

Support to ECOWAS Commission in the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Improving framework conditions for implementing the AfCFTA Agreement in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Challenges

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is actively committed to fostering regional economic integration. In 2018, all Member States of the Community signed the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to promote trade across the entire African continent and creates a united African market of 1.3 billion people. ECOWAS supports its Member States toward finding common negotiating positions in the AfCFTA negotiations, assists them in developing strategies for the regional implementation of the agreement and provides technical assistance to public and private sector actors.

A major challenge lies in the holistic implementation of the AfCFTA within the ECOWAS region. While the current institutional and regulatory framework reflects significant advancements in regional integration, it needs to be further developed to meet the complex demands of the AfCFTA. In addition, ECOWAS Member States face varying degrees of difficulty in implementing the agreement at the national level, particularly due to limited technical expertise and institutional inadequacies. Importantly, both the private sector and public authorities struggle with a lack of transparent and up-to-date information on regional and continental trade regulations.

Approach

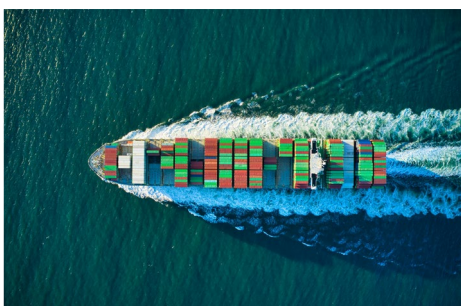
The project supports ECOWAS in the implementation of the AfCFTA by strengthening key implementation frameworks and advising on processes at continental, regional and national levels.

Project title	Support to ECOWAS in the Implementation of the AfCFTA
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Funded by	European Union (EU) and German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implemented by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Project region	ECOWAS Member States
Political partner	ECOWAS Commission
Overall duration	01/2023 – 03/2029
Financial volume	EUR 20.5 million

Working closely with the ECOWAS Commission and Member States, it promotes a coordinated implementation of the goods and services aspects of the agreement at all levels in the region.

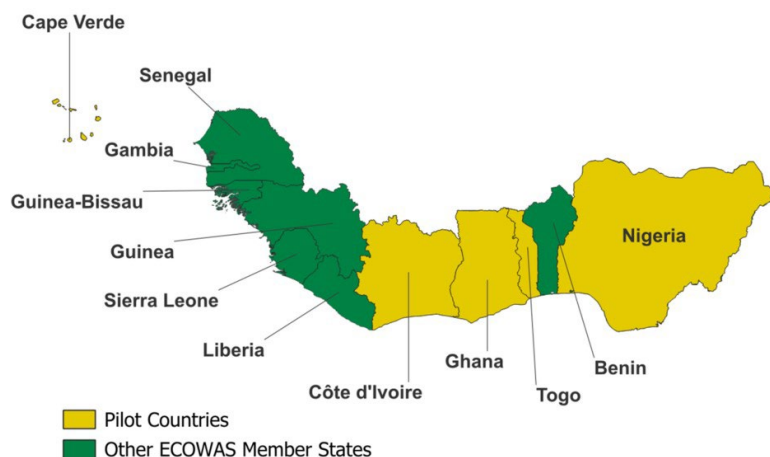
To remove trade barriers and deepen regional integration, the project supports the rollout and continuous strengthening of digital solutions for customs cooperation, such as the Interconnected System for the Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) and the ECOWAS electronic certificate of origin. It strengthens the capacity of public sector actors to enable them to facilitate regional and continental trade more efficiently.

The project also actively engages the private sector, with a focus on small businesses and women-led enterprises, to ensure their unique interests are adequately reflected in trade facilitation and trade in services measures and strategies. It helps businesses identify new export opportunities and supports the development of user-friendly trade portals.



Left: Container ship

Right: Documentation for export
procedure in Benin



Success Story

Mrs. Temitope Mayegun, the Founder and Managing Director of Avila Naturalle Limited, is a Nigerian entrepreneur gaining momentum with her natural body care and household products. In 2024, her company became **one of the first Nigerian businesses to trade under the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI)**, delivering 5,000 pieces of black soap to Kenya.

With the support of the AfCFTA project, Mrs. Mayegun participated in the GTI launch in Lagos, Nigeria, in July and the **BIASHARA Afrika Forum in Kigali, Rwanda**, in October 2024. These events opened doors to potential buyers from countries like Egypt and Tanzania. *"They've been dragging me for how many months now, he wants me to come and establish there. They want me to bring my products there,"* she says, as she received orders for her popular papaya oil, which sold out within a day at the forum.



Mrs Temitope Mayegun, the Founder and Managing Director of Avila Naturalle Limited, together with Olusegun Olutayo, Senior Trade Expert at the Nigerian AfCFTA Coordination Office, at the BIASHARA Afrika Forum.

However, Mrs. Mayegun's journey wasn't without challenges. *"It was a lot of work, and it took me months to fill in everything,"* she recalls about the overwhelming paperwork and high costs of documentation. *"Without access to loans, scaling up production and managing upfront logistics costs were difficult,"* she explains about the challenges she faced in accessing finance and responding to the increased demand for her products.

Through public-private dialogues and business matchmaking events, the AfCFTA project helps **raise awareness in the public sector about the needs of private businesses and identify export opportunities** for export-ready companies like hers. These efforts make it easier for entrepreneurs to seize opportunities presented by the AfCFTA and expand their reach across the continent.

For Mrs. Mayegun, the AfCFTA project has provided valuable opportunities to connect with international markets and has contributed to her business's growth. *"It really opened up a lot of opportunities for me,"* she says, reflecting on the positive impact of these initiatives.

Key results

The project aims to achieve five key results:

- **Improved regional coordination:** The Member States' positions in AfCFTA negotiations are better coordinated in order to ensure a unified representation of ECOWAS interests.
- **Streamlined implementation processes:** The coordination among Member States on technical design of the legal framework for AfCFTA implementation is strengthened.
- **Strengthened technical capacities:** The authorities of ECOWAS and the Member States are equipped with stronger technical competencies and a better understanding of the benefits of the AfCFTA.
- **Enhanced information access:** The private sector, public authorities and civil society have better access to the trade regulations and market opportunities in the ECOWAS region, particularly those under the AfCFTA.
- **Improved climate-friendly trade:** ECOWAS Member States have expanded agreements on regional and continental trade in services, taking climate protection into account.

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