



Independent project evaluation of the

**United Nations Development Account Project**

**1213AR**

**Strengthening capacities of African countries in boosting  
intra-African trade through support for establishing the  
African Continental Free Trade Area\***

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AGOA	Africa Growth Opportunities Act
ATPC	African Trade Policy Centre
AUC	African Union Commission
AU	African Union
BIAT	Boosting Intra African Trade
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
COMESA	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
CFTA	Continental Free Trade Area
DITC	Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities
EA	Expected Accomplishment
EAC	East Africa Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German International Organisation)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NTMs	Non-Tariff Measures
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPRs	Services Policy Reviews

UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (West African Economic and Monetary Union)
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade And Development
UNDA	United Nations Development Account
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
USAID	United States AID
WTO	World Trade Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background and context

In January 2012, the African Heads of State and Governments endorsed a Framework, Road Map and the Architecture for Fast Tracking the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and the Action Plan for boosting Intra-African Trade (Action Plan) and decided that the CFTA should be operationalised by the indicative date of 2017. This proposed deadline has since then considered to be over optimistic, given the complexities that this level of agreement entail.

UNCTAD was closely involved in the elaboration of support actions for implementing the Action Plan with other development partners<sup>1</sup>. At the African Trade Ministers' meeting (UNCTAD XIII at Doha on 20 April 2012) UNCTAD presented a note on its proposed support to the implementation of the African Union (AU) Action Plan. Subsequently a request to United Nations Development Account (UNDA) was submitted for a pilot project to assist African countries with dedicated support to their efforts in accelerating the formation of the CFTA, and this was discussed and approved with an overall budget of US\$490,000 for an initial duration of January 2013 to December 2015.

The overall goal of the project is to foster and boost intra-African trade expansion, leading to sustained economic growth and inclusive development through dedicated support to the establishment of the CFTA, and thereby facilitating a process of inclusive structural transformation of African countries.

The two expected accomplishments of the project are summarised as 1: Enhanced knowledge among policy-makers, experts and private sector on requisite policies and measures for establishing the CFTA; and 2: Increased capacity of policy-makers, experts and private sector to adopt and implement policies and measures to promote establishment of the CFTA.

The beneficiaries of the project were intended to be: (i) Selected AU member States; (ii) AU Member States not involved directly (to benefit indirectly through dissemination of the results); (iii) The 8 Regional Economic Communities<sup>2</sup> recognized by the AU; (iv) The AU and its Commission, and (v) Individual participants, (including policy-makers/experts from member states, and suitable private sector representatives) identified by the UNCTAD secretariat.

The project started in 2014 instead of 2013 due to late receipt of funds. Because of this, a project extension was requested by the project management and granted (by the UNDA Office) until November 2016.

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1 African Union (AU), Community of Sahel-Saharan States CEN-SAD, Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS or UDEAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development IGAD, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), 'Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

2 CEN-SAD, COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC and UMA.

The project delivered the following:

- (a) Documents
  - (i) 4 technical-cum-training material
  - (ii) 3 additional technical material were also prepared and published
- (b) Training workshops
  - (i) 2 Training Workshops
  - (ii) 1 Validation Workshop
  - (iii) 1 Stakeholder Consultation to Develop a Regional Strategy for the CFTA Negotiations
  - (iv) 1 Ministerial Event on Investment facilitation in the era of anti-globalization
- (c) Advisory Services through 13 different events

UNCTAD commissioned an independent evaluation of the project in October 2016, with the objective to ensure ownership, result-based orientation, cost-effectiveness, and quality of UNCTAD assistance. The evaluation was conducted by an Independent Evaluator between November 2016 and February 2017. The Evaluation consisted of a desk review (19 Documents were consulted) followed by field interviews in Addis Ababa (28 Nov - 01 Dec 2016) during the Africa Trade Week with 20 people from various organizations who were involved in the project's activities. An online survey using Survey Monkey was carried out using a short questionnaire (10 questions - both in English and French) which was sent to 128 (of which 46 were women) participants (in the project activities) between mid-December 2016 and mid-January 2017. The rate of response from the survey was 14.8% with only 3 responses from women. A couple of telephone interviews were also carried out to the stakeholders who were missed in during the field work.

## Key Findings

The success of the CFTA depends on the continuous capacity building and efficient negotiations and neither member states nor regional institutions can alone respond to this challenge. Through this project, UNCTAD developed a pilot initiative that served a fundamental need of member states, which has been appreciated by the majority of stakeholders as a high-value addition to the process of concluding the CFTA. While this project has laid the technical foundations for the start of the negotiations, significantly more such support is required. The member states, the regional institutions and the private sector consider UNCTAD well positioned to continue to provide such support. This project also has strong political importance for UNCTAD in its mission to support the African continent with the objective of achieving economic development through trade.

## Relevance

The evaluation concludes that technical support from UNCTAD is vital in the achievement of the CFTA. The project (and its choice of activities) is relevant to the filling the knowledge gaps and skills required for the successful finalisation of the CFTA.

Given that it is the first time that an agreement like the CFTA has been initiated at the African continental level, specialized skills and trade related experience from other parts of the world are

necessary for its achievement. UNCTAD's strength and comparative advantage in this area of expertise was key for the success of this project. The project's intervention logic as formulated in the project document is coherent and designed to purpose and also contributed to the CFTA progression, but does not provide a framework for a successful conclusion of the process, and this is a key measure of performance for the project.

## Effectiveness

The project was effective in achieving planned activities as enunciated in the project document. The quality of the manuals, papers, and synthetic documents (used as guides for policy makers) were highly appreciated by the beneficiaries. Two international training workshops were carried out as planned and received significant appreciation from the participants. Reports and training manuals were disseminated to participating countries during the various events organized, and these were also made available on UNCTAD's website for non-participating countries.

Although the project's outputs have been attained, it is too early to verify the outcomes-level change, as these have only been partially achieved<sup>3</sup>. As per the indicators of achievement, the participants have indeed acknowledged that they benefitted from the training, but this evaluation has not been able to verify whether the acquired knowledge and skills will be helpful in concluding the CFTA negotiations and elaborate appropriate policies and use of knowledge as per expectations. "It will be a test of time," remarked one of the stakeholders. What came out clearly from the stakeholders was that this type of training and technical support should be continued due to existing institutional weaknesses and technical knowledge shortages at the country and regional levels.

## Efficiency

The project achieved a high implementation rate (it utilised 98.4% of the funds), demonstrating financial efficiency. An analysis of the project finances indicated a sound utilisation of funds relevant to the project's requirements. No major problems were reported in the project's day-to-day management, despite some internal administrative changes and delays at the start of the project. The project would have benefitted from dedicated staff support, as its management responsibilities were added on to the existing work-plan of the designated project manager.

The project used UNCTAD's internal monitoring system and activity reports were prepared annually based on standard UNCTAD requirements. A more in-depth monitoring system could have

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