

Chapter 1: Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) –

Structure, Objectives and Context

By

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This chapter provides an exposition of the AfCFTA, its key elements and its objectives. First, the structure of the AfCFTA agreement is presented. Thereafter, the chapter provides the precolonial intra-Africa trade routes and context that spans over two thousand years. Light is cast on geopolitical events that shaped the establishment of intra-Africa trade treaties, the African Union and eventually the AfCFTA. The prevailing theme that shows up in the African Union (AU) texts, the Abuja Treaty, and AfCFTA texts, is the exigency to unite Africa, to integrate Africa and boost intra-Africa trade. I should point out upfront that the vast historical context of intra-Africa trade cannot be captured in one chapter, let alone in one manuscript. Thus, reference to the precolonial and colonial intra-Africa trade routes cited in the chapter does not diminish the criticality of a multitude of intra-Africa trade routes not cited that shaped the establishment of the AfCFTA. The contextual details provided in this chapter are only an attempt to expand the contexts that shaped the establishment of the AfCFTA beyond the formation of the OAU in 1963, beyond the signing off of the Abuja treaty in 1991, and beyond the establishment of the colonial and post-colonial regional economic communities. Appreciating the contexts of intra-Africa trade provides a backdrop to understand what is at stake in achieving the African Union's aspirations of a prosperous, integrated, united and peaceful Africa. To address historical bias, I have attempted to provide evidence from a variety of sources, and I have also provided different alternative views on the cultural and historical context of the AfCFTA. For instance, in the last part of the chapter, I highlight some of the

important critiques of AfCFTA, especially what scholars have presented as a neocolonial approach to integrating Africa.

Keywords: AfCFTA, African Union, customs union, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), precolonial trade, colonial trade, regional integration, regional economic communities (RECs), regional trade areas, trans-Saharan slave trade, silk trade route, trans-Atlantic slave trade.

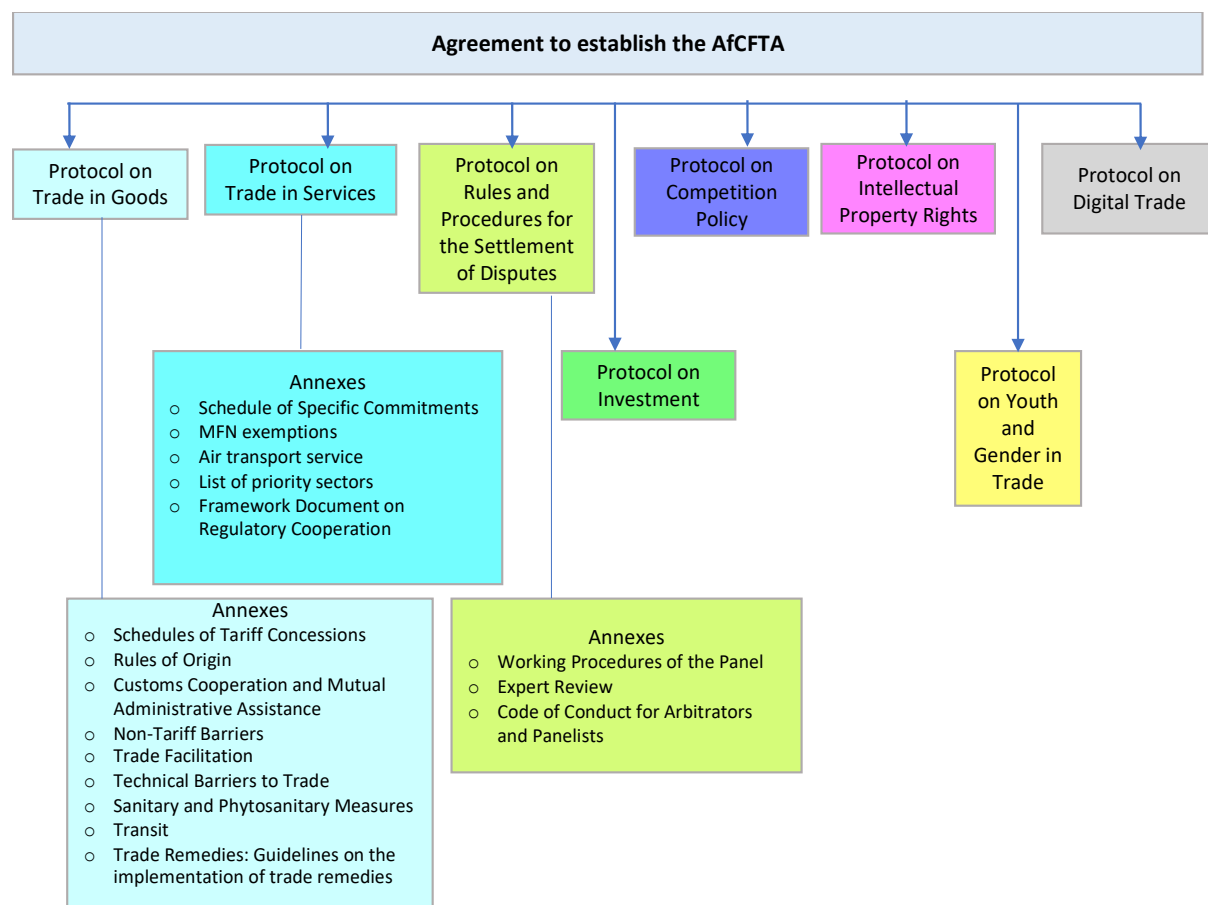
The AfCFTA Objectives and its Key Elements

The AfCFTA is a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063, with a mandate to create a single continental market that brings together 1.3 billion people, a combined GDP of approximately US\$ 3.4 trillion, 54 countries, and eight regional economic communities (African Union, 2018). The AfCFTA is expected to expand the size of Africa's economy to US\$29 trillion by 2050 (Afreximbank, 2023). The Agreement further seeks to liberalise trade among participating countries in order to deepen economic integration and to enhance competitiveness through economies of scale, while promoting industrialisation and sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development. The AfCFTA is also a binding legal instrument that legitimises the creation of a single continental market for goods and services as well as people and investments (African Union, 2022). All African Union (AU) countries, except Eritrea, had become signatories to the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which came into force on 30 May 2019. With 54 out of the 55 AU member States having signed the AfCFTA agreement, the trade policy is the largest Free Trade Agreement in the world in terms of participating countries since the formation of the World Trade Organization in 1994 (Afreximbank, 2023).

The fundamental objective of the AfCFTA is to boost intra-Africa trade, which is currently sitting at 16.6 percent of the total African trade (AfCFTA, 2022). Intra-Africa trade is envisaged

to be achieved by operationalising trade instruments, Protocols and Annexes that constitute the Agreement. Figure 1 presents the AfCFTA Framework consisting of eight Protocols: (1) Protocol on Trade in Goods with nine Annexes; (2) Protocol on Trade in Services with five Annexes; (3) Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Settlement of Disputes with three Annexes; (4) Protocol on Competition Policy; (5) Protocol on Investment; (6) Protocol on Intellectual Property Rights; (7) Protocol on Youth and Gender in Trade; (8) Protocol on Digital Trade.

Figure 1: The AfCFTA Framework



Source: Adapted from Republic of South Africa: Department of Trade, Industry and Competition 2024

The Protocols and Annexes make provision for the operationalisation of the seven AfCFTA objectives: (1) to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods progressively; (2)

liberalise trade in services progressively; (3) cooperate on investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy; (4) cooperate on all trade-related areas; (5) cooperate on customs matters and implementation of trade facilitation measures; (6) establish a mechanism for the settlement of disputes concerning members' rights and obligations; (7) establish and maintain an institutional framework for the implementation and administration of the AfCFTA. The link between the AfCFTA to the African Union's Agenda 2063 finds expression in Article of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, which points to the deepening of the economic integration of the African Continent (African Union, 2022). Indeed, the African Union's 2063 Agenda Framework puts forward Eight Priorities of the 2063 Agenda in a document titled "The Africa We Want" as outlined in Box 1.

There are two groups of countries under the AfCFTA trade regime – the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and non-LDCs. The LDCs are given a longer period to liberalise trade due to the development challenges they face. They are allowed 10 years to liberalise 90% of their tariff lines in the first phase, and 13 years for their sensitive products, which constitute 7% of their tariff lines. Non-LDCs, on the other hand, have five years to liberalise 90% of their tariff lines and 10 years to liberalise their sensitive tariff lines.

Box 1: The Africa We Want: African Union's Key Priority Areas

1. A Prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
2. An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and Vision of Africa's Renaissance
3. An Africa of good Governance, Democracy, Respect for Human Rights, Justice and rule of law
4. A peaceful and secure Africa
5. Africa with a strong Cultural Identity, Common Heritage, Values and Ethics
6. An Africa whose Development is people driven, especially relying on the potential offered by its Women, Youth, and well cared for Children
7. An Africa as a strong United and Influential Global Player

Source: African Union (2024). 2063 AU Agenda Framework Document – The Africa We Want

The Historical Context that Shaped the Establishment of the AfCFTA

Trade, throughout history, has been the means through which human interaction and the exchange of ideas and commodities have been made possible. In a study commissioned by Afreximbank (2017), Akyeampong traces trade to historical events that span over 10,000 years. This section focuses on intra-Africa trade routes that can be traced back to about 2000 years before colonisation, and trade routes during the process of decolonising Africa. To start off, let us define the concepts of colonisation and decolonisation. Without trying to simplify a concept covered in volumes of literature (see for example, Fanon, 1963; Golding 1994; Fanon, 1967; Mufwene 2002;) I submit a definition of colonisation provided by Hook (2004, p. 88 cited in Said's 1978) work that views colonisation as a violent practice that dispossesses people of their native territory. "We get deeper insights into the meaning of colonialization when viewing it from the coloniser's point of view aptly expressed by Albert Sarraut, the Colonial Minister for France (cited in Afreximbank 2023, p16).

Economically a colonial possession means to the home country simply a privileged market whence it will draw the raw materials it needs, dumping its own manufactures in return. Economic policy is reduced to rudimentary procedures of gathering crops and bartering them. Moreover, by strictly imposing on its colonial "dependency" the exclusive consumption of its manufactured products, the metropolis prevents any efforts to use or manufacture local raw material on the spot, and any contact with the rest of the world. The colony is forbidden to establish any industry, to improve itself by economic progress, to rise above the stage of producing raw materialism or to do business with the neighbouring territories for its own enrichment across the customs barriers erected by the metropolitan power.

Decolonisation, on the other hand, is the period coinciding with the end of the Second World War, characterised by agitations for independence and colonial powers eventually granting independence to former colonies. Snippets of the precolonial and colonial historical context of the trade routes provided below show that intra-Africa trade has been happening for thousands of years, with different transport and currency exchange modalities. To understand this rich history let us look at the trade routes that existed before colonialism and during colonial rule.

Precolonial and Colonial Intra-Africa Trade Routes

Trade, in its very nature, is predicated on a number of factors, including natural resources, trade routes, power dynamics in the trade route, as well as factors of production, including land and technological advances that shape the production and transportation of traded goods. While the factors that drive trade are all important, without the presence of trade routes that allow for the passage of goods, people and skills, trade would not be possible.

The African trade routes, in the past 2000 years can be traced to the Kingdom of Aksum. This ancient African Kingdom, situated in the highlands of northern Ethiopia, in near present-day Eritrea, was known for its trading activities between 50 BCE – 900CE (Woldekiros, 2014). Aksum had established trading routes across its territory and traded in ivory, gold and salt (Kobishanov & Mokthar, 1981). Anfray (1981, p. 386), noted the following about trade in the Aksum Kingdom:

“The position held by the Aksum kingdom in world commerce was that of a first-rate trading power, as evidenced by the minting of its own gold, silver and copper coinage. It was the first state in tropical Africa to introduce a coinage...The minting of coin,

especially gold, was not only an economic but also a political measure, proclaiming to the whole world the independence and prosperity of the Aksum state....”

Not only was the Aksum Kingdom a powerhouse of trade, it had a sophisticated productive capacity and an established monetary system with its own currency. A comprehensive account of the history of the Aksum civilisation and its connection with the Roman Empire is provided by Munro-Hay (1991). Munro-Hay notes that as far back as the 3rd century there was an established camel trade route, that was part of the ancient silk route. The silk road is a trade network that connects both land and sea trade across East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian continent, the Arabian peninsula, Eastern Africa and Europe. There is a consensus view in the literature, though, that the silk route is more than a trade route. It is viewed as a highway that connects merchants, migrants, explorers, pilgrims, refugees, and soldiers with religious and cultural ideas, together with goods and commodities (see for example Ma, 1998). During the trans-Saharan trade, the Silk Route became a web of trade routes where camel caravans crisscrossed the region (North and West Africa) with trade goods (see Korda, Lynch, Nelson & Tatlock, 2022).

The advantage of camel caravans was that camels did not need road infrastructure for long-distance trade since camels can traverse any terrain without difficulty; and can withstand high and low temperatures. The Silk Road, therefore, is not reduced to just being a trade route. It is a concept that captures initiatives that connect world trade to commercial activities and global value chains. The present-day Silk Road is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that connects more than 140 countries through partnerships and investments encompassing infrastructure projects, trade, production, distribution and global value chains (also see Huang, 2016).

Trade, in its very nature, is predicated on a number of factors, that is subject of multiple trans-disciplinary fields of study including, culture, history, economics, international trade, environmental sustainability, science and technology, tourism, leadership and power. While the skills, technology, land and other endowment factors that drive trade are all important, without the presence of trade routes that allow for the passage of goods, people and skills, trade would not be possible.

The trade route in the mid-7th century, as pointed out in Kordas, Lynch, Nelson & Tatlock's (2022) work, was between Southern Morocco, the Ancient Ghana and Mali Kingdoms and the Saharan territory. Caravan trade in the west of Africa was established in Timbuktu, Walata, Djenne, Katsina, Kano; and in the north African cities of Marrakesh, Fez, Tunis and Cairo (Korda *et al*, 2022; Nikis and Livingstone, 2017). Gold and Salt trans-Saharan trade linked the Mediterranean economies with camel caravan trade operating in Southern Morocco, as well as with the Mali and Ghana Kingdoms in West Africa. The trans-Saharan trade period was at its peak during the Islamic Golden Age between the 8th and the 13th century. Economic, social and educational institutions evolved around a caravan-based economy in Islamic society (Ma, 1998). This was the time when centres of learning flourished as a result of trade and cultural exchanges. For instance, one of the first universities in the world, Al-Qarawiyyin University was established during this time (859 CE) by Fatima Al-Fihri, a woman who migrated From Tunisia with her family to Fez in Morocco (Hoque & Abdullah, 2021). Timbuktu, where trade was thriving, was also known as an intellectual centre of African thought (Ajayi, Lameck, Goma & Johnson, 1996).

There is ample evidence that traces southern African, intra-Africa, or rather intra-village, trading of the precolonial time to the migratory drifts of the San, the Khoe and Kalanga people

who drifted from the northern to the southern parts of Africa (Mellet, 2020). In his groundbreaking account of the precolonial, colonial and decolonial history of Southern Africa, Patric Tariq Mellet (2020), traces the history of the establishment of the Mapungubwe by the Kalanga people who emerged from San people and settled at the Shashe-Limpopo Basin. Drawing from extensive archaeological evidence, history, genetics, linguistics, rock art, anthropology, and climatology, Mellet (2020) traces the establishment of the state of Mapungubwe. In his book, he provides evidence that Mapungubwe was a centre of trade during the period between 600CE and 1300 CE. The evidence is corroborated by Pikirayi and Pwiti (1999) and Huffman (2009). The Mapungubwe Kingdom was situated in the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers that form the current border between Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The wealth of the Kingdom of Mapungubwe was attributed to international trade in gold, glass beads, cotton cloth, ceramics, ivory, copper, and animal hides (Pikirayi and Pwiti, 1999). Mapungubwe trading routes included Swahili city-states on the East African coast into the Indian Ocean. In the 9th century trade expanded to Southern Tanzania in Kiswa Kisiwani (Huffman, 2009). Kisiwani, now classified as a World Heritage site, boasts a number of natural resources including ivory, timber, crystals (semi-precious stones), gold, copper, and iron. Kilwa flourished as a trading centre during the period between the 9th and the 15th century (Huffman, 2009). The decline of the Mapungubwe Empire coincided with the rise of the Great Zimbabwe Empire (Mellet, 2020), where the Great Zimbabwe trade route flourished.

The Great Zimbabwe Empire had its territory stretching across the south of the Limpopo River down to the Zambezi River and into the current region of Mozambique and Botswana. Precolonial trade in Zimbabwe is traced as far back as 700 – 1700 CE by Pikirayi and Pwiti (1999). Great Zimbabwe became the centre of trade in Southern Africa, connecting the Khoisan people in the South of Africa to the north east and north west of South Africa. The region produced copper and traded intra-regionally with merchants in the Katanga region of Congo

(Nikis and Livingstone (2017). An extensive account of precolonial trade in Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe Plateau is provided by Pikirayi and Pwiti (1999) as well as by Mellet (2020).

Selected Pre-Colonial and Colonial Events that had an Impact on African trade

The arrival of the Portuguese in present-day Ghana in 1471, with their subsequent control of the gold trade, changed the trade dynamics in Africa (Hilson, 2002). Their arrival led to the establishment of the European trading post that contributed to the transatlantic slave trade (Hilson, 2002). The Portuguese control over the gold trade in Ghana coincided with the rise of the Rozvi people – the Karanga ruling elite of the time. The Portuguese eventually switched their attention to slaves and were the first to drive what we now know as the transatlantic slave trade. There are over 100 battles and wars that were waged in Africa during this period, whose purpose was to seize and conquer territories in Africa in order to gain access to slaves and raw materials for the burgeoning transatlantic trade (Ezenwa and Udensi, 2021). As explained by Kordas et al. (2022), enslaved Africans were sources of sugar plantation labour in the Caribbean, Brazil and South America. Between 1501 and 1700 there were more than 1.2 million enslaved Africans taken on board ships in West Africa.

Table 1: Enslaved Africans taken on board ships in West Africa between 1500 and 1700

Year	Number of enslaved Africans
1501-1525	702
1526-1550	22,768
1551-1575	46,130
1576-1600	206,528
1601-1625	223,934

1651-1675	169,362
1676-1700	446,634

Source: Kordas, A., Lynch, R. J., Nelson, B., & Tatlock, J. (2022). *World History, Volume 2: From 1400*. OpenStax

Kordas et al. (2022) noted that trade in both sugar and slaves spurred growth in a number of industries, including ship-building industries, sugar refineries, rum production, as well as growth in the Bakery industry, banking and insurance industries, among others. Eventually, the Portuguese were expelled from the Zimbabwe plateau by the new rulers of Zimbabwe plateau – the Rozvi (Newitt, 2018), and in the 17th century, the Rozvi empire dominated trade through the ports along the Mozambique coast.

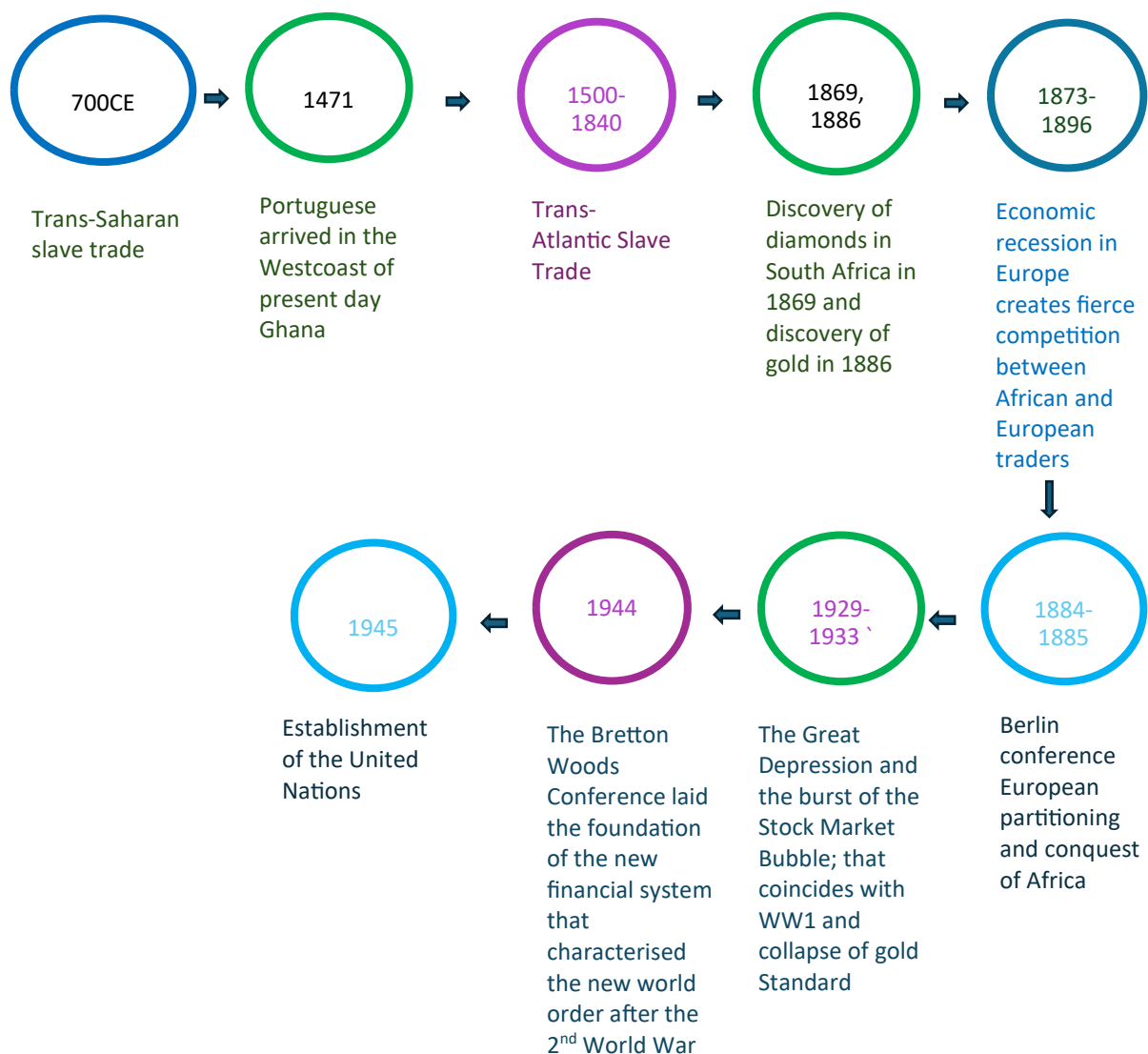
Towards the tail end of the transatlantic slave trade, when communities of the African continent were at their highest heights of vulnerability, paralysed by fear and grief of slave trade, the 1885 Berlin conference was convened to establish principles and rules for colonising Africa. In his work, Wang Shih-Tsung (1998) discusses how the Berlin Conference guided the acquisition of new territory in Africa by using any of the following modalities: (1) conquest; 2) cession; (3) occupancy or settlement. With these in place, the scramble for Africa started. The discovery of diamonds in South Africa in 1869 and the discovery of gold in 1886, attracted foreign capital and expanded trade in Southern Africa. Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho, were not created at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 as detailed in the following account by Ettinger (1974, p.7):

“Unlike most Africa states, these three [Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland] were created not at a conference in Berlin or by map-makers in London or Paris, but as a result of military and diplomatic manoeuvrings in southern Africa itself. By a combination of their own military strength and political astuteness, and the rivalry between the British and the Boers, the Batswana, Basotho and Swazis were able to

maintain themselves as political entities and to receive protection from Britain, leading eventually to their regaining full sovereignty in the late 1960s.”

Another key event that shaped African trade was the Great Depression of 1929-1933. The Great Depression was an aftermath of the bursting of the stock market bubble in 1929, which affected Europe's demand for African exports. Trade was significantly impacted as Western economies turned towards protectionism. World War 1 (1914 to 1918) and World War 2 (1939-1945) saw more than a million troops recruited to participate in the European wars (Ekundare, 1973). What was unanticipated was the exodus of European administrators to the Western fronts. This period did not only witness a sharp decline in trade imports but also the introduction of export licenses (Ekundare, 1973). Most importantly, World War 1 ushered in a period when the Gold Standard (a monetary system that links the value of a country's currency to gold) was abandoned.

Figure 2: Selected Precolonial and Colonial Events that had an impact on African trade



Source: Constructed by the author

It should be noted that in precolonial and colonial times trade expansion in Africa led to an influx of a variety of local precolonial currencies including salt, gold, cowrie shells, iron rods, beads, silk and other textiles, amongst other forms of exchange. These currencies formed an indigenous monetary system that gave African leaders greater political autonomy. The colonial rulers, with the introduction of the CFA and the West African Currency Board in 1912 created a colonial monetary system. The West African Currency Board, with its headquarters in London issued pounds pegged to gold. When the pound left the gold standard in 1931 (Hopkins, 1966), the currency revolution in Africa started as economies straddled between several currencies and exchange rate regimes. African economies struggled to adapt to the changing global conditions and to new monetary policies demanded by the collapse of the gold standard. Gardner's (2023) work showed how African governments incurred heavy financial losses introduced by inconsistencies in monetary policies due to different currency zones leading to different and fluctuating exchange rates. Merchants took advantage of the arbitrage opportunities offered by fluctuating exchange rates with negative impact on the colonial economies.

The exchange rate dynamics, the fluctuation in prices, poor trade performance and the world wars resulted in colonial grip loosening during World War 2. This is also the period that saw the reordering of the World's economic and financial systems as a result of the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, which birthed the new world order institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Trade Organisation and the

establishment of the United Nations in 1945. This is the time when the architecture of the hegemony of the United States of America was established by the decision to establish the US dollar as a dominant reserve currency, convertible to gold (details of the Bretton Woods Conference are provided in Solti, 2024) It is important to note how the new world order informed by the United Nations Charter was institutionalised in Africa with the establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

As mentioned earlier, the decolonial period coincided with the end of the World War 2, which saw colonial powers increasingly granting independence to former colonies. Ghana was the first colony to be granted independence from colonial rule in 1955. Of course the granting of independence did not end the forms of violence and conflicts that characterised colonial rule. To give more depth to the picture of conflicts in Africa during the decolonial era, it should be noted that out of 54 African countries, 45 have had at least one coup attempt since 1950 (Duzor and Williamson, 2022). During the same period, there were 204 coup attempts, out of which 106 were successful. Sudan had the highest number of coup attempts (17) followed by Burundi (11), Ghana (10) and Sierra Leone (10).

Table 2: Coups in Africa since 1950- 2020

Region	Coup attempts	Successful	Failed
Africa	214	106	108
Latin America	146	70	76
East Asia	49	27	22
Middle East	44	21	23
Europe	17	8	9
South Asia	16	10	6

Global	486	242	244
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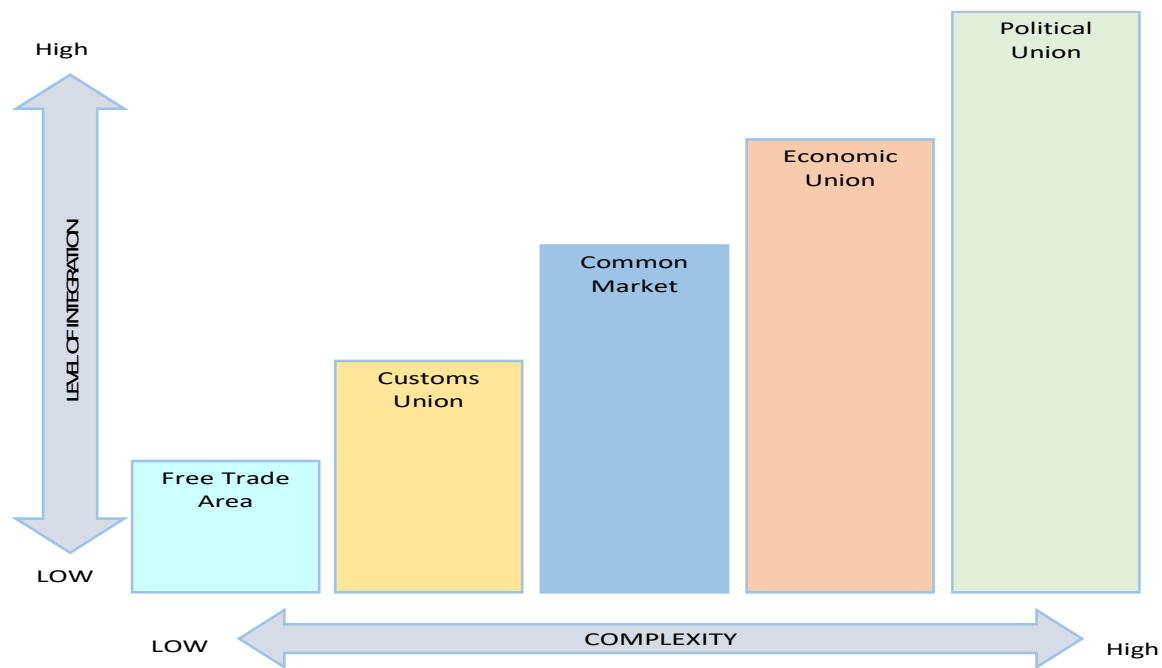
Source: Duzor and Williamson (2022).

AfCFTA Eight Regional Economic Communities: The Roots and the Trajectory

Regional integration is a subject that has attracted the interest of scholars for a long time. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an extensive critique of the regional integration literature. For African leaders during the early phases of independence from colonial rule, regional integration meant cooperation, solidarity and peace to improve the social and economic lot of all African people. However, Tinbergen (1954, p. 54), who won a Nobel Prize for his work on regional economics, defines economic integration as the “creation of the most desirable structure of international economy, removing artificial hindrances to the optimal operation and introducing deliberately all desirable elements of co-ordination of unification”. The theory categorises integration into five levels of integration (see Fig 3) with the Political Union being the deepest level of integration where political sovereignty is shared. For instance, the United Kingdom is a political union between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A Free Trade Area is a type of regional integration characterised by the removal of trade barriers but member countries can still trade with non-member states. The AfCFTA and SADC are examples of free trade areas. A free trade area has the lowest level of integration. A Customs Union, on the other hand, is where a group of countries that have established a free trade area agree on common external tariffs and a common external trade policy. Article 3 of the AfCFTA makes provision for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage.

Figure 3: Levels of Integration



Source: Constructed by the author

There are currently five Customs Union in force in Africa (WTO, 2024): (1) the Southern African Customs Union (SACU); (2) the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); (3) the East African Community (EAC); (4) the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU); (5) Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) – operational; and (6) The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

The next level of integration is the Common Market where there is free movement of goods, services, labour and capital across member states. An economic union is a Common Market area where member states integrate economic policies, including fiscal and monetary policies.

Tinbergen's work provided a framework for analysing trade creation and trade diversion. Tinbergen proposed that integration may lead to trade creation where higher-cost domestic production are replaced with lower-cost imports from partner countries, thus increasing welfare. Integration may also lead to trade diversion, where there is a shift in imports from a more

efficient non-member country to a less efficient member country due to tariff preferences, thus reducing welfare.

Even though Africa is home to more than 30 regional trade areas (Yang and Gupta, 2007), Article 1 of the AfCFTA makes provision for eight regional economic communities (RECs) recognised by the African Union: These include: (1) Arab-Maghreb Union (AMU); (2) Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); (3) Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); (4) Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); (5) Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS); (6) Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); (7) East African Community (EAC); (8) Southern African Development Community (SADC). Article 5 of the AfCFTA recognises the eight RECs as the “building blocs for the AfCFTA”.

The AfCFTA recognises the different levels of integration not only of the RECs but those of the Regional Trade Areas and the Customs Unions. Article 19 makes provision for regional trade areas, Customs Unions and RECs that have attained “*higher levels of regional integration*” by allowing for the higher levels of integration to be maintained.

To make sense of the current regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa, it would be helpful to cast light on the historical context of the establishment of the RECs, as presented in figure 4. As far back as 1895, France created a regional economic zone that was named the West African Federation as a union of the Ivory Coast, Mauritania, French Guinea, French Sudan, Upper Volta, Dahomey, Niger and Senegal (Bryant, 2020; Cowan, 1953). In 1905, the French Equatorial Africa was established. In 1912, Great Britain followed suit and established the West African Currency Board – the British Colonial Monetary System.

In present-day Africa, there are 14 African States that form part of two CFA Franc Zones that use the CFA Franc, backed by the French treasury and pegged to the Euro - Central African CFA franc (XAF) and the West African CFA Franc (XOF). Eleven of the 14 countries in the two CFA Franc zone are categorised as Least Developed Countries (LDC). LDC is a United Nations term for categorizing countries on the basis of three criteria: (1) average per capita income below \$1,018; (2) low score on the human asset index (which measures health and education outcomes); (3) high on economic and environmental vulnerability. LDCs, as mentioned earlier, are treated differently under the AfCFTA regime.

Yates (2018, p. 4) poses a pertinent question about the French Equatorial Africa and French West Africa: “Why were the two large federations of French [Equatorial] Africa and French West Africa broken up into 13 small and hardly viable states?”

In responding to this question, Yates cites McNamara (1989, p. 77) as follows:

Indeed, what better ways to perpetuate close relations than to split the empire into many dependent mini-states averaging 3 million souls each? Dealt with individually by France, these weak, financially strapped countries were likely to be less adventurous and to possess far less bargaining power than would two large, more financially secure federations.

Yates (2018) advances an argument that the weakness of the newly independent states of francophone Africa appears to be a conscious effort by France to preserve its dominance. This view is supported by Diop (2021) in a contention that the survival of the CFA currency, which is pegged to the Euro, provides France with privileged access to sources of supply of raw material, of course with the complicity of African ruling elites.

Table 2: Two CFA Franc Zone Countries in Africa

	Country	Current Regional Grouping	LDC Categorisation
West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)	Benin	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
	Burkina Faso	ECOWAS	LDC
	Côte d'Ivoire	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	Non-LDC
	Guinea-Bissau	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
	Mali	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
	Niger	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
	Senegal	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
	Togo	ECOWAS, CEN-SAD	LDC
Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC)	Cameroon	ECCAS	Non-LDC
	Central Africa	ECCAS	LDC
	Congo	ECCAS	LDC
	Gabon	ECCAS	Non-LDC
	Equatorial Guinea	ECCAS	LDC
	Chad	ECCAS, CEN-SAD	LDC

Source: Yates, D. A. (2018). France and Africa. Africa and the World: Bilateral and multilateral international diplomacy, 95-118

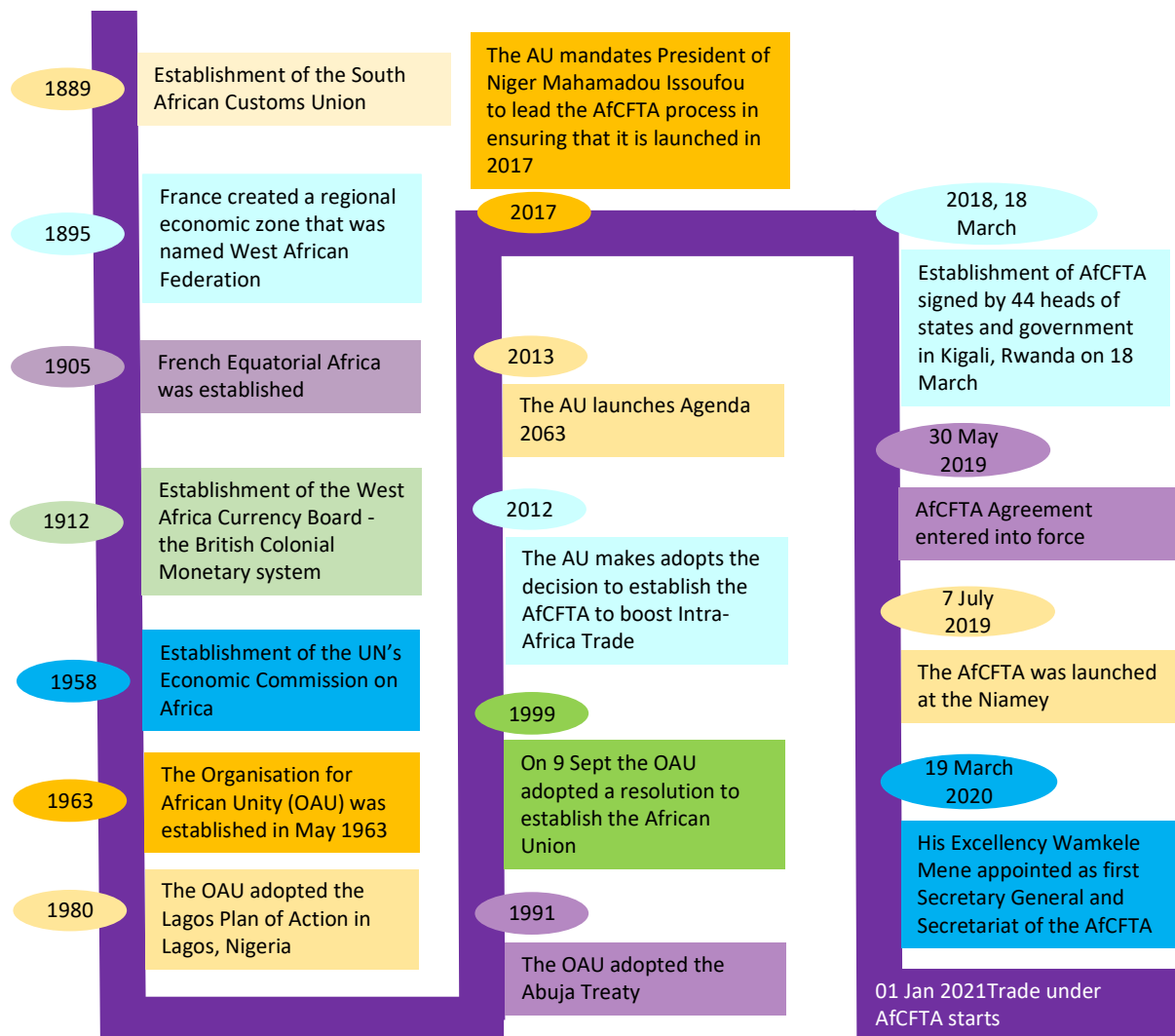
The cracks in the wall of the decolonial project started to show when the trade liberalisation policies exacerbated by the IMF's structural adjustment programmes led to inefficiencies in the performance of African economies (see, for example, a critique on the neoliberal approach on regional integration provided by Ngwu & Ojah, 2024). Joseph Stiglitz, on his part, notes that "The Western countries pushed trade liberalization for the products that they exported, but at the same time continued to protect those sectors in which competition from developing countries might have threatened their economies" (2002, p. 60). During this time, S

ub-Saharan Africa saw its income decline by more than 2% as a result of trade liberalisation (Stiglitz, 2002). Stiglitz views this as double standards and as the hypocrisy of the Western countries. Along the same thread of thought Hopkins (cited in Afreximbank, 2017) says the following:

“decolonisation was the greatest triumph of colonialism in how retreating colonial powers found allies in accommodating African elites, who then ensured the protection of British and French vested economic interests without the cost of political control for the retreating colonial powers”.

In 1958, fifteen years after the establishment of the United Nations, the UN’s Economic Commission of Africa was established with a mandate to foster intra-regional integration and promote international cooperation for Africa’s development. Here we see the genesis of the regional economic communities. In 1963, delegates from 32 African countries convened in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, to establish the Organisation for African Unity (OAU). The OAU stood for the liberalisation of Africa as well as the eradication of Apartheid from Africa. The OAU faced a set of its own unique challenges in navigating the decolonial era, most notably, the endeavours to unify divergent ideologies and territorial conflicts (see Matthews Karuvilla 1977). In 1980, the Organisation of African Union adopted the Lagos Plan of Action, which laid the foundation for Africa’s pursuit of economic integration and self-reliance.

Figure 4: Genealogy of the RECs in Africa



Source: Constructed by the author

The Plan of Action called for the establishment and strengthening of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks for a united African economic system, thus laying the foundation for the establishment of the AfCFTA and, ultimately, for achieving an African Economic Community. The Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community was adopted on June 3, 1991 (AU, 2022). The key objective of the treaty was to create a deep level of economic integration to promote the social and economic development of the member states. Eight years later, in Sirte, Libya, the OAU adopted a resolution to establish the African Union and to speed up the implementation of the provisions of the Abuja Treaty.

The signing of the AfCFTA on 21st March 2018 in Kigali by 44 countries represented a milestone on the road towards achieving the long-standing goal of closer African economic and political integration. On July 7, 2019, the AfCFTA was launched at Niamey in Niger at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of States of the AU. On 01 January 2021, trade under the newly formed AfCFTA commenced in earnest.

Concluding remarks

This chapter should be viewed with an understanding that there is vast material in literature to fill libraries on the colonial and post-colonial events that shaped the establishment of the AfCFTA. I have cited a very small fraction of the events and examples. This is not, at all, to suggest that the events not mentioned in this chapter are less eminent. On the contrary, citations provided not only show a path of learning and evidence to make the arguments advanced in this chapter complete but are also provided to encourage readers to explore the sources so they may arrive at their own interpretations and perspectives of the context leading to the establishment of the AfCFTA. In this chapter, I have shown that the establishment of the AfCFTA cannot be seen outside a complex web of archaeological, historical, economic and political events, and contexts regionally and globally. That said, this chapter is far from being a comprehensive account of the context of the AfCFTA. With broad brush strokes, this chapter has yielded broader insights into the challenges policymakers and scholars have to be aware of in implementing the AfCFTA. It is worth noting that the configuration of trade routes and trade flows as a result of the cutting off of economic and political ties with colonial powers is an avenue for further research, especially given the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States, made up of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. How the Alliance of Sahel States will coexist and

work with ECOWAS and the AU within the AfCFTA trade regime is fertile ground for further research.

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