

# Information Brief on the CFTA

Third World Network-Africa

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Negotiations on the proposed Africa Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) have gathered momentum. Within the first half of this year alone number of high profile meetings have taken place either organised by officials or civil society organisations. The latest is the Six Negotiating Forum-a continental gathering of all member states of the African Union- held in the Nigerien capital, Niamey, from 6<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

The meeting adopted the modalities- the formulas, targets or specific measures to guide the negotiations-on goods and services liberalisation/deregulation. Member states agreed to liberalise trade in goods up to 90 percent of tariff lines with flexibilities accorded in the remaining 10 percent for sensitive and excluded products. For services deregulation, a common positive list approach for progressive services liberalisation was adopted. That is listing of those sectors and subsectors that member countries agreed to undertake commitments. These are contained in a [report](#) by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa on the meeting.

Speaking at the opening ceremony in Niamey, Africa Union Commissioner on Trade and Industry, Albert Muchanga, raised the need to ensure that the liberalisation is counter-balanced with infrastructure development. This view seems to have been corroborated by South African Trade Minister, Rob Davies, who said the CFTA needs to be a driver of structural transformation in Africa as it is central to developmental regionalism.

Prior to this, ECOWAS as a Regional Economic Community (REC), held experts' consultation on the CFTA in Accra, Ghana, from the 16-18<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. This brought together most member states, civil society and the private sector, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Africa Union Commission. Similar meetings have been reportedly held in East and Southern Africa.

The concerns expressed by the Minister Davis at the Niger meeting have been the central theme of CSO gatherings on the CFTA, many of which have taken place under the banner of Africa Trade Network (ATN) this year. Three sub-regional consultations have been held so far. These consultations have acted as dialogue sessions between government officials, private sector, academia, women groups and NGOs. The latest one being the north Africa consultation held in Rabat, Morocco from the 28-30 June 2017. This was organised by Regions Refocus in collaboration with Third World Network-Africa.

In May 2017, just as the ECOWAS experts meeting was underway, another CSOs consultation on the CFTA was held in the East Africa region specifically in Uganda. This was organised by SEATINI in collaboration with ECONews-Africa and the ATN Secretariat. This meeting, like

the other consultations, benefited from broad participation-government officials, women groups and the Africa Union Commission. Prior to this, a similar multi-stakeholder consultation for the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) was held in Lusaka, Zambia from the 4-6<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

All these consultations, either at the official level or CSOs, were informed by the issues that confronted member states and other stakeholders at the maiden Edition of the Africa Trade Week, organised by the Africa Union Commission and the Africa Trade Policy Centre of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The meeting, which centred on the CFTA, took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from November 28 to December 2, 2016.

During the Trade Week, various concerns raised on the CFTA centred on the process, content and focus and deadline of 2017 by member states, private sector academia, women groups and NGOs as well as other stakeholders. For more information on CSOs concerns consult a [statement](#) issued preceding the Africa Trade Week.