

The Impact of Trade Agreements on Women's Participation in Trade in Africa: A Landscape Analysis

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Abstract: The African continent, rich in resources and cultural diversity, has been experiencing pivotal changes in its international trade dynamics. As trade agreements burgeon, promising an interconnected economic future, there lies an under-analyzed aspect - the empowerment and participation of women in these newly forged trading paradigms. This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of how trade agreements influence and shape women's engagement in trade across the diverse nations of Africa. One can only mention trade in Africa if discussing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It stands as a beacon of hope for reshaping intra-African trade. This monumental agreement, encompassing a majority of African nations, could redirect the trade currents. Central to this investigation is how agreements like AfCFTA can be channelled to fortify women's economic roles.

Simplified trade regimes, the removal of stringent trade barriers, and an emphasis on diversified exports can collectively serve as gateways for women's heightened participation in commercial activities. However, the impact of such agreements extends far beyond the conventional contours of trade. They have the latent power to cultivate women's entrepreneurial spirits, usher in waves of female-centric job opportunities, and instigate programs that uplift the skill sets of women in trade. The positive ripples of these changes can be transformative, marking a dual victory for both gender equity and the broader macroeconomic growth of the region. However, this promising trajectory has hurdles. Despite the optimistic dawn of new agreements, African women continue grappling with challenges that hinder their ascent in the trade sector. At the heart of these challenges lies financial accessibility. The quest for financial resources, credit facilities, and expansion capital still needs to be discovered for many women-led enterprises. Coupled with this are the shadows of gender-specific barriers: cultural norms, biases, and overtly discriminatory practices that function as gatekeepers, often preventing women from venturing into numerous economic sectors.

The digital age, with its plethora of opportunities, unfortunately, introduces its disparities. There is a stark digital divide that's discernible across Africa. Technological gaps, marked by insufficient infrastructure and lack of digital literacy, hinder many women from harnessing the fruits of e-commerce and online trading, especially in remote regions, or need consistent developmental initiatives. Understanding these complexities, our study is not merely diagnostic but prescriptive.

This Study introduces an array of policy recommendations tailored to address the multifarious challenges enumerated. These policy suggestions range from enhancing digital literacy programs for women and fortifying micro-financing structures to launching awareness campaigns to combat deep-rooted gender biases. Every recommendation is underscored by a singular vision: ensuring inclusivity, diminishing gender disparities, and accentuating the prominence of women in Africa's trading future. To wrap up, the evolving narrative of international trade in Africa is teeming with potential. However, to translate this potential into tangible growth, this study seeks to ensure that every segment of society, especially women, is integrally involved. It is not just about economic numbers but crafting an inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future for all.

Keywords: AfCFTA, Digital divide, Gender equity, Trade agreements, Women's participation

Background

The historical context of women's roles in African trade provides a rich tapestry that underpins the contemporary dynamics of their participation. Traditionally, women in many African societies played crucial roles in local and regional economies, often dominating agriculture and market trading. This historical centrality of women in trade is often overlooked in conventional economic narratives but is pivotal for understanding current trends and challenges. In pre-colonial Africa, women were integral to the subsistence economy, responsible for food production and the management of household resources. Their involvement in trade was marked by selling agricultural produce and handmade crafts in local markets, a practice that laid the groundwork for female entrepreneurship in later periods (Davison, J., 1997). These activities provided economic sustenance and afforded women social autonomy and community influence.

The colonial period, however, brought significant disruptions. Colonial policies often marginalised women's economic activities, favouring male-dominated cash crop production and formal employment sectors from which women were excluded mainly (Allman et al.; V., 2000). This shift resulted in a dual economy where women continued participating in the informal sector but with reduced status and earning potential. Post-independence, the role of women in African trade underwent a further transformation. The structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s, prompted by international financial institutions, led to a retrenchment of state support for social services and a push towards market liberalisation (Tsikata, D., 2009). These changes disproportionately impacted women, pushing many into small-scale trading and informal sector activities to survive.

In West Africa, for instance, women traders, often called 'market queens', have historically controlled significant portions of commodity trading, including essential goods like textiles and food products (Clark, G., 2010). Women's participation in cross-border trade has been significant in Eastern and Southern Africa. Women traders have been pivotal in the informal cross-border trade, which, despite its lack of formal recognition, contributes substantially to the economies of these regions (Peberdy, S., 2002). These women have not only contributed to local economies but also played a role in shaping regional trade dynamics.

Women still dominate informal intraregional trade, which significantly contributes to socio-economic growth. It is estimated that 70% of informal cross-border trade in Africa is conducted by women traders (AfCFTA Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women). Overall, around 90 per cent of women in Africa are in informal employment compared with about 83 per cent of men (Popova & Özel, 2018). However, women informal cross-border traders and other small-scale traders, as revealed in a study by Zarrilli and Lopez (2020) on women traders in Eastern and Southern Africa, face challenges that include cumbersome border processes, weak governance at border posts, corruption and bribery, harassment, poor border facilities, payment of undue fees, misinformation about customs procedures and regulations, lack of access to capital and assets, and limited entrepreneurial skills and literacy, among others.

The journal article will explore the free trade areas established by agreements like COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) (1994), SADC (Southern et al.) (1992), and AfCFTA (African et al. Area) (2018) and their impact on women's participation in the trade in Africa. COMESA aims to simplify trade regimes, benefiting women-led businesses. SADC focuses on socio-economic development, with programs for women in cross-border trade. AfCFTA, a significant free trade area, promotes trade liberalisation, enhancing economic empowerment for women in intra-African trade. These areas, created by free trade agreements, are pivotal in boosting trade opportunities for women and overcoming entry barriers in Africa's trade sectors.

Free Trade Areas in Africa and Women's Participation in Trade

COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa)

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), encompassing 21 member states, is pivotal in driving sustainable economic growth in Africa. This integration is achieved through strategic trade and investment initiatives that leverage the region's rich natural resources and human capital. A notable example is the 2014 Simplified Trade Regime (STR), which aimed to support women in informal cross-border trade, a segment often overlooked in economic policies (Musonda, 2015).

COMESA's establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA) is a critical step towards eliminating trade barriers. As Karingi and Mekongcho (2016) outlined, this initiative enhances market access for goods and services, benefiting female traders by reducing trade costs and expanding business opportunities. The FTA symbolises a significant move towards gender-inclusive economic growth. The COMESA Rules of Origin determine eligibility for preferential treatment

within the FTA and are vital for women traders. These rules, detailed in the COMESA Handbook (2018), provide clarity and transparency, essential for navigating regional trade complexities and effectively accessing preferential tariffs.

Trade facilitation measures by COMESA, aimed at streamlining customs and improving border management, are crucial for reducing the bureaucratic challenges disproportionately affecting women traders. Studies by Njimanted and Nsoh (2017) highlight the importance of these measures in enabling women to engage more efficiently in trade. COMESA's commitment to gender mainstreaming and women's economic empowerment is evident in initiatives like the 50 Million African Women Speak Networking Platform Project. As Okeke-Uzodike and Simelane (2018) discussed, this project exemplifies the organisation's efforts to support women entrepreneurs across various regions, including the EAC and ECOWAS.

COMESA's initiatives, like the STR and Small-Scale Cross-Border Trade (SSCBT) framework, particularly benefit women in informal trade. As Moyo (2019) notes, these initiatives reduce trade barriers and provide support mechanisms for empowering women traders. While COMESA's policies offer significant potential for enhancing women's participation in trade, their impact depends on effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Kabaso and Mwema (2020) argue that addressing gender-specific barriers and promoting gender-responsive trade approaches are essential for furthering women's economic empowerment.

COMESA's role in regional economic integration, focusing on empowering women traders, showcases a progressive model of regional cooperation. Its commitment to gender equality and economic empowerment is critical for the region's sustainable development. Continuous adaptation and commitment to these policies are necessary to ensure they effectively meet the evolving needs of women traders.

COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR)

Simplified Trade Regime is a trade facilitation initiative based on the principles of free trade, and it is a special provision explicitly aimed at MSMEs who regularly transact in low-value consignments.¹ It is in line with Article VIII of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Agreement² and Provision of the Revised Kyoto Convention on simplifying and harmonising Customs Procedures³. The STR advocates for implementing simplified trade procedures for eligible small-scale traders to assist them in overcoming the obstacles they face at the border, contributing to the low levels of intraregional trade and informal trade (Nzohabonimana, 2017). The STR targets small-scale traders importing and exporting goods worth US\$ 2,000 or less on the Common list of eligible products negotiated and agreed upon by the two neighbouring countries.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 84% of employed women are in the informal sector (World Bank, 2018). In their study, Steel and Snodgrass (2008) found that the majority (59 to 83%) of informal sector workers are women. This is consistent with the Civil Society Organization of Botswana (2008) finding that in 2007, 67.6% of the country's informal firms were owned by women. Moreover, according to Chen et al. (2005), women are concentrated in the riskier types of informal employment. Thus, STRs can significantly impact women's participation in trade, particularly in developing countries where women often face more barriers and constraints than men. Simplified trade regimes aim to reduce trade barriers, streamline customs procedures, and facilitate cross-border trade.

SADC (Southern African Development Community)

The Southern African Development Community (SADC), a consortium of 16 member states, is a beacon of regional economic collaboration in Southern Africa. Establishing a Free Trade Area (FTA) within SADC is a strategic move aimed at dismantling tariffs and non-tariff barriers, fostering an environment conducive to trade expansion. This initiative, central to SADC's mission, is poised to significantly benefit women traders by carving out new business avenues, nurturing entrepreneurship, and catalysing the growth of women-led enterprises.

SADC's dedication to regional integration and economic cooperation is further exemplified through its various trade policies, notably the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). The RISDP, as articulated by SADC

¹ [https://www.tralac.org/blog/article/15847-small-scale-trade-and-the-simplified-trade-regime.html#:~:text=The%20Simplified%20Trade%20Regime%20\(STR,transact%20in%20low%20value%20consignments.](https://www.tralac.org/blog/article/15847-small-scale-trade-and-the-simplified-trade-regime.html#:~:text=The%20Simplified%20Trade%20Regime%20(STR,transact%20in%20low%20value%20consignments.)

² https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/ai17_e/gatt1994_art8_gatt47.pdf

³ https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/instrument-and-tools/conventions/pf_revised_kyoto_conv.aspx

(2020), is a long-term strategy that underlines the pivotal role of gender equality and women's empowerment in sustainable development. It provides a blueprint for gender-responsive trade policies, dismantling gender-specific barriers and boosting women's engagement in regional trade.

Adopting the Gender Mainstreaming Protocol by SADC marks a seminal advancement towards gender equity and women's empowerment in various sectors, including trade. This protocol, highlighted in the works of Chitiga and Mupedziswa (2019), underscores the need to address gender disparities in facilitating women's access to resources, skill development, finance, and markets. SADC's commitment to integrating gender perspectives into trade policies and programs is critical in amplifying women's participation and securing economic empowerment.

Trade facilitation measures implemented by SADC are instrumental in streamlining customs procedures, reducing paperwork, and enhancing cross-border trade efficiency. As analysed by Mlambo and Oloruntoba (2018), these measures are particularly beneficial to female traders, who often face disproportionate challenges in the trade sector. By simplifying trade processes and enhancing transparency, these measures enable women to participate more actively and efficiently in commerce.

SADC's efforts in promoting cross-border trade, mainly through the SADC Protocol, are notable. These initiatives, designed to simplify trade, improve border management, and support small-scale traders, are especially advantageous for women. Hamadziripi et al. (2021) observed that SADC's focus on reducing trade barriers and providing targeted support is essential for fostering women's participation in the cross-border trade and informal sector.

While SADC's trade policies have the potential to influence women's participation in trade positively, their effectiveness hinges on practical implementation, continuous monitoring, and rigorous evaluation. Addressing gender-specific challenges and advocating for gender-responsive trade approaches, including access to finance, market information, and capacity building, is crucial for furthering women's economic empowerment and inclusion in regional trade.

SADC's approach to economic integration, emphasising supporting women traders, exemplifies a progressive model of regional cooperation. However, the success of these policies relies on a sustained commitment to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of women in the trade sector.

AfCFTA (African Free Trade Area)

The AfCFTA has the potential to significantly enhance the participation of women in trade throughout the African continent. The primary objective of this trade agreement is to enhance intra-African trade and stimulate economic growth by establishing a unified market for goods and services, streamlining the movement of goods, services, and individuals, and fostering regional integration. The agreement lays the foundation for establishing a continental customs union and facilitating the free movement of persons, capital, labour and investments (AfCFTA Agreement, Article 3). The AfCFTA has the potential to exert a favourable influence on the involvement of women in trade through various means. First and foremost, trade liberalisation has the potential to generate novel market prospects for women entrepreneurs and businesses by facilitating their entry into a broader consumer market. This phenomenon has the potential to result in a rise in exports and the expansion of businesses, thereby fostering economic empowerment for women.

Secondly, the AfCFTA can facilitate the integration of women into regional and global value chains. The AfCFTA is projected to support Africa's structural transformation by increasing intra-African trade and strengthening regional value chains and industrial networks (Xolani T et al., 2022). Implementing the AfCFTA might result in a 10% boost in earnings, with unskilled employees and women benefiting the most. Reducing trade barriers, such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers, makes it easier for women-owned businesses to participate in cross-border trade, access inputs, and engage in value-added activities.

Additionally, the AfCFTA has the potential to facilitate the diversification of sectors and industries (Saygili et al., 2018), thereby potentially resulting in increased participation and representation of women in various economic sectors. The integration of women into diverse sectors of the economy challenges the conventional gender roles that society has historically assigned to women. Including women in non-traditional sectors facilitates their economic autonomy and social empowerment. Promoting economic autonomy and social empowerment among women is crucial in facilitating their engagement in trade activities within the African context.

To maximise the immense potential of the AfCFTA for the active involvement of women in trade, it is imperative to tackle the unique obstacles and difficulties they face. In promoting inclusive trade practices, various strategies have been identified to foster equitable opportunities for all stakeholders. These strategies encompass a range of initiatives,

including but not limited to enhancing access to finance, offering specialised assistance for capacity building and skills development, advocating for gender-responsive trade policies, and actively involving women in decision-making processes on trade.

In addition to the points above, it is crucial to emphasise the significance of allocating resources towards physical and social infrastructure, specifically in healthcare and education. By doing so, we can effectively bolster women's economic empowerment and equip them with the necessary tools to capitalise on the opportunities that arise from the AfCFTA. By implementing these strategic measures, the AfCFTA has the potential to serve as a powerful catalyst for fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth throughout the African continent. This transformative initiative holds the promise of benefiting both men and women, ensuring that both genders can reap the rewards of this historic trade agreement.

The impact of trade agreements on various groups of women

The World Bank classifies three groups of women traders particularly affected by trade agreements. These are

- Women who produce traded goods and services ranging from rural farmers of cotton to professional activities such as legal and accountancy services and
- Women entrepreneurs with dominant ownership of exporting companies.
- Informal cross-border traders (Brenton, Paul 2013).

The impact of trade agreements on various groups of women has been observed to vary significantly. However, it is worth highlighting these agreements' profound influence on informal cross-border traders, as numerous studies conducted across the continent consistently reveal that most individuals engaged in this sector are women (Brenton, Paul 2012). When examining the effects of free trade areas on informal cross-border traders in Africa, it becomes evident that both positive and negative impacts are at play.

Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT), defined by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), encompasses exchanging goods and services between neighbouring countries conducted by vulnerable, small, unregistered traders. Typically, it is proximity trade involving the move of produce between markets close to the border. The informality refers to the trader's status (unregistered), not necessarily to the trade itself (captured or unrecorded by the official customs system). ICBT often involves small-scale traders who exchange goods and services outside formal regulatory frameworks and operate without formal licenses or permits.

Positive impacts of Free Trade Areas on women's participation in trade:

- Increased market access: Free trade areas create larger markets and reduce trade barriers, allowing informal cross-border traders to access a broader market outside their local markets. This can lead to increased opportunities for trade and income generation for women participating in trade as informal traders.
- Reduced transaction costs: Free trade areas simplify customs procedures, streamline border processes, and progressively reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers. This can lower transaction costs for informal traders, making it easier and more affordable for them to engage in cross-border trade.
- Enhanced competitiveness: Free trade areas can promote competition by eliminating protectionist measures and encouraging fair trade practices. This can spur informal traders to improve the quality of their products and services, enhance productivity, and innovate to remain competitive in the new market environment.

Negative impacts

- Displacement of informal traders: In some cases, the formalisation of trade through free trade areas may lead to the displacement of informal traders who cannot meet the regulatory requirements or compete with formalised businesses. As a result, this can leave vulnerable traders with no source of income.
- Increased competition: Free trade zones can attract established companies and foreign investors, intensifying informal traders' competition. Small-scale traders may need help to compete with larger firms with more excellent resources and economies of scale, resulting in a possible decline in their market share.
- Regulatory challenges: Informal traders often need help complying with formal regulations and requirements imposed by free trade areas. This may include issues related to licensing, taxation, and meeting quality standards. Compliance costs and administrative burdens can pose challenges for informal traders, limiting their ability to benefit fully from the opportunities presented by free trade areas.

It is important to adopt inclusive policies that recognise and support informal traders' unique needs and contributions to mitigate these negative impacts and maximise the benefits for informal cross-border traders, particularly women. This can include providing targeted support for capacity building, access to finance, and simplified regulatory procedures tailored to the informal sector.

Some ways these regimes can affect women's participation in trade include:

In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 84% of employed women are in the informal sector (World Bank, 2018). In their study, Steel and Snodgrass (2008) found that the majority (59 to 83%) of informal sector workers are women. This is consistent with the Civil Society Organization of Botswana (2008) finding that in 2007, 67.6% of the country's informal firms were owned by women. Moreover, according to Chen et al. (2005), women are concentrated in the riskier types of informal employment. Thus, STRs can significantly impact women's participation in trade, particularly in developing countries where women often face more barriers and constraints than men. Simplified trade regimes aim to reduce trade barriers, streamline customs procedures, and facilitate cross-border trade.

Some ways these regimes can affect women's participation in trade include:

- **Increased access to markets:** Simplified trade regimes can enhance women's access to markets by reducing administrative burdens, paperwork, and trade costs. This can make it easier for women, especially those in informal trade, to participate in cross-border trade and reach a more extensive customer base.
- **Reduced gender-specific barriers:** The participation of women in commerce is frequently hindered by gender-specific obstacles, such as discriminatory regulations, cultural norms, and limited access to information and resources. Simplified trade regimes that promote gender equality and inclusive trade policies can assist in overcoming these obstacles and creating a more hospitable environment for women to participate in trade.
- **Enhanced economic empowerment:** Increased participation in trade can contribute to women's economic empowerment by providing them with opportunities to generate income, enhance their financial independence, and broaden their economic options. Simplified trade regimes can support the growth and integration of women-owned businesses into the formal economy.
- **Capacity building and support:** Simplified trade regimes can be coupled with targeted capacity-building programs and support mechanisms to enhance women's trade-related skills, knowledge, and access to finance. This can help women overcome the specific challenges they face in trade, such as limited access to credit, lack of market information, and low awareness of trade regulations.
- **Promoting inclusive policies:** It is crucial to ensure that simplified trade regimes are designed to focus on gender and consider women traders' unique needs and priorities. This includes addressing gender-based violence, ensuring access to social protection, promoting fair and equitable working conditions, and addressing any discriminatory practices that may hinder women's economic participation.

Governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders must collaborate and implement gender-responsive policies and programs to maximise the impact of simplified trade regimes on women's participation in trade. This can create an enabling environment that supports women's empowerment, economic inclusion, and equal opportunities in the trade sector.

Digitalisation

The interplay between trade agreements, digitalisation, and women's participation in trade is a crucial aspect of the modern global economy. Trade agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) are instrumental in breaking down barriers and fostering economic integration. When these agreements emphasise digitalisation, they open up new opportunities for women entrepreneurs and traders. Digital platforms and tools facilitated by these trade agreements can significantly lower entry barriers for women in business, allowing them more access to new markets, streamlined trade processes, and enhanced networking opportunities.

The digital age, with its plethora of opportunities, unfortunately, introduces its disparities. There is a stark digital divide that's discernible across Africa. Technological gaps, marked by insufficient infrastructure and lack of digital literacy, hinder many women from harnessing the fruits of e-commerce and online trading, especially in remote regions, or need consistent developmental initiatives. Understanding these complexities, our study is not merely diagnostic but prescriptive.

UNCTAD policy review at the UN Trade Forum 2023 argued that overcoming existing North-South disparities and addressing gender discrimination in society and in the economy is vital if e-commerce is to support sustainable development (UNCTAD,2023). Some businesses, such as women-led small enterprises in rural areas, face multiple barriers to access and Internet use. Currently, most women lack access to technological resources, which hinders their ability to participate in e-commerce.

Gender determines how both men and women use and benefit from the internet. These differences result from pre-existing gender gaps and gender digital divides (UNCTAD,2023). The gender digital divide is defined by Thystrup (2018) as “impaired access to IT infrastructure or IT skills education based on gender. There may be several obstacles to meaningful connectivity and use of the Internet for productive purposes, including affordability, unsuitability of content and language used, lack of digital skills and awareness of the benefits of use (Hosman & Pérez Comisso, 2020).

Women in trade have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by the above obstacles. For example, women-led MSMEs are less likely to seize Internet opportunities, even when coverage and access are flexible. A study conducted by the World Wide Web Foundation (2015) estimates that women who are already online are 30 to 50 per cent less likely than men to use the Internet for income-generating activities.

A survey by UNCTAD in 2019 among female farmers across various supply chains in Myanmar reveals that respondents were reluctant to use the Internet to seek information about prices and potential new markets for their produce despite having mobile Internet access (UNCTAD, 2020). Utilising the Internet to enhance skills and knowledge and locate business-related information and opportunities would benefit female entrepreneurs.

E-commerce can foster the service economy, in which many women are employed, and can improve knowledge, skills and access to information about entrepreneurial opportunities. Overall, digital solutions that remove the need for face-to-face interactions for a transaction can help women overcome mobility constraints and discrimination and even reduce exposure to violence (World Trade Organization (WTO) and OECD, 2017; World Bank and WTO, 2020).

Trade agreements can ensure that women traders are integrated into spaces, allowing them to participate in e-commerce through online trading of goods and services. Negotiations for the AfCFTA e-commerce protocol are still underway. The E-commerce Protocol, also known as the Protocol on Digital Trade, aims to promote the emergence of African-owned e-commerce platforms at national, regional and continental levels. This protocol increases market access for all, such as customs duties, valuation and pricing, cross-border flows and digital products.

Recommendations

To enhance women's participation in international trade, it is crucial to incorporate strategies that raise awareness and provide training on the opportunities trade agreements offer. These initiatives are fundamental to ensuring that women understand the potential benefits of these agreements and possess the skills and knowledge to capitalise on them effectively. To this end, the following comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategy has been developed to empower women in the African trade environment:

- ❖ **Reduction of Tariffs and Trade Barriers:** Implement policy reforms to lower tariffs and trade barriers in sectors where women are predominantly involved, like textiles and agriculture, to expand their access to international markets.
- ❖ **Enhanced Access to Finance:** Develop measures to improve financial inclusion for women, such as introducing microfinance schemes and gender-responsive investment programs tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs.
- ❖ **Gender Mainstreaming in Trade Policies:** Incorporate gender considerations into all trade policies, ensuring they address women's challenges, including gender-based violence and access to resources.
- ❖ **Data Collection and Research:** Invest in gathering gender-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policymaking and monitor the impact of trade policies on women's economic empowerment.
- ❖ **E-commerce and Digital Trade:** Incorporate gender considerations in e-commerce and digital trade policy discussions, following the framework set by the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment.

- ❖ Digital and Transport Infrastructure Development: Allocate public funds to enhance digital connectivity and develop transport infrastructure, addressing the digital divide and improving women's access to trade networks.
- ❖ Virtual Trade Opportunity Forums: Create online forums and webinars to educate women about trade agreements and opportunities, leveraging virtual platforms for broader accessibility.
- ❖ Mobile-Based Financial Literacy Apps: Introduce user-friendly mobile applications that enhance financial literacy among women traders.
- ❖ Digital Trade Skill Bootcamps: Organize digital bootcamps offering hands-on experience in e-commerce, digital marketing, and modern digital tools essential for international trade.
- ❖ Multilingual Trade Communication Workshops: Conduct language workshops to empower women with the necessary communication skills for global market engagement.
- ❖ Legal Clinics for Trade Regulations: Establish legal clinics to guide international trade laws and compliance, making legal assistance accessible to women traders.
- ❖ Sector-Specific Innovation Labs: Set up innovation labs focusing on sectors like textiles and agriculture, providing specialised resources and training.
- ❖ Global Trade Networking Platforms: Develop online platforms for networking, mentorship, and partnership among women traders globally.
- ❖ Entrepreneurial Leadership Academies: Launch academies dedicated to developing entrepreneurial and leadership skills among women in trade.
- ❖ Trade Policy Simulation Games: Create simulation games for practical and engaging learning experiences in trade dynamics and decision-making.
- ❖ Feedback-Driven Training Adaptation: Implement a system for collecting real-time feedback to continuously refine and update training programs based on the evolving needs of women in trade.

These strategies aim to create a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future for all in Africa's trade landscape by addressing financial, educational, technological, and policy-related barriers and harnessing the power of digital tools and international collaboration.

In summarising the landscape analysis presented in "The Impact of Trade Agreements on Women's Participation in Trade in Africa," it is evident that inclusive and equitable trade policies are vital for harnessing the full potential of women in the African trade sector. These policies are not merely instruments of fairness but are crucial drivers of sustainable economic growth and societal advancement. Addressing the specific challenges women face in trade, such as constrained access to finance and market information, these policies bridge the gender gap, enabling women to participate in trade effectively. Women's empowerment in trade extends beyond individual economic gains; it catalyses community-wide benefits, enhancing health, education, and overall societal well-being. The diverse involvement of women across various trade sectors contributes to economic diversification, enriches business innovation, and fosters competitive resilience in economies.

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