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The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – an opportunity for BioTrade?

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Namibia

THE **ABS**
CAPACITY
DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVE



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DES CAPACITES
POUR L'APA

AfCFTA in brief

- Flagship project of Agenda 2063 – of 55 AU Member States 54 have signed and 47 have ratified
- Single African market for goods and services; free movement of persons, capital, and investment
- Largest FTA: 1.3 billion people, combined GDP of approximately US\$ 3.4 trillion
- Very early stage of implementation: October 2022 launched AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative
 - Only 8 countries, only ceramic tiles, batteries, tea, coffee, processed meat products, corn starch, sugar, pasta, glucose syrup, dried fruits, and sisal fibre
- Environment and biodiversity remain national prerogatives



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Some African realities

- Communities and ecosystems artificially divided by colonial borders (1884 Berlin Conference)
- Youngest region, population expected to double
- Biodiversity still very important for livelihoods
- Significant, rising pressures on ecosystems, to be accelerated by climate change impacts
- Traditional natural products still widely used
- Significant informal (sometimes illegal) trade across open borders – women and SMEs
- Emerging formal biotrade sector in some places
- ABS measures creating significant obstacles
- Support for multilateral benefit sharing, IPLCs



BioTrade Threats and Opportunities

- **Nature-based Solutions:** land grabs for “carbon colonialism” **but** AfCTFA aims to support development of carbon market across Africa – holistic?
- **Economies of scale:** small domestic markets limit potential for growth **but** free trade in biological resources could move value adding back to Africa
- **Single resource focus:** “nothing left but baobabs” **but** product diversification may support ecosystem-based approaches (and restoration)
- **Limited skills and capital:** many areas rich in biodiversity lack know-how and investment **but** free movement of persons and investment may help
- **Shared GR and aTK:** potential “race to the bottom” **but** coordinated approach, information sharing, and common standards could address
- **Modern biotech:** DSI and synbio can eliminate need for biodiversity **but** capacity development and tech transfer could keep benefits in Africa

Ensuring AfCFTA delivers for people and planet

- Adequate support for biodiversity custodians is key – recognised in IP Protocol
- Don't impose conservation burdens on the poorest
- Trade is good only if sustainable
- Plan to diversify value chains
- Support ecosystem restoration
- Increase local share of benefits
- Educate consumers
- Change will come from the bottom up – or not at all

