

Information Brief on the CFTA

Third World Network-Africa

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Concerns on the ongoing negotiations on the proposed Africa's Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) and the much-needed industrialisation within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) became one of the topical issues during the 13th annual alliance gathering of faith-based organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations in Johannesburg, South Africa. The forum discussed other issues such as education, health and the political developments in the SADC region. These were contained in an outcome document that will inform the direction of the Alliance for the next one year.

The forum, convened by three constituencies-faith based organisations, non-governmental organisations and trade unions-brought together diverse civil society formations mainly from the SADC region and a few representatives outside the region, took place at Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, Boksburg, South Africa from the 14th-16th August 2017 to collectively reflect on ways to strengthen, secure and consolidate their organisations, common future and gains to advance the interest of the people for development, peace and justice.

Specifically, on the CFTA, the outcome document, which is the amalgamation of all the issues from the various thematic areas discussed during the conference, states that 'we as civil society from the SADC Region are concerned about the de-industrialisation of African economies, perpetual dependency on raw materials exports and de-skilling of people and workers over the years. This has resulted in weak or some countries almost non-existent domestic manufacturing base. The negotiations on CFTA, therefore, ought to start from this structural economic reality that confronts us. We are also concerned about the differences between production capacities among countries, across sectors, different players (small and big) and social groups. The CFTA negotiations should not result in unequal outcomes where bigger players reap much of the benefits at the expense of the small players. Development with equity must be ensured'.

The outcome document also touched on the low-intra African trade. 'We are further concerned about the low intra-Regional trade in the SADC Region and to a large extent in the whole of Africa due to the supply side constraints, quality standards and over liberalisation of African economies in relation to external partners that allows multinational corporations to entrench their dominance across the region. we are dismayed that the negotiations of the CFTA so far have officially excluded the voices of youth who make about large portion of the population, women, NGOs, trade unions and other stakeholders that are all critical to legitimatise the outcome of the CFTA' the outcome document reiterated.

The CFTA Thematic café was organised by Economic Justice Network (EJN) of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa (FOCCISA) and Third World Network-Africa on the second day of the conference, 15th August 2017.