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The Future of Cross-Border Trade within Africa Trade Series Part 1: Interoperability of Trade; Is a Ministry of Integration a Necessity or Nicety?

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) powered by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, an agency under the African Union is poised to transform the economic landscape of Africa by creating a single market for goods and services across 54 countries. This monumental step aims to boost intra-African trade, stimulate investment, and foster sustainable development. However, to fully realize its potential, effective coordination and implementation at the national level are crucial. This raises the question: is a Ministry of Integration a necessity or merely a nicety for the member states of the AfCFTA?

Understanding the Role of a Ministry of Integration

A Ministry of Integration would be a specialized governmental body dedicated to managing and facilitating the integration process within the AfCFTA framework. Its primary functions would include harmonizing national policies with AfCFTA agreements, coordinating with other member states, promoting infrastructure development, enhancing capacity-building initiatives, and resolving trade disputes. By focusing exclusively on the nuances of continental trade integration, such a ministry could provide the targeted leadership and expertise necessary to overcome the challenges of interoperability.

The Necessity Argument: Why a Ministry of Integration is Essential?

Streamlined Coordination and Implementation: The success of the AfCFTA hinges on the effective implementation of its policies and agreements. A Ministry of Integration could ensure that these policies are not only adopted but also properly executed at the national level. By streamlining coordination between various governmental bodies and international partners, it can eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies and accelerate the integration process.

As Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, emphasized, "The AfCFTA will be judged on how well it delivers economic growth and development, and this requires effective national implementation strategies".

Policy Harmonization: One of the key objectives of the AfCFTA is to harmonize trade policies, tariffs, and regulations across member states. This is a complex task that requires meticulous planning and execution. A dedicated ministry can focus on aligning national policies with continental standards, reducing non-tariff barriers, and ensuring a consistent regulatory environment. This harmonization is vital for creating a seamless market where goods, services, and investments can move freely.

The African Development Bank Group highlights that "policy harmonization is essential for reducing trade costs and improving the business environment, which is critical for the success of the AfCFTA".

Infrastructure Development: Trade integration is heavily reliant on robust infrastructure. A Ministry of Integration could prioritize and coordinate infrastructure projects that enhance connectivity, such as transport networks, ports, and digital infrastructure. By addressing infrastructure gaps, it can facilitate more efficient trade routes, reduce logistical costs, and support economic growth.

The World Bank notes that "improved infrastructure is fundamental to economic integration and can significantly reduce the cost of trading across borders".

Capacity Building: Enhancing the capabilities of local businesses and government agencies is crucial for participating in the AfCFTA. A Ministry of Integration can focus on capacity-building initiatives, providing training and resources to help local enterprises meet international standards and become more competitive in the continental market.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), "building the capacities of national institutions and private sector operators is essential for effective participation in the AfCFTA".

Conflict Resolution: Trade disputes and non-tariff barriers can impede the integration process. A Ministry of Integration could establish mechanisms for resolving



conflicts and addressing trade-related issues swiftly. This would foster a more stable and predictable trading environment, encouraging businesses to invest and expand their operations within the AfCFTA.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) states that "effective dispute resolution mechanisms are critical for maintaining trust and stability in trade agreements".

The Nicety Argument: Potential Downsides and Alternatives

Overlapping Mandates and Bureaucracy: Critics argue that establishing a new ministry could lead to overlapping mandates with existing bodies, such as the Ministry of Trade and Industry. This could create bureaucratic redundancies, slow down decision-making processes, and increase administrative costs. Effective coordination between existing ministries and agencies might achieve similar outcomes without the need for a new ministry.

Resource Allocation: Setting up and running a new ministry requires significant resources, which could strain government budgets. These resources might be better spent on direct investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, the financial and human capital required to establish and maintain a Ministry of Integration could divert attention from other critical areas of economic development.

Alternative Models of Coordination: Some suggest that instead of creating a new ministry, existing ministries could be strengthened and better coordinated. Inter-ministerial committees or task forces could be established to handle AfCFTA-related matters, ensuring a more integrated approach without the need for a separate ministry. This model could leverage existing expertise and infrastructure while avoiding the pitfalls of bureaucratic expansion.

The African Union has recommended "strengthening existing institutions to better handle the requirements of AfCFTA implementation" rather than creating new ones".

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Kenya's president William Ruto withdraws tax plan after people's protest turns deadly and parliament gets burnt

Kenya's President William Ruto has said that he will withdraw a finance bill containing controversial tax hikes after deadly protests that saw the parliament building set ablaze on Tuesday.

In an address to the nation, he said it was clear that Kenyans "want nothing" to do with the bill.

"I concede," he said, adding that he would no longer sign the bill into law.

At least 22 people were killed in Tuesday's protests, according to the state-funded Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNHRC).

Mr. Ruto said he would now enter into dialogue with the young people, who were at the forefront of the biggest protests to hit the

country since he was elected in 2022. The bill was passed by parliament on Tuesday, despite nationwide demonstrations against it, but has now been withdrawn.

Earlier, protesters broke into parliament, vandalizing the interior and setting parts of the complex on fire. The ceremonial mace, symbolizing the authority of the legislature, was stolen and President Ruto initially responded with defiance.

He ordered the military to be deployed, saying "violence and anarchy" would not be tolerated.

But he climbed down on Wednesday, following an extraordinary demonstration of people power.

"Ruto bows to Gen Z pressure, withdraws Finance Bill," read the headline on Kenya's Citizen TV.

In his second address to the nation in less than 24 hours, Mr. Ruto laid out a very clear rationale for why he thought the tax increases were necessary.

The proposed legislation was part of efforts to cut the country's massive debt burden of more than \$80bn (£63bn), which costs the country more than half of its annual tax revenues to service.

Mr. Ruto added that his government had made progress and was on course to "assert sovereignty" by repaying its debts. He said the provisions would have benefitted farmers, students, and teachers, but he admitted the people were not behind him.

"I also lead people," he said, "and the people have spoken."

It is unclear how his climbdown will affect plans to resume the protests, which have largely been organized via social media, on Thursday. Chatter on social media suggested that it would still go ahead.

The stated purpose of the demonstrations was to force the president not to sign the bill. But the protesters have begun demanding that he step down, with the slogan "Ruto must go."

Mr. Ruto rose to the presidency after defeating his main rival Raila Odinga by a narrow margin in the 2022 election. He got 50.5% of the vote, to Mr. Odinga's 48.8%. Mr. Ruto won after portraying himself as a "hustler" who was challenging an attempt by two dynasties - the Odingas and Kenyattas - to hang on to power.

He promised a "bottom-up" approach to the economy to tackle the high unemployment rate among young people, and to improve the lives of those less well-off.

Several killed as Kenyan police open fire on anti-tax bill protesters

Several people have been killed after police fired live rounds at protesters trying to storm Kenya's legislature, where lawmakers voted to pass a contentious finance bill that would hike taxes. Parts of Parliament building were set ablaze as protesters stormed the complex in Kenya's capital, Nairobi.

Thousands of people joined the youth-led demonstration in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on Tuesday to demand that lawmakers vote against the bill amid soaring tensions over a cost-of-living crisis in the country.

But legislators voted to pass the bill, and some then fled the chamber as protesters breached the complex of the Parliament of Kenya. Parts of the Parliament building were set ablaze.

Police eventually managed to drive the protesters from the building amid clouds of tear gas and the sound of gunfire. The lawmakers were evacuated through underground tunnels, local media reported.

At least five people were killed and 31 others were wounded, the Kenya Medical Association and several other NGOs said in a statement on Tuesday. It said that of the wounded, 13 had been shot with live bullets and four with rubber bullets.



"Despite the assurance by the government that the right to assembly would be protected and facilitated, today's protests have spiraled into violence," the groups said.

However, Kenyan President William Ruto said that the security of Kenyans remained his "utmost priority".

Mr. Ruto called the deadly protests "treasonous", adding that the debate over the tax increases had been "hijacked by dangerous people". The Kenyan Police was deployed and opened fire after tear gas and water cannon failed to disperse the crowds whilst Kenya's army was deployed to support the police in controlling the "security emergency" which resulted in the "destruction and breaching of critical infrastructure", Defence Minister Aden Duale said in the official gazette.

Al Jazeera's Malcolm Webb, reporting from outside the Parliament building in central Nairobi, said on Tuesday that he had seen "the body of a young man who was carrying a Kenyan flag" a short while ago. "He had a bullet hole right in the centre of his forehead," Webb said.

Source: BBC, Citizen TV, Aljazeera



Cyril Ramaphosa names a "never before" Government of National Unity cabinet

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa named a new Cabinet yesterday Sunday 31st June 2024 in the evening after his African National Congress, the former main opposition party, and nine other parties agreed on the makeup of a coalition government of South Africa's seventh administration following weeks of haggling.

Ramaphosa's announcement of his new, "unprecedented" multi-party Cabinet came a month after the ANC lost its 30-year political dominance of Africa's most industrialized country in a national election, forcing it to seek coalition partners. The ANC's share of the vote slumped to 40% in the May 29 vote and it lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since it came to power at the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994.

Ramaphosa's party retained the largest share of ministerial positions as he appointed ANC officials to 20 of the 32 Cabinet minister roles in the new coalition. But there were six ministers from the Democratic Alliance, once the main opposition and the fiercest critic of the ANC, and Ramaphosa shared out the remaining ministerial posts among some of the smaller parties. The DA won the second largest share of the vote with 21%.

Others have also joined what the ANC called a government of national unity GNU that is open to any of the 18 parties represented in Parliament. Some have refused to take part. "We have shown that there are no problems that are too difficult or too intractable that they cannot be solved through dialogue," Ramaphosa said, noting the negotiations had been complex.

In some of his most significant Cabinet decisions, Ramaphosa reappointed Paul Mashatile of the ANC to continue as his deputy president. Ramaphosa also appointed Parks Tau of the ANC as the minister of trade and industry, an important portfolio that the DA was seeking and was at the heart of some of the tensions between the two parties.

DA leader Steenhuisen was appointed minister of agriculture, while Ramaphosa also brought the leaders of four other political parties into his Cabinet as new ministers.

"We have had to ensure that all the parties are able to participate meaningfully in the national executive," Cyril Ramaphosa has said. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has included seven different parties in his Cabinet in an unprecedented power-sharing agreement in the continent's most industrialized country after the African National Congress lost its parliamentary majority in a milestone election result in late May.

Ramaphosa's announcement of the new Cabinet on Sunday night takes South Africa into uncharted political territory after 30 years of dominance by the ANC, which liberated the country from the white minority rule of apartheid in 1994 and has governed ever since. The new multiparty Cabinet was the culmination of a month of tense and sometimes acrimonious negotiations between Ramaphosa's ANC and the Democratic Alliance, the white-led former main opposition party that has now agreed to share power with the ANC.

While the coalition is made up of 11 parties, including seven with Cabinet positions, the agreement largely rests on the ANC and the DA – the two biggest parties – putting aside their ideological differences and more than 20 years of being political foes to work together.

Here's a breakdown of the new coalition, which has the challenge of solving South Africa's deep socioeconomic problems.

Ramaphosa reappointed Paul Mashatile of the ANC as his deputy president and also kept ANC officials in charge of the key ministries of finance, trade and industry, foreign affairs, defense, and justice. The ANC, which won the largest share of the vote in the election with 40%, has 20 of the 32 Cabinet minister positions.

Keeping the foreign ministry under ANC leadership also is likely to mean a continuation of South Africa's overtly pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli stance. The ANC is the driving force behind South Africa's highly sensitive case at the United Nations' top court accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. South Africa is also set to play a significant role in foreign affairs when it takes over the presidency of the Group of 20 developed and developing nations next year.

Ramaphosa gave the DA six ministerial positions, including making DA leader John Steenhuisen the minister of agriculture. While the DA had pushed for the trade and industry portfolio as the second biggest party, it was given deputy minister posts in trade and industry and finance, and those areas might be the sternest tests of whether the ANC and DA can work together.

The left-leaning ANC and the centrist DA are at odds over many economic policies, including the ANC's flagship Black Economic Empowerment affirmative action program that aims to advance opportunities for Black people in business. The ANC maintains it's necessary to right the wrongs of apartheid, but the DA has said it wants to scrap the policy and replace it with one in which race is not a decisive factor. The coalition faces wider challenges regarding race with the ANC, the party that liberated South Africa from white minority rule, and the DA, viewed by some as focused on the interests of the country's white minority, which accounts for 7% of the population of 62 million.

Source: AP News, ABC News

Discover the Johannesburg Art Gallery



The Johannesburg Art Gallery is an art gallery in Joubert Park in the city centre of Johannesburg, South Africa. It is the largest gallery on the continent with a collection that is larger than that of the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

The building, which was completed in 1915, was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, with Robert Howden working as supervising architect, and consists of 15 exhibition halls and sculpture gardens. It houses collections of 17th-century Dutch paintings, 18th- and 19th-century British and European art, 19th-century South African works, a large contemporary collection of 20th-century local and international art, and a print cabinet containing works from the 15th century to the present.

"Built over 100 years ago, the Johannesburg Art Gallery is the oldest museum of its kind in the city, and boasts a collection of over 10 000 artworks.

In addition to robust historical and Southern African cultural collections, the 'JAG' as it is affectionately known, also houses a growing contemporary collection.

Exhibitions run for an average of 3 months and showcase works from the collections as well as work from local and international contemporary artists.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery collection was opened to the public in 1910, before the gallery itself had been built, and was housed at the University of the Witwatersrand. The architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, came to South Africa in 1910 to examine the site and begin the designs, after Lady Florence Phillips had secured funding from the city for a purpose-built museum. The building was built with a south-facing entrance, but was not completed according to the architect's designs—no part of the museum was broken down to let in the light. It was opened to the public, without ceremony, in 1915, just after the start of the First World War. The gallery was extended during the 1940s with east-west wings along the south galleries according to the Lutyens' design. The present north facade and galleries, constructed during the 1986-87 extension were designed by Meyer Pienaar and Associates.

In recent years the building has been poorly maintained, with many gallery halls closed and notable artworks removed from display.[6] In 2023, the Oppenheimer family moved their collection from the deteriorating gallery to the Brenthurst Library.

Guided tours offered to groups of 10 or more by appointment with education officer Colin Groenewald ColinG@joburg.org.za

The Johannesburg Art Gallery is located in the CBD and is home to over 9,000 works of art. Spend time wandering through the halls, viewing a variety of different pieces of art. Located in the central business district of Johannesburg in Joubert Park, Johannesburg Art Gallery is a popular tourist attraction where young and old, local or tourist can spend some time immersed in the beauty of both contemporary and historical works of art. Housed in a magnificent building that was designed by Edward Lutyens, the art gallery is made up of 15 different exhibition halls and a number of sculpture gardens.

Visitors to the museum can meander through the different halls viewing art collections ranging from 17th century Dutch paintings including drawings and etchings by Rembrandt van Rijn. There is also a large contemporary collection of both local and international 20th century art and the print cabinet contains works reaching as far back as the 15th century all the way to the present day.

Art on display

Home to over 9,000 artworks, the largest of the collections is the contemporary South African art collection that is made up of installations, new media and digital pieces, paintings, prints, ceramics, photographs, and sculptures. Some of the most noteworthy pieces are by well-known artists such as Robin Rhode, Jane Alexander, and William Kentridge.

Other notable artists with work in display include the French Impressionists, the Pre-Raphaelites, and more modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Donald Judd, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol. Of great cultural and historical significance, the museum also displays a number of important southern African traditional art and artefacts that include the Brenthurst Collection and the Jacques Collection of headrests.

How to Get There

The Johannesburg Art Gallery is situated in the Joubert Park Gardens off of King George Street in Joubert Park in Johannesburg's central business district. Visitors can drive to the museum or alternatively, the Gautrain stops at Park Station where one can board the Rea Vaya C3 bus which will take you directly to the gallery.

Source: Wikipedia, Johannesburg Art Gallery

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