in Africa
5. The Role of Foreign Influence on Trade and Development in Africa
6. Taxation and Custom Duties vs Trade Liberalisation
7. The Contribution of Trade to Sustainable and Inclusive Socio-Economic Development
8. AfCFTA and the WTO Regime
9. Climate change and its implications on International Trade

The Conference will take place in a hybrid mode (virtual and physical) in Maseru on the 5th and 6th of October 2023. It is intended to provide a forum for robust and interdisciplinary engagement, incorporating perspectives from the Social sciences, Law, Humanities, and related disciplines. The conference papers shall be selected strictly based on academic quality and relevance to the conference theme via a blind peer review process. The papers that will finally be approved for the conference will be part of the conference proceeding. The conference is planned to run according to the following timelines:

Deadline for receiving abstracts	-	10 th July 2023
Notification of accepted abstracts	-	15 th July 2023
The cut-off date for receipt of full papers	-	30 th September 2023
Conference (hybrid)	-	5 - 6 October 2023
Deadline for revised conference papers	-	30 th October 2023
Preparation for conference proceedings	-	1 st – 30 th November 2023

An abstract of 300 to 500 words with author(s) name(s), institutional affiliation, and email address should be sent to: dn.yuni@nul.ls & wtochairs@wto.org on or before 10th July 2023. The email subject should be 'Submission of abstract for the 2nd NUL-WTO chair conference'. Abstracts should detail the motivation, research question, data used if any, methodology/approach, and expected/realized findings. The full papers should range between 5 000 and 8,000 words and be written following the APA referencing guide/style. There is limited sponsorship for travel and accommodation for contributors within the SADC region; interested contributors should submit a motivation when submitting their abstracts. Applications for travel sponsorships will be reviewed and successful contributors duly informed. All contributors whose papers will finally be accepted will be eligible for some stipend.

⁴ West Africa's Eco currency remains an illusion. <https://www.dw.com/en/west-africas-eco-currency-plan-remains-a-pipe-dream/a-58136111>