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Webinar on the launch of the UNCTAD publication: “Implications of the African Continental Free Trade Area for BioTrade, Challenges and Opportunities”

Joint UNCTAD BioTrade and ABS Capacity Development Initiative event
Virtual Webinar on Zoom
10 November 2021, 10:00-13:00 (CET)

Version of 10 Nov 2021

Background:

The [African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\) Agreement](#) came into force in 2019 and has been signed and ratified by 37 countries in the African region as of 2021. As the largest global free trade area in terms of the number of participating countries, it has the greatest potential to drive Africa’s aim to attain inclusive and sustainable development in the next 50 years.¹ While sustainable socioeconomic development is one of the general objectives of the Agreement, the link between trade, environment and sustainability was not fully developed under the commitments that were negotiated up to December 2020. The AfCFTA would benefit from the inclusion of sustainable development considerations into the protocols that are currently still being negotiated in the second phase of the negotiations, as well as from the introduction of a specific protocol, a standalone chapter on trade and environment, with conservation and sustainable use biodiversity, as well as consideration of BioTrade.

In response to this, the BioTrade Initiative e-published, [“Implications of the African Continental Free Trade Area for Trade and Biodiversity: Policy and Regulatory Recommendations”](#) in August 2021. This study investigates the nexus between trade and biodiversity under the framework of the AfCFTA and seeks to identify potential entry points for BioTrade. The study circumspcctly presents recommendations, opportunities and implications of legal and sustainable trade considerations in the AfCFTA. With the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) also currently negotiating its [new global biodiversity targets](#), biodiversity conservation is increasingly becoming a crosscutting issue.

BioTrade² is understood as activities related to the collection, production, transformation and commercialization of goods and services derived from under environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria known as the [BioTrade Principles and Criteria \(P&C\)](#). Over the past two decades, BioTrade activities have been implemented in over 80 countries globally of which 20 countries in Africa. BioTrade partners and practitioners work in various sectors and value chains including personal care and food industries including argan oil, baobab pulp, honey, marula oil and shea butter.

¹ [Agenda 2063: “The Africa We Want” of the African Union.](#)

² “BioTrade” (uppercase “B” and “T”) activities are characterized by respect for environmental, economic and social criteria whereas “biotrade” may be used to describe the trade in biological resources, such as plant material for use as ingredients or inputs for food, cosmetic or industrial products.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly slowed the global growth of fast-growing African economies. In this context, sustained actions are needed to help African countries 'build forward better' by establishing a green development pathway. As African countries move towards economic recovery, they must focus on economic opportunities, including biodiversity-based solutions such as BioTrade. The latter is particularly relevant as many African countries have a comparative advantage in both biological and genetic resources. Furthermore, much of Africa's population depends directly on biodiversity and ecosystem services for their livelihoods. Natural capital accounts for between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the total wealth of most African countries. This would enable African countries to seize the opportunities for local value addition while capturing the growing consumer preference for biodiversity-friendly products and services.

Target audience:

The event will target current negotiators of the AfCFTA, party members of the agreement, as well as trade and legal experts and civil society working on sustainable trade, access and benefit-sharing, and BioTrade in the African region. The event is open to the public (registration and entry into the online meeting room will be regulated).

Purpose of the webinar:

The webinar will focus on specific topics related to trade including tariffs and non-tariff measures (NTMs), intellectual property rights, investment, competition policy as well as analyses treaty provisions from a BioTrade perspective:

1. Present the main findings and recommendations of the BioTrade AfCFTA study, especially to the negotiators of the AfCFTA and the governments who are part of the agreement.
2. Bring together experts in trade and biodiversity as well as the AfCFTA Secretariat to exchange and discuss ways on how the region can positively harness its rich biodiversity and increase its production and trade capacity which promote both economic recovery and environmental sustainability.
3. Explore current/potential issues (beyond the publication) on what the current challenges and opportunities provided by the AfCFTA are for trade and biodiversity, especially considering the many difficulties that African countries face due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach:

This virtual webinar will consist of two roundtable formats featuring the main authors, contributing authors/organizations, experts, and academics as speakers. The first roundtable will consist of the 2 main authors in which the moderator will ask a set of in-depth follow-up questions on the publication, especially on the main findings and recommendations. This will be followed by a Q&A session from the audience. The second roundtable will consist of contributing authors/organizations in which will focus on questions on the next steps, what needs to be done, and the challenges that are faced for the second phase of the negotiations. There will also be a Q&A session after the session and the meeting will then conclude with a closing session from the organizers.

This online event is organized under the global BioTrade programme "[Linking trade, biodiversity and sustainable development](#)" with the financial support of the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO. UNCTAD also gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ, under the [ABS Capacity Development Initiative](#) / the ABS compliant Biotrade in Southern Africa Project (supported by Germany, the European Commission, Norway and Switzerland) and the BioInnovation Africa Project (supported by Germany).

Tentative Programme:

10 November 2021

10 – 10:50 a.m. (Geneva time)	Welcoming remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD• Mr. Mohamed Ali, Director, Trade in Goods and Competition, AfCFTA Secretariat• Mr. Andreas Gettkant, Project Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)/ Manager, ABS Capacity Development Initiative & BioInnovation Africa• Mr. Philipp Ischer, Programme Manager, Economic Cooperation and Development, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, Switzerland
10:50 – 11:20 a.m. (Geneva time)	Roundtable by the main authors of the paper <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Frederic Perron-Welch, UNCTAD and ABS-I expert• Mr. Olivier Rukundo, UNCTAD and ABS-I expert
11:20 – 11:35 a.m. (Geneva time)	Q&A session
11:35 a.m. - 12:35 p.m. (Geneva time)	Roundtable: How to green the AfCFTA? Co-moderators: Mr. David Vivas Eugui , Legal Officer, UNCTAD Mr. Suhel al-Janabi , Lead Technical Consultant, BioInnovation Africa <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Trudi Hartzenberg, Executive Director, TRALAC• Mr. Pierre du Plessis, Advisor to the Africa Group of Negotiators on Biodiversity• Ms. Preshanthie Naicker, Project Director, South Africa Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment• Ms. Shamiso Mungwashu, Project Development Specialist, Fairtrade Support Network/BioInnovation, Zimbabwe
12:35- 12:50 p.m. (Geneva time)	Interactive Discussions
12:50 – 1 p.m. (Geneva time)	Closing Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Andreas Gettkant, Project Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)/ Manager, ABS Capacity Development Initiative & BioInnovation Africa• Ms. Lorena Jaramillo, Economic Affairs Officer, UNCTAD

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