

39th GIMAC Pre-Summit CSOs Consultative Meeting

FEBRUARY 2023



GIMAC Network's 39th Pre-Summit Consultative Meetings on Gender Mainstreaming at the AU and Member States was a significant step towards addressing women's and girls' rights issues and promoting their inclusion in the AfCFTA implementation. The GIMAC Network's focus on breaking trade barriers for African women and youth is a commendable effort towards achieving sustainable development and economic growth in Africa.

It is imperative that relevant stakeholders and AU organs continue to strengthen partnerships and implement solutions to address the challenges faced by women and girls in the AfCFTA implementation.



Executive Summary



The Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC Network) recently organized its 39th Pre-Summit Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) consultative meeting in Addis Ababa. The main objective of the meeting was to engage African Union (AU) Member States on women's and girls' rights issues in alignment with various treaties, conventions, protocols, charters, strategies, and procedures. The GIMAC Network focuses on themes related to the operating articles of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA-2004), which include Governance, Peace and Security, Human Rights, Health, Education, Agriculture, Climate Change and Economic Empowerment, and other emerging issues.

The 39th pre-summit consultative meeting was held from 12-14 February 2023 in Addis Ababa, in line with the AU theme for 2023 "Acceleration of the African Continental Free Trade Area Implementation." The AfCFTA aims to create an integrated continental market for goods and services facilitated by the movement of people. It is one of Agenda 2063's flagship projects, which aims to contribute to the movement of capital and natural persons, enabling Africans to use trade more effectively as an engine for economic growth and sustainable development. The implementation of the AfCFTA is estimated to result in a 10.5% increase in wages for women, compared to 9.9% for men, according to the World Bank's 2020 report.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was adopted and signed by all African Union Member States in March 2018 and entered into force on May 30th, 2019. To date, 54 AU Member States have signed and 46 member states have ratified the AfCFTA Agreement. The AfCFTA aims to 'create an integrated continental market for goods and services facilitated by movement of persons. It is one of Agenda 2063 flagship projects that aims to contribute to the movement of capital and natural person which will enable Africans to use trade more effectively as an engine for economic growth and sustainable development.

However, to achieve this projection, it is crucial to identify and address the possible challenges that may impede the inclusion of women and girls in the AfCFTA implementation. This includes considering the potential impact on their human rights, proposing solutions to overcome any challenges, and strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders and African Union (AU) organs. The GIMAC Network's discussions during the 39th Pre-Summit Consultative Meetings on Gender Mainstreaming at the AU and Member States focused on "The Implementation of the AfCFTA: Breaking Trade Barriers for African Women and Youth to Ensure Their Inclusion." The discussions aligned with the AU's 2023 theme of "Acceleration of the African Continental Free Trade Area Implementation."

The 39th Pre-Summit Consultative Meetings also incorporated the outcomes of the 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training, which took place on 12th February 2023, under the theme "Galvanising the Role of Youths in the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area." This shows the GIMAC Network's commitment to ensuring that youths are actively involved in the AfCFTA implementation. The report provides a summary of the discussions held during the 39th GIMAC Pre-Summit Consultative Meetings on Gender Mainstreaming at the AU and Member States, along with the outcomes of the 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training.

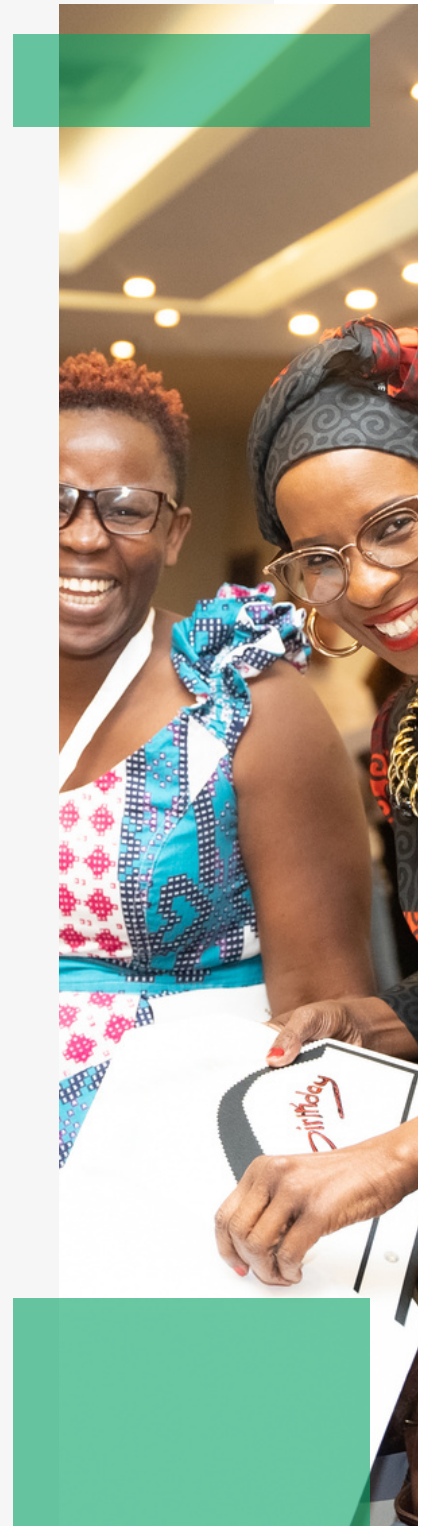


Introduction

The Pre-Summit Consultative meeting aimed to promote a more gender-inclusive implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by providing a platform for civil society organizations and young people to discuss opportunities and challenges. Attendees analyzed how to strategically involve women and young people at continental, regional, national, and grassroots levels in implementing the AfCFTA.

The 9th GIMAC Young Women Advocacy Training workshop, held on the 1st day of the meeting, focused on galvanizing the role of youth in AfCFTA implementation. Over 150 young people from across Africa participated in person, and over 200 joined virtually, to discuss the role of young people in the AfCFTA and advocate for their inclusion in policy formulation and decision-making on trade in Africa.

The main event, the 39th GIMAC Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender mainstreaming at the African Union and Member State, took place over two days under the theme "The Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area - Breaking Trade Barriers of African Women and Youth to ensure their Inclusion". The meeting brought together African civil society organizations, women's rights organizations, youth and youth-led organizations, local NGOs, journalists, high-level representatives from the African Union and UN systems, policy makers, key stakeholders, and other international organizations. The aim was to inspire commitment for collegial action with AU mechanisms responsible for the AfCFTA implementation.





Brief Summary of Discussions and Deliberations

The AfCFTA is an initiative aimed at boosting intra-Africa exports by over 81% and increasing the continent's income by USD 450 billion. It is also expected to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. However, there are concerns that existing structural inequalities in the economic sector may lead to unequal outcomes for vulnerable populations, particularly women and young people.

Recent research shows that Africa has over 60% of its population under the age of 35. The continent currently has 420 million youths aged between 15-35, and this population segment is expected to double to 840 million by 2040. However, despite the potential benefits of the AfCFTA for young people, they continue to face a number of economic, social, political, and other challenges. To ensure the success of this initiative, it is crucial to equip young people with the necessary resources, including business funding, mentorship, access to data and information, and policies and frameworks that support micro, small, and medium enterprises.



Women in Africa also face structural inequalities that hinder their ability to resist external adversities such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the persistent threat of climate change. Women constitute more than 50% of Africa's population, with those in poor households constituting a large share of informal traders. Restrictive socio-cultural norms, laws, and policy frameworks that exclude women and youth continue to affect Africa's trade potential and ultimately the implementation of the AfCFTA.

While the AfCFTA provides a great potential for economic opportunity for youth and women, it also comes with significant challenges, particularly the infringement of human rights. Cross-border trading facilitated by the agreement can expose girls and young women to issues such as human trafficking, sexual abuse, gender-based violence, commercial sexual exploitation, among others. As such, it is crucial that the implementation of the AfCFTA prioritizes ways to uphold human rights while opening the borders for trade.

According to a 2020 study by Plan International on the implications of AfCFTA, trade agreements can have positive and negative impacts on vulnerable groups. For instance, increased cross-border trade could exacerbate existing challenges like child marriages, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and child trafficking. Ignoring women informal cross-border traders in the AfCFTA implementation could lead to entrenchment of situations exposing them to various human rights abuses.



Over 150 young people from Africa joined physically, while more than 200 others participated virtually to discuss on how youth can strategically contribute to AfCFTA implementation



GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training

The 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training, centered on the theme "Galvanising the Role of Youth in AfCFTA Implementation," was held on February 12th, 2023. Over 150 young people from Africa joined physically, while more than 200 others participated virtually to discuss how youth can strategically contribute to AfCFTA implementation and advocate for their inclusion in policy formulation and decision-making on trade in Africa.

The training featured plenary and group sessions, with discussions focused on AfCFTA and inclusive digital technology, women and youth financial and economic inclusion, the impact of AfCFTA on the rights of girls and young women, region-specific opportunities for youth and women in AfCFTA implementation, and training on advocacy. Various youth presented on these thematic areas, with participants enriching the discussions through questions and comments. Additionally, a group session was held, divided into three thematic areas: promoting women and youth financial and economic inclusion, accelerating AfCFTA implementation through inclusive digital technology, and the impact of AfCFTA on girls and young women. The group discussions were followed by a plenary session where the findings of each group were presented.

The report summarizes the key messages from presentations, including recommendations on AfCFTA implementation submitted by youth at the 39th GIMAC pre-summit meeting and subsequently to the AU Heads of State and Government during the 36th AU Summit. The training provided valuable insights and knowledge to young people, equipping them to advocate for their inclusion and contribute strategically to AfCFTA implementation.

Issues Highlighted by the Speakers of the Opening Session of the Advocacy Training



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The 9th GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training forum highlighted the pressing need for young people, particularly young women, to be engaged in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). While the AfCFTA offers significant economic opportunities, it also presents potential risks, including trafficking and exploitation of young women. Speakers emphasized the importance of engaging youth and women as critical actors in driving economic development in Africa, and ensuring that the AfCFTA is implemented in a manner that is equitable and sustainable. To address concerns about the potential threats posed by the AfCFTA, Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Executive Director of Rozaria Memorial Trust, called for measures to protect the human rights of women and girls, including monitoring by the Special Rapporteurs of Human Rights and the Office of the Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security. She also suggested developing an annual scorecard for monitoring and reporting on how women and youth will hold stakeholders accountable. The speakers also emphasized the critical role of youth and women in peace-building and economic development.

Mme Bineta Diop, AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, stressed the importance of engaging Africa's leaders in efforts to realize peace and security on the continent, particularly in hotspots such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia.

Finally, the speakers highlighted the need for skills development and networking opportunities for young people to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA. Mr. Sam Norgah, Director, Plan International African Union Liaison Office, emphasized the importance of ensuring that young people are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage effectively in the policymaking process and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA. Overall, the forum underscored the need for capacity-building and empowerment of young people to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA while ensuring that it is implemented in a manner that is inclusive and sustainable.

Contents Covered in the Training

As the overall goal of the advocacy training was to provide an opportunity to interrogate how young people can strategically be involved in the implementation of the AfCFTA at the continental, sub-regional, national and grassroots levels, the below three training topics were framed to facilitate the discussions.

i. Orientation on AU Theme of the Year 2023, Youth Policies & Existing Legal Frameworks

The AU Theme of the Year 2023 and existing legal frameworks were the focal points of an orientation session that provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges that the AfCFTA implementation presents for African youth. During the session, Mr. Komi Tsowou highlighted critical factors that could hinder economic development in Africa, including infrastructure deficits, knowledge gaps, and trade-related barriers. Addressing these challenges is essential to fully harnessing the potential of the AfCFTA.

One of the challenges highlighted by Mr. Tsowou is the heavy reliance on exports, particularly in the tea value chain. Although East Africa is the main exporter of tea on the continent, North Africa is the highest importer. This presents an opportunity for intra-African trade, but knowledge gaps and trade-related barriers hinder the realization of this potential. Addressing these challenges requires efforts to increase awareness and knowledge transfer, as well as reducing trade barriers through the AfCFTA.

The AfCFTA presents a promising opportunity to create a large market for "made in Africa" products, which would incentivize large-scale production, manufacturing, and trade of goods within the continent. This presents an opportunity for young entrepreneurs to tap into and contribute to the continent's economic growth. However,





the success of this initiative depends on investing in skills development and capacity building, as well as creating a conducive business environment that promotes innovation and entrepreneurship.

The orientation session also discussed the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, which is a step in the right direction towards creating an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs to access wider markets, improve their competitiveness, and participate in regional value chains. However, more concerted efforts are needed to empower young entrepreneurs to take advantage of the AfCFTA implementation fully.

"the AfCFTA implementation presents a promising opportunity for the continent to boost economic development and intra-African trade. Efforts to empower young entrepreneurs and women producers and reduce trade barriers are critical to the successful integration of youth and women in the AfCFTA implementation."

Mr. Tsowou emphasized the importance of empowering young entrepreneurs and women producers to ensure successful integration of youth and women in the implementation of AfCFTA. He recommended using GIMAC as a platform to bring youth and women entrepreneurs together, increase their negotiation power, pool resources, and access greater financing for their businesses. While there exist many opportunities for Africa's youth and women, Mr. Tsowou observed that much work needs to be done on the ground.

Reducing tariffs is expected to decrease production costs and increase profits for farmers. The AfCFTA will help reduce the cost of cocoa production, which will increase the value of the cocoa value chain. Creating a large market for "Made in Africa" products will incentivize large-scale production, manufacturing, and trade of goods within the continent, creating more value. However, it is essential to define rules for considering products as "Made in Africa" to prevent African countries from importing finished products from outside the continent and tagging them as "Made in Africa."

ii. Youth Advocacy Processes/ Lobbying and Negotiation

The training session led by Ms. Juliet Kimotho, a Senior Advocacy Officer from the African Population and Health Research Center, aimed to educate youth on policy-making, advocacy, and implementation for transformative cross-border trade and youth economic empowerment. Ms. Kimotho discussed advocacy objectives, including identifying issues, actors, and timelines, and outlined seven steps for effective advocacy, such as defining messages and assessing resources. She emphasized that advocacy strategies range from networking to capacity building for policy actors. Ms. Kimotho also explained the different products of advocacy, such as position papers, policy briefs

and social media posts, and detailed how to monitor and evaluate change using the outcome harvesting tracking tool.

The GIMAC Youth Network's advocacy gains, including campaigns for reducing maternal deaths and gender-based violence and producing Africa Youth Policy and Beijing +25 Manifesto, were also highlighted. Overall, the session aimed to empower youth to advocate for policy change and highlighted the importance of advocacy for social change and positive outcomes.



iii. Opportunities for Collaboration for Youth and Women in the AfCFTA Implementation



During her presentation, Ms. Cynthia Kamikazi from African Development Bank (AfDB) proposed collaboration opportunities between the organization and African youth and women to advance Africa's development agenda. She highlighted upcoming youth activities and campaigns within the network that should be explored. Some low-hanging opportunities for engagement in the current year were identified, including organizing a youth-led civil society forum for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, mobilizing resources for African youth to participate in the Women Deliver Conference in Kigali, and engaging with global partners to drive gender parity.

Participants, however, pointed out potential challenges that could hinder youth participation, such as the high financial cost of travel and visa barriers. They urged the AfDB to work with youth networks and provide resources to support their inclusion in critical advocacy processes.

39th GIMAC Pre-Summit CSOs Consultative Meeting



Both the 39th GIMAC pre-summit consultative meeting and the 9th Youth Advocacy Training were anchored on inclusion of women and young people in the implementation of the AfCFTA, with sub-thematic areas that guided the discussions on identifying the gaps and challenges of inclusion of women and youth, the vulnerabilities and risks of the AfCFTA to women and young girls, progress made and recommendations and policy options that are gender responsive in addressing some of the issues raised. The recommendations generated during the youth advocacy training's breakout sessions were presented at the 39th GIMAC Pre-Summit meeting. These recommendations were also integrated into the final recommendations of the meeting.

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL OF EXPERTS

The 39th GIMAC pre-summit commenced with a Conversation on Unpacking the African Continental Free Trade Area featuring a High-Level panel of Experts. The session was moderated by Dr. Amany Asfour, who emphasized the importance of building the capacity of women and youth to drive the AfCFTA and the importance of value addition in the production process. The panellists H.E Ambassador Albert Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the AU and Dr. Hanan Morsy, Deputy Executive Secretary and Chief Economist of the UNECA highlighted the opportunities and challenges faced by women and youth in the AfCFTA.

Ambassador Muchanga further highlighted the importance of inclusivity in economic development and the opportunities that the AfCFTA brings, as well as the need for information and statistics on African Trade and digitization in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Dr. Morsy on the other hand emphasised the need for safety for women in trade, especially the cross-border traders and the informal sector, the importance of capacity building, mentorship and training for women in financial literacy and the need for advocacy and awareness creation to involve women in the implementation of the AfCFTA.



Thematic Areas of Focus:

i. Creating a Conducive Environment for Integration of Women and Young people into AfCFTA

The pre-summit meeting dedicated a session that highlights the need to create an enabling environment for women and young people to participate in the AfCFTA that emphasizes the importance of integration and inclusivity in the implementation of AfCFTA. The Panel composed experts in different areas including Faith Lumonya, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Mehjabeen Alarakhia, UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO); and Dr. Anthony Ajayi, African Population and Health Research Center. Dr. Olumide Ajayi, African Leadership Foundation moderated the discussion.



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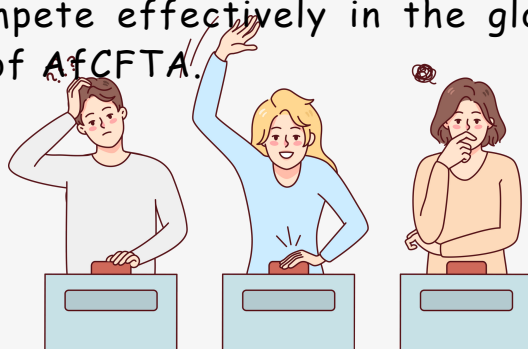
The speakers highlighted the Concept of Rules of Origin (ROO), which requires that products meet at least 70% rules of origin to trade within the continent. However, it was pointed out that most products in Africa are similar, making it challenging to meet this requirement. Therefore, investment in high-value products is necessary to create a favourable context for the ROO. The panel also emphasized the need for a continent-wide strategy and approach in the AfCFTA implementation. They further stated that adding a protocol on women and youth would not be sufficient, and a review of the agreement is necessary. The discussion identified the lack of implementation of the protocol on Free Movement of Persons as a significant challenge, limiting mobility and access to visas, which hinders trade. Therefore, the ratification of the protocol on free movement by member states is crucial for the successful implementation of AfCFTA.

ii. Readiness to Ensure African Women and Young People Effective Participation in the AfCFTA



The education panel, moderated by Fraciah Kagu, FAWE, featured speakers including Munnira Katongole, UNAIDS -Education Plus, Victoria Egbetayo, GPE and Dr. Musa Chibwana of SCI-AULO. The discussion centered on the role of education in advancing the implementation of AfCFTA, emphasizing the crucial role that education plays in achieving the goals of AfCFTA.

The panelists stressed the importance of empowering women and young girls through education to realize the objectives of AfCFTA. Education is a vital tool for empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills required to drive economic growth and development. The success of the AfCFTA depends on the extent to which Africans are educated, and it is vital for all actors to invest in building the human capital necessary to drive the development envisaged by the AfCFTA. Governments must also ensure that education curricula are revised to have an entrepreneurial orientation that fosters the education of adolescents on STEM as well as building their skills on the digital economy. The implementation of such education policies would enable Africa to compete effectively in the global economy and realize the benefits of AfCFTA.



However, the discussion also highlighted some of the challenges facing education in Africa, which may have negative consequences for the implementation of AfCFTA. The reduction in global funding support and imbalances in domestic financing for education has left children in low-income households with limited education opportunities. Additionally, attacks on the education sector due to war and conflict, pandemics, and other crises could impede the implementation of AfCFTA.

Thus, there is a need for governments, private sector actors, and civil society organizations to collaborate to change the education outlook on the continent. Investing in gender-sensitive and gender-transformative education that goes beyond the classroom walls is crucial. Furthermore, linking the digitalization framework with the implementation of AfCFTA would ensure that Africa is adequately equipped to compete in the global digital economy. Addressing these challenges would go a long way in ensuring that education plays a critical role in driving the implementation of AfCFTA.

The session on AfCFTA and Peace and Security emphasized the importance of stability in promoting trade and sustainable development, with a focus on case studies of cross-border women traders. The panel of speakers included representatives from ACCORD, the UNECA, APIA and EASSI Uganda.

The discussion highlighted the obstacles conflicts and insecurity pose to the implementation of the AfCFTA, particularly for women traders. Conflict diverts resources from education and infrastructure development, leading to higher levels of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Additionally, countries experiencing conflict tend to have slower implementation of trade-related policies and higher levels of mistrust between communities. However, if implemented effectively, the AfCFTA can lead to peace and security based on the liberal model of peacebuilding that emphasizes the linkages between peace and development.

The session also examined a case study of cross-border women traders in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), demonstrating the impact of conflict and the positive role that local organizations can play. To facilitate the implementation of the AfCFTA in the Great Lakes Region, it is essential to resolve the security situation in Eastern DRC and involve women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. The establishment of a transitional justice mechanism and advocacy for peace, reconciliation, and justice in trade agreements were also suggested.

iii. The Implementation of the AfCFTA and Healthcare Access for Girls, Women and Youth

The Panel "Birthing a Brighter Future: Harnessing the AfCFTA to improve maternal health in Africa" explored how the implementation of the AfCFTA can improve maternal health in Africa, and support the economic and financial inclusion of women and youth. The session was moderated by Wilna Paulemon, MSD for Mothers and the speakers were H. E. Amb. Minata Samaté Cessouma, Commissioner, AUC HHS; Sunita Caminha, UN Women ESARO; and Angela Nguku, White Ribbon Alliance, Women voice.

The panelists highlighted the importance of education in promoting the rights of women, advancing sexual education and increasing the capacity of women for the labour market. Additionally, investments in the health sector and systems, particularly in maternal health, were noted as key to improving maternal health outcomes. However, the challenge of high rates of violence against women including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) was also noted, with limited access to healthcare and comprehensive sexual education.

The discussions also emphasized the need for law and policies towards maternal health, which is crucial in protecting the rights of women and breaking down barriers of marginalization and gender inequality. The panelists noted that information and awareness creation on reproductive and health rights will be crucial in positively influencing the pharmaceutical industry. Overall, the session highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach that focuses on the economic and financial inclusion of women and youth, while also prioritizing maternal health and education to reduce the incidence of HIV and advance sexual education.





iv. Potential Impacts of the AfCFTA on Girls' and Women's Human Rights

The AfCFTA has the potential to impact the human rights of girls and women, and a panel moderated by Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, African Commission, Human & Peoples' Rights with panelist from the UN Human Rights Officer, OHCHR Right to Development Section, Maria Andrea Echazu; Mahoule Kpako from UN Economic Commission for Africa; Ibrahim Kasiriye from Plan International; and Emolet Allan David, Chairperson, Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA was dedicated to discussing the human rights implications and opportunities in its implementation.

The discussions identified key challenges, including structural changes that have shifted labour from higher to lower productivity employment, discriminatory practices favoring big businesses, and the risk of child trafficking and commercial sex exploitation. Recommendations included prioritizing human rights concerns in negotiating, drafting, and implementing the AfCFTA agreement, gradual liberalization that allows protection for vulnerable groups, and establishing infrastructure at border points for women.

The women's land rights session focussed on particularly in the agriculture sector, and the implications of limited access to land for women in the implementation of AfCFTA was one part of the agenda of the meeting. The panel of speakers included Naomi Shadrack, Women's Land Policy Advisor at OXFAM International. Ms. Moureen Wagubi, Executive Director of the Institute for Social Transformation and Empowering Women in Agriculture (EWA), moderated the session.

Prioritizing human rights concerns in negotiating, drafting, and implementing the AfCFTA agreement, gradual liberalization that allows protection for vulnerable groups, and establishing infrastructure at border points for women.



The panel of speakers highlighted land rights as a key challenge, especially for women in the agricultural sector, and stressed the importance of reviewing policies and frameworks, ensuring information-sharing and knowledge dissemination on AfCFTA, diversifying the language of policy documents, and increasing women's access to land, equipment, digitalization, markets, and financing.

Investment in climate-smart agriculture, ICT infrastructure, mechanization of agricultural production, transport systems, and harmonization of standards of goods were also noted as crucial. The session concluded by stressing the need for convening dialogues that foster deeper awareness of the challenges women face in cross-border trade and how they can be addressed. Overall, the discussions emphasized the importance of considering and protecting the human rights of all individuals, particularly girls, women, and youth in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

v. Promoting Financial and Economic Inclusion of Women and Youth in the Implementation of the AfCFTA

In seeking to identify and explore mechanisms as well as initiatives that could promote financial and economic inclusion of women and young people in the implementation of the AfCFTA the pre-summit meeting organized a panel on “*Unleashing the Potential of Women and Youth in the AfCFTA era*” and a presentation of the Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative 2030 (WYFEI) call to action.



The session on unleashing the potential of Women and Youth in the AfCFTA era aimed to explore ways to empower women and youth in the implementation of the AfCFTA. The discussion revolved around financing and access to credit, digitalization and technology, and the barriers that hinder women's effective participation in AfCFTA implementation. The panel of speakers included Dr. Nancy Gitonga, from AWEF Kenya Chapter, Mercy Nnanna Chukwuma from Small-scale Women Farmers Organization in Nigeria (SWOFON), Zaithwa Katherine Milanzi, Young Urban Women Representative from Malawi, and Memory Kachambwa from the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). The moderator of the session was Felister Gitonga from Gender Justice Oxfam Pan Africa Program.

The discussion highlighted various barriers preventing women's full engagement in the economy, such as cross-border harassment, lack of access to credit and financing, and limited access to information. To address these challenges, the panel recommended that African political leaders adopt a gender-inclusive and gender-responsive approach to AfCFTA implementation. They also emphasized the importance of policies that remove trade barriers for women and youth engagement in economic inclusion. Access to credit financing for women was also highlighted as critical to enhancing production and value chains.

Training and capacity building were also identified as essential in enhancing the skills and knowledge of women and young people. The panel stressed the need to strengthen institutions and structures that allow women and young people access to credit, as well as having policies that protect them against big companies. The importance of having monitoring and evaluation frameworks to measure progress against set targets was also highlighted, along with the need for relevant disaggregated data to inform decision-making. The WYFEI initiative was presented as a critical step towards economic empowerment for women and youth in Africa.

The initiative is a public-private-women and youth (PPWY) partnership initiative that seeks to unlock \$20 Billion for at least 1 million African women and youth by contributing to empowerment, poverty reduction, and improving the welfare of women and youth in Africa in a bid to tackle the systemic bottlenecks which have led to 70% of women and youth being excluded from financial services. The initiative recognizes the importance of creating an enabling environment that promotes financial inclusion and economic empowerment. The focus on increasing income for women and youth, promoting financial sector reform, and implementing women and youth-friendly micro-economic policies is commendable. The framework's three-level approach that intervenes at the environmental, systems, and personal levels is comprehensive and seeks to address the various barriers to financial inclusion.

The call to action for inputs from women and youth is also a great way to involve them in the process and ensure that their needs and concerns are considered. Overall, the WYFEI initiative and the call to action are steps in the right direction towards promoting financial inclusion and economic empowerment for women and youth in Africa.



Challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the AfCFTA

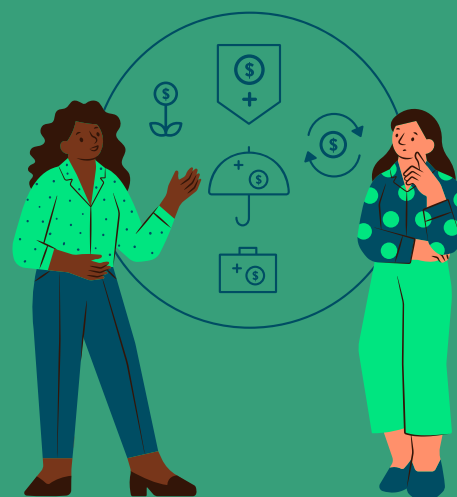
Despite the potential for increased trade opportunities within the continent, Africa still faces challenges such as lack of critical infrastructure, high trade tariffs, limited access to markets for products in the continent.. The connectivity of last mile infrastructure such as energy and digital technology is crucial in increasing the services component, fostering trade in certain goods such as time-sensitive products, changing patterns of comparative advantage, and affecting the complexity and length of global value chains. However, with increase in mobile penetration on the continent and access to the internet, young people are driving innovations to create e-commerce solutions that facilitate trading outside of the conventional ways through social media and digital markets, making it easier to facilitate trade across borders at the comfort of their homes.

To ensure successful implementation of the AfCFTA, investment in data collection, analysis and research on the experiences of women and young people is crucial. Disaggregating data through gender and age can raise awareness on the issues that affect women and young people and having a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the performance against the set targets can guarantee inclusion and accountability in AfCFTA' s implementation. Such analysis of the reality of women and girls in relation to trade could inform sound decision-making around AfCFTA.

The successful integration of adolescent girls, young women and women in the implementation of the AfCFTA calls for their empowerment through education, training and capacity building in financing and credit management as well as in digital technologies. This will allow women and young people access to credit and economic empowerment through the small and medium sized businesses (SMEs).

What Next?

By recognizing the importance of gender equality, the AfCFTA can lead to peace and security based on the liberal model of peacebuilding that makes clear linkages between peace and development.





Despite the potential of the AfCFTA for Africa's development, the impact of conflict and insecurity on women traders cannot be overlooked as it creates severe obstacles for them and hinders progress. Conflicts take away resources for education and infrastructural development and scale up the incidents of Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGBV) perpetrated by armed groups and security forces. Moreover, the pace of implementation of trade-related policies is slower in countries experiencing conflict, with high levels of mistrust between communities. If fully implemented, the AfCFTA can lead to peace and security based on the liberal model of peacebuilding that makes clear linkages between peace and development.

The AfCFTA recognizes the existing challenges for women in trade, such as cross-border traders and those in the informal sector. As such, gender equality is promoted as one of its objectives. However, only one provision in the Protocol on Trade in Services references women, reflecting the minimum consideration given to the gender aspect of the AfCFTA during negotiations.

To address these pre-identified gaps and existing structural inequalities, State Parties of the AfCFTA have also agreed to mobilize resources to improve the export capacity of service suppliers with particular attention being given to women. The Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the AU has also committed "to broaden inclusiveness in the operation of the AfCFTA through interventions that support African women". Accordingly, the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade is being developed to ensure that women's participation and inclusivity in trade are integrated and enhanced.

Recommendations:

AUC AND RECS

- Expedite efforts to ratify the Protocol on free movement of people and goods and facilitate visa-free travel for African peoples. This requires regional and continental coordination and cooperation, and resource allocation for infrastructure and administrative systems.
- Establish an AfCFTA sub-committee specifically focused on addressing human rights issues. This sub-committee should prioritize the recognition of sexual harassment as a non-tariff barrier and work towards developing minimum standards for one-stop border posts.
- Consolidation of peace and security across Africa will be critical in ensuring better access to markets and financial services are provided for selling products. . To scale up the participation of women in peacebuilding and peace-making processes to promote stability and security in their communities. This is a precondition to address threats to AfCFTA implementation, especially in conflict-stricken countries and regions across Africa.
- Invest in training of security personnel to employ a human rights-based approach to stabilisation especially across borders.

- Ensure broad consultation and participation in the AfCFTA negotiations and implementation. This can be achieved through increased efforts to engage all stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalized groups. Policymakers and negotiators need to make a conscious effort to reach out to all groups and ensure that their voices are heard and considered.
- Diversifying the language of policy making in AfCFTA to include many African languages and to have a wider reach among those who do not read English and French. To also explore diverse ways of disseminating information on the AfCFTA.need for diverse ways of disseminating information on the AfCFTA.
- Establish a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework. It is essential to ensure that women and youth are consulted throughout the MEAL process.
- Collaborate to ensure enforcement of trade remedies and dispute resolution mechanisms at the REC level. For instance , the RECs should consider compensating traders for losses incurred during times of conflict.



MEMBER STATES

- Take proactive positive steps to promote women's rights, including attenuate discrimination and endorsing policies that advance women's rights. This includes ensuring non-discrimination by focussing particular attention on the situation of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society over time. Doing so can yield economic benefits for all.
- Mainstreaming gender in the AfCFTA implementation strategies. This would help address underlying gender barriers that prevent women from participating in the economy - access to credit, market and information, and addressing violence that sees women suffer more.
- Implement existing land policies that seek to address discrimination against women, such as the UN Voluntary Guidelines of Responsible Governance of Land Tenure. They should also encourage community leaders to abolish cultural practices that bar women from accessing land; while promoting cultural practices that guarantee the use of land by women for long-term investment, loans (using land as collateral) independent of women's and girls' marital status. Land distribution should be done in a transparent, and consultative manner.
- Ratify the Protocol for Free Movement of People as key enabler for successful implementation of the AfCFTA.
- Address deep seated social factors driving conflict and insecurity within countries. Minimising conflict will maximise the benefits of enhanced regional integration. A peaceful and secure Africa will certainly guarantee free movement of people, goods and services and spur women and youth towards achieving their economic potential.
- Establishing infrastructure at border crossings appropriate for women will be crucial to deal with unfriendly border infrastructure manifested in absence of sanitation facilities, lack of day care centres, and lack of storage facilities for women traders.
- Invest in ICT infrastructure in the last mile and rural areas to help bridge the digital divide and have internet as a source of information on the AfCFTA. This would facilitate the use of digital tools to harness connectivity of youth and women traders. Reducing the cost of accessing data will be critical to this end.
- Need for investment in agriculture - including training of rural women farmers to be able to compete in the market and drive food security in Africa and facilitating access and control of land for women. Climate-smart agricultural investment is much needed in this regard as is supporting access to finance to help scale up agricultural production and intra-regional trade.
- Undertake reform in education curricula that considers mainstreaming the use of ICT in education at all levels.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- Fund nationwide birth registration to address child trafficking; protecting against child trafficking will be critical given that AfCFTA might increase the risk of child trafficking and commercial sex exploitation with weak border controls and challenges with tracing minors.
- Provide financing for physical infrastructure development (ICT, Transport, Energy) in a manner that centres women and youth. This will address many infrastructure gaps and reduce timelines for cargo clearance at ports.
- Joint efforts to invest in developing digital infrastructure that accommodate the needs of women will be important. Leveraging youth know-how in ICT in digitalisation of trade through e-commerce could help remove barriers to capital, ensuring skills development in ICT and digital economy, and enhance access to finance, especially for informal women traders who lack access to formal finance, thus bridging the gap between them and men.

- Support the AfCFTA Secretariat with an adequate support package to enhance AfCFTA implementation. The AfDB - having so far mobilized 1 billion dollars in financing women, UNECA and the AU - remain critical partners in this regard.
- Ensuring credit financing and capital guarantees for women will ensure high standards of production and high value chains. Partners like AfreximBank (through a digital platform called MANSA) and AfDB are critical partners in this regard.
- Leverage the role of the private sector through the African Women Development Fund and African Women Entrepreneurship Programme to help scale up the capacity of small businesses and ensure women's access to land, equipment, and markets.
- Work with Member States to implement much-needed reforms aimed at increasing access to finance as well as gender-sensitive and gender-transformative education/training opportunities particularly in sectors that are likely to benefit the most from the agreement (industrialisation and services). In this regard, engagement of governors of central banks through AFAWA will be crucial.



CSOS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- Advocacy on women's land rights will be critical in scaling up their access to land. Agriculture is a huge contributor to the continent's GDP; yet the contribution of women in this regard is restricted for various reasons - lack of access to capital and factors of production, mainly.
- In partnership with think tanks and research institutions including institutes of higher learning, organize dialogue activities that foster deeper awareness creation on challenges women face in cross-border trade and how they can be addressed.
- Research and publication on key datasets to help strategic areas of engagement for effective implementation of the AfCFTA in a way that works for women and youth. Strong analysis, documentation and reporting on the lived experiences of women in conflict and how it stifles their businesses, for example, could help inform decisions around AfCFTA implementation.
- Engage in awareness creation on the importance of the AfCFTA and avenues to tap into the opportunities it presents.
- Collaborate to increase access to comprehensive sexual education to de-risk prospects for contracting HIV. Increased movement brought about by the AfCFTA will increase spread and incidence of HIV/AIDS
- Advocate for peace, reconciliation, justice, skills building and young women led SMEs should be factored into trade agreements so regional integration benefits and intra-African trade can be reaped.
- Call for action against gender discrimination within the context of existing policies such as CEDAW, Maputo Protocol, among others.
- Advocating for stronger regional policies and reforms that are equitable and gender-responsive will go a long way in stemming continuous discrimination of women across the workforce, including the exposure to harassment and sexual exploitation that make it difficult for women to participate in regional value chains.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS



- Entrenching a human rights-based approach throughout the implementation process is critical - disadvantaged groups should meaningfully benefit.
- An ecosystem of partners will be critical for the AfCFTA's successful implementation. Financial institutions, the private sector and development partners should support investment in youth start-ups and women-driven businesses. Such an integrative approach among all stakeholders will enhance women's (and youth's) full and equal support in cross-border trade.
- Enhance access of women and youth to networks that can help tap into the opportunities/potential that CFTA offers.
- Collaborate to strengthen public-private dialogue opportunities and frameworks.
- Need for tools to monitor progress such as the AGDI (Gender Status Index) and the African Women's Progress Scoreboard developed by UNECA. These platforms can be leveraged alongside other indices to collect and analyze data in relation to AfCFTA implementation.
- Important for all stakeholders to work together to realize the objectives of the AfCFTA, ensuring the barriers to women's and youth's inclusion are broken.
- Build capacity of women and youth in negotiating business contracts and honing their business skills overall.
- Address cross-border FGM through partnerships in addressing gaps in contraception and related services for women and girls.



Through our Pre-Summit Meetings, we provide a platform for CSOs to engage with decision-makers and influence policy outcomes.

Be Part of Our Network

- Website: www.genderismyagenda.com
- Email: info@genderismyagenda.org

About the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign

Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC Network) is a powerful and effective advocacy platform for civil society organisations (CSOs). As a leading network of CSOs working on gender issues in Africa, GIMAC has a proven track record of successfully advocating for the rights and interests of women and girls at the highest levels. Through our Pre-Summit Meetings, we provide a platform for CSOs to engage with decision-makers and influence policy outcomes.

By partnering with GIMAC, you can help ensure that the voices of civil society are heard and that gender equality is at the forefront of discussions at African Union Summits. Join us in our mission to create a more just and equitable future for all.



FOR WOMN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

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**The African Women's
Development and
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