**Are African Member States National Development Plans Aligned with AFCTFA? A case of Kenya, Nigeria & Zambia**

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) establishes one of the largest free trade areas in the world with an aggregate market of 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP of USD 3.4 trillion has the potential to significantly transform Africa’s trade and economic landscape

The AFCFTAs potential success is underpinned on radical shift from a net exporter of natural resources which captures little economic value in the global market to towards labor-intensive manufacturing as big corporations take advantage of economies of scale as well as competitiveness and productivity gains associated with the drastic reduction in the risk of investing in smaller markets.

Since the official launch in 2019, there has been great strides in making it a reality with the recent launch of the operational phase was characterised by the adoption of five key instruments ; rules of origin,tariff concessions, online mechanism on monitoring, pan-African payment and settlement systemThe African Trade Observatory

Some of the key benefits of the AFCTA include: Increasing trade among African countries which currently ranges between 15-18%, Stimulate production through the development of regional value chains, to ensure that manufacturing, agro processing and other activities across the continent are stimulated to supply the market, Strengthen the capacities of African companies to access and supply world markets and Strengthen Africa's economic and commercial diplomacy.

The million Shilling question is whether African member states are keeping up and aligning their national development plans with AFCFTA .

Kenya’s 2024 Budget policy statement a policy document that sets out the broad strategic priorities and policy goals that will guide the national and county governments in preparing their budgets for the financial year and over the medium term , the second under the Kenya Kwanza administration, reaffirms the priority policies and strategies under the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) and prioritised in the Fourth Medium Term Plan of the Vision 2030.

The 2024 Budget Policy Statement has targeted the following five core priority areas: agricultural transformation and Inclusive growth, micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME), housing and settlement, healthcare and digital superhighway and creative industry.

A quick review of the 2024 BPS access to market plan reveals a clear need for logical access to market plan for SMEs in terms of identified priority markets within the East Africa Economic bloc and AFCFTA

Further the BPS 2024 doesn't enumerate how MSMEs are going to be organized and linkage to the EAC, AFCTFA value chains. ie Through Constituency. Industrial Development Centers ( CIDCs) and KYEOP-MSEA or County Aggregation and Industrial Parks (CAIPs) or Development Centre in every ward or Industrial park and business incubation center in every TVET institution

Nigeria's National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025 recognises the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and aims to align national development goals with the regional integration agenda such as tariff reduction and removal, export development, regional value chain development under promotion of trade and investment sub plans as well as Capacity Building and Institutional Support with a focus on trade facilitation through strengthened customs and border management procedures to streamline trade processes and minimize delays, SME cross border capacity building to enhance their capacity to participate in regional trade.

Similarly Zambian Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) for the period 2022-2026 places a strong emphasis on aligning with regional integration frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in areas such as; market access through Intra-African Trade Promotion, trade barrier reduction and value chain integration and capacity Building and Institutional Support

Despite Africa’s volatile political climate that has seen new regimes ‘’ reinventing the wheel’’ in terms of programs and discontinue predecessor programs despite their success, there is an acute need for continued alignment of African member state national long term and medium term plans to ensure the potential AFCFTA benefits are realized.

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