Panel Proposal

**Rights-Based Collaborative Approaches for Gender-Responsive Financial Inclusion in the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Sustainable Development**

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Introduction:

The African Union took a significant step towards boosting intra-continental trade during its 18th Ordinary Session in January 2012 when it adopted the decision to create a continental free trade area for goods and services among its 54 member countries, which collectively represent about 1.3 billion people. This initiative aimed at exploring collaborative possibilities in various areas such as policy, facilitation, production, infrastructural development, information, finance, and market integration, with the goal of achieving a GDP of around USD$3.4 trillion. Negotiations are currently underway to remove tariffs on 90% of goods over a 10-year period for the least developed countries, and the World Bank's June 2022 report projected a significant wage gain for women through industrial expansion, estimating a rise of about 11.2%. However, in order to ensure the sustainability of these efforts, it is crucial to prioritise effective policies and institutions that ensure marginalized individuals and communities are considered as equal stakeholders in the implementation of these policies.

Panel Focus:

To address these pressing issues, we intend to convene an expert panel consisting of policymakers, academics, financial experts, and development practitioners, to discuss the potential for enshrining a justifiable regional framework for inclusive policy implementation in countries that have ratified the AfCFTA agreement.

We recognise that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents a transformative opportunity for intra-African trade and economic growth, with the potential to lift millions out of poverty. However, to ensure that the benefits of AfCFTA are inclusive and sustainable, it is crucial to adopt rights-based collaborative approaches that prioritize gender-inclusive financial inclusion.

The proposed panel will particularly focus on the context of implementing the protocol for free labour migration and how gender responsiveness is reflected in the creation of visa-free zones, as well as strategies for promoting valuable production while taking into account the unique circumstances of least developed countries destabilized by conflicts or transitioning from conflict contexts. Additionally, the panel will explore ways to manage political and language barriers to trade across Lusophone, Francophone, and Anglophone Africa in order to boost income on the continent towards the benchmark of USD$450 billion in just over the next decade.

Proposed areas for discussion:

* How can policy measures be implemented to ensure inclusive and justiciable regional frameworks for policy implementation under the AfCFTA agreement, with a specific focus on gender-inclusive financial inclusion?
* What concessions could be legalised as sustainable trade measures for least developed countries affected by conflicts or transitioning from conflict contexts, while ensuring that the needs of marginalized groups, including women, are prioritized?
* How can intra-continental bilateral trade relations be brokered without neocolonial interference in order to lift 30 million Africans from extreme poverty, while promoting equitable participation of women in trade activities?
* What measures can be taken to manage political and language barriers to trade across Lusophone, Francophone, and Anglophone Africa to boost income on the continent towards the USD$450 billion benchmark in just over the next decade, while ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into trade policies and practices?

Insights:

The panel discussion aims to provide insights and recommendations on how rights-based collaborative approaches can be promoted for gender-inclusive financial inclusion in the implementation of AfCFTA for sustainable development. By prioritising inclusive policies and institutions, addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, and promoting equitable trade relations, the panel hopes to contribute to the successful and inclusive implementation of AfCFTA, leading to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa.

**Conveners**

**Philip Ademola Olayoku** is a Co-Director and serves as the Coordinator of the West African Transitional Justice Centre (WATJCentre). He is also the Chair of Marcel Advisory's Think Tank and a Senior Research Fellow of the Institut Francaise de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA-Nigeria) at the University of Ibadan. Recently, he served as a consultant on the UNDP Anticorruption Initiative project and the Media and Terrorism Project for the Centre for Journalism, Innovation, and Development (CJID - formerly PTCIJ). Additionally, he has been an expert for the African Union Commission on the validation of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) guide. He holds a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Ibadan and has taught as an adjunct at the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies and the Cultural and Media Studies Programme. His published works on security issues can be found in reputable journals such as African Security Review, Digital Policy Studies, African Notes, and the African Journal on Conflict Resolution. He is passionate about inclusive economic policies and has recently co-founded the Centre for Research of African Digital Policy and Innovations as a platform for promoting inclusive financial engagements in the digital age.

**Dr King Omeihe** is an Associate Professor of Small Business at the University of the West of Scotland and the President of the Academy for African Studies. With a wealth of experience in academia and policy advisory, Dr Omeihe has held positions such as the Head of Division at the University of Aberdeen, Chair of African Studies at the British Academy of Management, and Chair of Ethnic Minority Groups at the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. In addition, he currently serves as the Chair and Senior Economic Advisor on African Economic Policy at Marcel House, an African-focused think tank. Dr Omeihe's educational credentials include a diploma from the University of Cambridge, an MBA from the University of Aberdeen, and a PhD from the Doctoral College of the University of the West of Scotland.

**Gloria Mkushi** is an International lawyer, specialised in international development and intergovernmentalism, having trained in European Union law in The Netherlands. A Southern African, she was worked on Global-North partnerships and relationships within the gender-development axis, the rights of women and children’s development, peace and conflict specifically within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and several rights-based, children’s NGOs. Before establishing Interdev Consulting in Nairobi, Harare and The Hague, she worked for the COMESA regional development finance institution, the Trade and Development Bank.

**Uyi Lawani** has been a university teacher since 2006. He is currently an Associate Professor of Strategic Management in the Lewis College of Business at Marshall University. He has previously been an Assistant Professor of Business at Concordia University, Wisconsin. He earned a PhD in Strategy and Economics as a Toulouse Fellow at the University of North Texas. He holds an MBA in Finance from East Carolina University and a BSc in Microbiology from the University of Benin in his native Nigeria. He started his career as a soldier in the Nigerian Army, after which he worked as a Research and Development Chemist in UACN which was Nigeria’s biggest business conglomerate at the time, and then as a banking executive in a couple of Nigerian banks. Dr. Lawani’s research interest covers corporate governance and organizational performance at the micro level, and developmental finance and economics at the macro level. He is a lifelong learner and is always excited about the discovery of new knowledge and ideas.