

The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) in Africa – A Human Rights Perspective

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Preface

The African Union Assembly launched the continental free trade area negotiations at the 25th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on 15 June 2015 in Johannesburg, South Africa. This decision marked a significant step towards advancing Africa's regional integration and development agendas. Discussions around the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) have paid minimal attention to the important human rights implications of the CFTA, which are likely to be significant.

The liberalisation of trade can have differential impacts on various socio-economic groups due to unequal access to assets, credit and economic opportunities. Women and informal cross-border traders face particularly acute challenges to participating in welfare-enhancing trade.

Different types of workers can face differential impacts of trade liberalisation, depending on their skill-level or sector of employment. Agricultural trade liberalisation raises particular concerns for adverse impacts on agricultural livelihoods and food security.

The CFTA offers a window of opportunity for African countries to boost intra-African trade, to diversify, structurally transform, and meet the important human rights objectives and poverty-related goals the continent is committed to under its Agenda 2063 – of which the CFTA is a flagship project – and the global Agenda 2030.

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[International Trade & Regional Integration](#) [2]

[The Continental Free Trade Area \(CFTA\) in Africa – A Human Rights Perspective](#) [3]

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