

CONCEPT NOTE

**Framework for Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT),
Ten-years After: Progress, Implementation Challenges,
and Implications for the AfCFTA**

Expert Group Meeting

19 June 2024

Douala, Cameroon

I. Background

Empirical evidence suggests that trade integration plays a pivotal role in inclusive growth and economic development. African countries can fully capitalize on the opportunities that trade integration presents for productive transformation and sustainable economic development. Africa's share in world exports hovered around 3 percent in 2022¹, reflecting low intra-African trade and a heavy reliance on external markets. While Europe and Asia thrive on intra-regional trade, intra-African exports and imports stand at 17.8 per cent and 14.6 per cent, respectively². This stark contrast highlights the untapped potential within Africa for increased trade and industrialization.

Recognizing the transformative potential of intra-African trade, the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted, during its 18th Ordinary Session that was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2012, the decision (Assembly/ AU/Dec.394 [XVIII]) to establish a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by the indicative date of 2017. The Assembly concurrently endorsed an Action Plan for Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT). The primary aim of the AfCFTA is to establish a unified African market, allowing seamless trade in goods and services within the continent and enhancing Africa's global trade position³. It encompasses eight strategic objectives: creating a unified market, tariff liberalization, facilitating the movement of capital and individuals, laying the groundwork for a Continental Customs Union, fostering sustainable socio-economic development with a focus on gender equality and structural transformation, boosting competitiveness regionally and globally, promoting industrialization, regional value chains, agricultural development, and food security, and streamlining membership in regional economic communities to expedite regional and continental integration.

On the other hand, BIAT aims to deepen Africa's market integration and significantly increase the volume of trade that African countries undertake among themselves. BIAT identifies the key obstacles to the growth of intra-African trade in seven pivotal clusters – Trade Policy, Trade Facilitation, Productive Capacity, Trade-Related Infrastructure, Trade Finance, Trade Information, and Factor Market Integration – and outlines the activities to be undertaken to address each of the constraints. The Trade Policy Cluster focuses on integrating intra-African trade into national strategies, involving the private sector in policy-making, enhancing trade in food products and services, and simplifying trade regulations. Trade Facilitation aims to slash transit times by 50 per cent through streamlined customs procedures, border post optimization, and integrated border management. Productive Capacity strives for regional value chains, improved trade information systems, increased investments, technology centers, and enhanced local production. Trade-related infrastructure prioritizes infrastructure development, funding, and private sector involvement for multi-country projects. Finally, Factor Market Integration aims for labor mobility, harmonized business laws, cross-border establishment rules, and qualification recognition to bolster intra-regional movement.

Significant strides have been made in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), with 47 of the 54 signatories (87%)⁴ having deposited their instruments of

¹ UNCTADstat (2022)

² Ibid.

³ United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa (2023-03). AfCFTA what you need to know: frequently asked questions & answers. Addis Ababa: © UN. ECA., <https://hdl.handle.net/10855/49411>

⁴ <https://www.tralac.org/resources/infographic/13795-status-of-afcfta-ratification.html>

ratification as of April 2024, trading commenced on 1 January 2021, and protocols on investment policy, intellectual and property rights, and competition policy have been endorsed by Member States. In contrast, BIAT's progress remains limited, with scant information on its domestication and execution at regional and national levels. Thus, there was an urgent need to evaluate BIAT's progress, address implementation challenges, and propose improvements to ensure its alignment with the AfCFTA's transformative goals.

II. Meeting objectives

The Expert Group Meeting is convened to carefully review the draft report and to gather valuable insights from experts towards further enriching the draft report and facilitating its finalization and subsequent publication. More specifically, the meeting is expected to:

1. Review the report – which takes stock of intra-African trade before and after BIAT and analyses the varying implementation levels of the seven BIAT clusters (Trade Policy, Trade Facilitation, Productive Capacity, Trade-Related Infrastructure, Trade Finance, Trade Information, and Factor Market Integration) at RECs and Member States' level – towards enhancing its coherence, methodological and analytical soundness, as well as the robustness of the data used and the pertinence of emerging recommendations and conclusions.
2. Serve as a platform for consultations and exchanges with RECs and other relevant stakeholders on the report's content and emerging findings and recommendations.
3. Gather further valuable inputs, including pertinent information, data, and feedback, from RECs, regional institutions, and participants to enhance and finalize the study.
4. Foster a shared understanding among participants regarding critical short-, medium-, and long-term actions necessary to boost intra-African trade and provide robust support for the successful implementation of the AfCFTA.

III. Outcomes

The expected outcomes from this meeting are as follows:

1. A careful and detailed review of the draft report titled “Framework for Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT), Ten-years After: Progress, Implementation Challenges, and Implications for the AfCFTA” that significantly contributes to strengthening its content, enhancing its coherence, robustness and the pertinence of its findings and recommendations.
2. Contribute to making the emerging findings and recommendations in the draft report more practical and implementable and more capable of significantly contributing to advancing the implementation of the BIAT Action Plan and articulate an advocacy strategy to facilitate buy-in and action by relevant stakeholders to accelerate its implementation in support of the AfCFTA.

IV. Participants

The meeting will include participants from the Regional Economic Communities, the African Union Commission, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Afreximbank, the Trade and Development Bank, the African Trade & Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI), and representatives from the private sector.

V. Date and Venue

This in-person meeting will take place in Douala, Cameroon, on 19 June 2024.

VI. Working Languages

The meeting will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous interpretation in both languages.

VII. Contacts

For further information and/or to confirm your attendance, please contact ECA staff Ms. Zewditu Befekadu (befekaduz@un.org), Ms. Aline Nakaima (aline.kamenakaima@un.org) and Ms. Ndinaye Sekwi Charumbira (ndinaye.sekwi@un.org), copying Mr. Francis Ikome (ikome@un.org).

VIII. Tentative Agenda

Douala, 19 June 2024 – 8:30 to 5:30 pm
Moderator: Mr. Francis Ikome (ECA)

Time	Topic	Speaker
08:30-09:00	Arrival of guests and registration	
09:00-09:30	Welcoming remarks - ECA - AUC	Mr. Stephen Karingi (ECA) AUC (TBD)
09:30-10:30	Presentation of the report	Mr. Adeolu Adewuyi
10:30-11:00	Morning break	
11:00-13:00	Discussion on BIAT clusters: 1. Trade Policy – ECOWAS/AUC 2. Trade Facilitation – AfDB/AUC 3. Productive Capacity – Afreximbank Interactive Discussions	Discussants: - TBD (AUC) - TBD (AfDB) - TBD (Afreximbank) - TBD (ECOWAS)
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-16:00	Discussion on BIAT clusters: 4. Trade-related Infrastructure – AfDB/ECA 5. Trade Finance – Afreximbank 6. Trade Information – Afreximbank 7. Factor Market Integration – ECOWAS/ECA Interactive Discussions	Discussants: - TBD (AfDB) - TBD (Afreximbank) - TBD (ECOWAS)

16:00-16:30	Afternoon break	
16:30-17:15	Summary of key takeaways and conclusions	Ms. Ndinaye Charumbira and Ms. Jane Karonga
17:15-17:30	Closing remarks - ECA	Mr. Stephen Karingi (ECA)