



AFRICAN CENTRE  
FOR BIODIVERSITY

# The Africa we want?

A neo-imperialist food regime  
reinforced by Agenda 2063,  
the UNFCCC, and the CBD

Part 3 of 5

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The African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) is committed to dismantling inequalities and resisting corporate industrial expansion in Africa's food and agriculture systems.

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# Part three: The AU' Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA: Embracing a catastrophic industrialised food system agenda for Africa?

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This series questions the motivations behind Agenda 2063, and who will benefit from various iterations of Africa's integration into the global economy and its concomitant rampant industrialisation, in light of our converging humanitarian, ecological, and economic crises. This brings us to the all-important questions: what is the Africa we want and what is standing in our way?

This third paper in the series briefly explores the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063, and whether or not its industrialisation agenda is truly what the continent desires.





# African Integration, intra-regional trade and agro-industrialisation

The AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, aspires to build a “prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development”, and ensure that Africa becomes a “strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner” (Aspirations 1 and 7. AU Commission, 2022: 15). It is essentially a plan to address the economic, political, and social challenges facing the continent. It has seven Aspirations and 20 Goals.

In its implementation plan (2014-2023), Agenda 2063 seeks to ensure the free movement of goods, services, and capital and to increase the volume of intra-African trade threefold – especially in agricultural value-added products – by 2023 (AUC, 2015). This will be done through the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA). Agenda 2063 identifies industrialisation and manufacturing as one of the seven core priority areas for its implementation, with the impetus to promote industrialisation through the AfCFTA, which came into force in May 2019 (AU, 2022). However, in the in the African Union's climate change and resilient development strategy and action plan (2022-2032), it emphasises the need for inclusive, low-emission, and resource-efficient industrialisation, stating:

“There is no doubt that Africa has enormous potential for industrialisation, given its rich natural resources as well as prospects for developing intra-African value chains and integration into global value chains. industrialisation in Africa, however, does not necessarily need to follow the

1. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/goals>

same path of polluting and inefficient industrialisation process that had been followed by countries in other regions. On the contrary, following the conventional industrialisation path under an increasingly carbon and resource constrained world is neither viable nor tenable. In this context, African countries need to adopt a new path of industrialisation that creates jobs and livelihoods for its people, while at the same time responding to climate change and maintaining the sustainability and integrity of its natural ecosystems” (AU, 2022: 53).

Agenda 2063 aspires to ensure that “Africa’s agriculture will be modern and productive, using science, technology, innovation, and indigenous knowledge”. The transformation of Africa’s agriculture is anchored in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods, adopted during the 23rd Ordinary Session of the AU’s Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 2014, provides further impetus to the CAADP process and gives the direction for agriculture on the continent for the next decade. This essentially constitutes the agricultural component of the first 10 years’ implementation plan of Agenda 2063. Both CAADP and the Malabo Declaration commit to developing regional value chains and integrating smallholders and other actors in intra-African trade. An essential part of the Malabo Declaration is to seek private sector finance to support agriculture and agribusiness development in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

While Agenda 2063 claims to be Pan-African and driving an African Renaissance, it appears to be little more than the legitimisation of a system establishing the infrastructure for a capitalist model of trade, and ultimately serving local and international structural powers (Njie, 2019). Under a capitalist system, those that have and control capital, and the institutions that support it, have the ability to direct political and economic institutions. The expansion of corporate power on the continent demands more attention. As it stands, Agenda 2063 may in fact reinforce the current system, protecting the economic interests of the elite and reinforcing the European and agribusiness imperialist agenda.

Pan-Africanism, while an essential element to drive an afro-centric paradigm to development, does not necessarily question liberal economic and democratic values, its failure on the continent, and the inherent shifts towards the economic powers that uphold it. Central to the AfCTFA and other free trade agreements already in place – and the many more to come – is connecting smallholder farmers and small and larger enterprises to regional value chains and an expanded regional market. Yet this mega FTA will undoubtedly serve those with vested political and economic interests, benefitting from reduced trade barriers, while smallholder farmers, and those already on the margins, ultimately stand to lose. There is a fundamental question about whether pan-Africanism can live alongside neoliberal capitalism. It seems, rather, pan-Africanism is being appropriated to facilitate the unabated expansion of agribusiness, heavily tied to and restricted by regional and bilateral EPAs.

2. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20160510-2>

## The African Continental Free Trade Areas Agreement (AfCFTA)

The AfCFTA aims to create the largest free trade area in the world, representing a market of 1.2 billion consumers, and commits countries to remove most tariffs and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to improve the flow of goods and services across countries, with the intention to boost economic growth. However, since trading under the AfCFTA started on 1 January 2021, only 36 out of 55 African countries have ratified the agreement (Haile-Gabriel, 2021).

In terms of tariffs, Member States have committed to eliminating tariffs on 90% of goods. The remaining 10% is divided between sensitive products (7%) and the exclusion list; namely, products on which no reduction in tariffs would be proposed (3%). The timeframe for implementation for non-sensitive products is five years for developing countries and 10 years for the least developed countries (LDCs), while for sensitive products, it is 10 and 13 years, respectively.

In terms of NTBs, domestic transportation can account for 50%-60% of marketing costs. Vital Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) account for a 13% higher cost of regionally traded food prices. Coordination, transportation, borders, and other NTBs are seen as essential to reduce time and cost bottlenecks.

The justification is that Intra-African trade remains low – with only 10%–12% of Africa's trade taking place within Africa, compared to 40% and 60% for North

America and Western Europe, respectively (Ngepah & Udeagha, 2018). As such, African countries trade more with the European Union than with each other. Between 2004 and 2007, only 20% of African food exports stayed in Africa. Of all agricultural imports, 88% originate from outside the continent, mainly from the US and Europe (cereals, meat, and milk products) and Asia (fruit and vegetables) (Rakotoarisoa et al., 2011). While it is vital to address the complete lack of mobility and transport within and between countries in Africa, alongside the potential to expand intra-sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) trade, the need to focus on developing Africa's own agriculture agenda remains critically hamstrung.

While the AfCFTA intends to strengthen intra-continental trade, we are concerned that this will inevitably cause greater inequalities in production, manufacturing and transportation across the continent. Socio-political problems will likely be reinforced through the AfCFTA and this will have implications for the other Aspirations and Goals set out in Agenda 2063. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the AfCFTA can achieve its goals, due to the relative position of African countries within the current practices, programmes and policies of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and in bilateral and regional FTAs in the first place. Secondly, it is unsure how this vision will affect the continent, taking into account the rise of neo-colonial agribusiness and a tendency to revitalise export-orientated agriculture, building on the priorities of regional economic Regional Economic Communities, and essentially dissecting the continent along particular commodity crops, reminiscent of colonisation.<sup>3</sup>

3. COMESA has prioritised maize, cassava, livestock, dairy, leather, soya beans, fruits, vegetables and flowers. EAC's priority commodities include maize, rice, beans, soya beans, sunflower, palm oil, cassava, Irish potatoes, dairy and fish. The key commodities for ECCAS are rice, cassava, livestock, meat, poultry and cotton. ECOWAS has prioritised cassava, maize, rice, sorghum, beans, livestock, meat, dairy, cotton, cocoa, fisheries and aquaculture. IGAD's proposed commodities include sorghum, millet, sesame, maize, sugar cane, gum Arabic and livestock, meat, feed, leather and dairy value chains. SADC's priority commodities are livestock, leather and associated value chains, soya beans, cotton and groundnuts.





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There is a clear commitment by the AU to industrialise Africa, seen as the only way to develop and seal the hindrances to wealth accumulation on the continent. This is visible in the Lagos Plan of Action (1980-2000), the Abuja Treaty (1991), the Africa Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Accelerated Industrial Development for Africa, the Africa Mining Vision, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, the AfCFTA, the Framework for Boosting Intra-African Trade in Agricultural Commodities and Services (2021), the Continental Agribusiness Strategy (2012), and the soon coming Africa Industrial Revolution Strategy. At the heart of this is developing the continent's

domestic productive capabilities to spur structural transformation (SEATINI, 2022).

**The pursuit is clearly on driving industrialisation through the private sector, valorising and value-adding Africa's agricultural and other commodities (including nature).**



The focus is on the creation of jobs, without much consideration of the types of jobs that will be created with the expansion of agribusiness and established exports or who could benefit from these changes – while informal traders, primarily women, are left high and dry.

While trade may be implicit in neoliberal development processes, even then, it is not the sole determinant for development (Gokce, 2010). It is impossible to develop and flourish in the context of extreme economic and social under-development (Stevens, 2019). In many ways, the multilateral and bilateral trading systems have benefitted developed states, while developing countries, and in particular African countries, remain underdeveloped (Stevens, 2019).

**Essentially, global development paradigms are not only unsustainable but their uniform application, especially in addressing poverty, and socio-economic development in diverse political and cultural contexts, has maintained the status quo.**

Emphasis on foreign direct investment (FDI) does not translate into meaningful change on the ground. FDI is seldom reinvested in the local economy as its profits are owned outside the continent, and in many ways, FDI represents a form of control based on the global financial market and economic system (Njie, 2019). Ultimately, the main growth happens in the financial

services sector, not the agricultural and industrial sectors which constitute the majority of jobs (UNCTAD, 2019). In addition, growth is concentrated in specific regions of the continent and tends to reinforce existing disparities across Africa (Asuelime & Francis, 2014).

**Therefore much remains to be desired when considering what industrialisation may mean for Africa, and whether this will entrench the extraction and financialisation of material and human resources, while the continent and its people continue to suffer.**

While, essentially an Africa without borders is ideal, in today's socio-economic and political climate, the impacts may be widespread, particularly when the focus is on private-sector led industrialisation – and neglecting and undermining smallholder farmers and informal trade, i.e. the basis of food systems on the continent .

As outlined by the FAO (2017), trade liberalisation:

- can lead to greater specialisation and improved productivity, and boost production, but may lead to a decrease in the availability of domestically produced foods locally;
- may in fact lower domestic food production with greater competitiveness, and actually increase imports;
- shift production patterns locally in favour of cash crops for export markets, at the expense



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of traditional and indigenous foods of superior nutritional quality and essential for family consumption and nutritional security;

- may result in food price increases, particularly of exportable products, and affect access locally;
- may result in lower incomes and therefore lower purchasing power; and
- leads to shifts in food consumption associated with the 'nutrition transition' towards ultra-processed, nutritionally void foods.

Greater openness to trade may exacerbate the stability of food supplies and food prices when shocks do occur, affecting these longer supply chains and thereby increasing risk and vulnerability overall. In some cases, trade can act as a climate change adaptation strategy by stabilising food prices and quantities in times of shocks, but this should be the exception, rather than the rule.

While the particular orientation of Agenda 2063 may have some conflicting aspects, overall it is clear that it is a plan to rightfully actualise Africa's right to development. The question is: what trajectory should Africa's development follow? While Africa needs to own its means of production and control its resources, ultimately power is transferred to corporate interests within the context of neoliberal globalisation, reinforcing the control of capital by (mostly foreign) private rather than public entities.

It is about time that we question the neoliberal paradigm driving Agenda 23 and global trade policies and assess and restructure trade and investment relationships between Africa and the rest of the world, especially considering the impacts of COVID-19. The need for short supply chains is crucial and, in that way, regional integration and regional supply chains take a step to reduce vulnerability and import dependence, but the direction being taken seems to be highly contradictory. History has taught us that free trade simply does not exist but has rather driven a global food regime that breaks down our planetary and socio-cultural systems needed for human sustenance and resilience.



## Agro-processing and agro-industrialisation

A priority for the region is research and development (R&D), in particular in regard to science and technologies for the development and commercialisation of new products and services. This may include regional centres of excellence to support agricultural research and the promotion of agro-industrial parks and special economic zones for agro-processing, e.g. the Common African Agro-Parks Programme (CAAPs). This AU programme, still in the inception phase, aims to facilitate the development of transboundary infrastructure in key trade corridors by establishing common mega agro-parks to industrialise and scale up African agriculture. The overall goals are to apply African investment funds to reduce food imports; create business and specialised employment for Africans, and boost intra-African trade for staple food commodities. The plan for CAAPs is to link up with the infrastructure network of energy, transport, transboundary water, and information and communications technology (ICT) facilities built by initiatives such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) (FAO and AU, 2021).

There are currently 409 PIDA projects underway: 54 Energy; 114 ICT; 232 Transport; and nine Water projects by sector.<sup>4</sup> The Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, starting in Nigeria, passing through Niger, and exiting Algeria, is a direct output to Europe. Other energy-related projects, including the Kenya-Uganda-Rwanda Petroleum Products Pipeline, a variety of transmission interconnectors, and hydropower plant establishment and upgrades, are gearing up for expanding trade in energy.

### Selected PIDA Projects (FAO and AU, 2021)

#### Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

**(COMESA):** The North-South Multimodal Transport Corridor integrates Eastern and Southern Africa along the North-South corridor spanning from United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, and Mozambique.

#### Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD):

The establishment of monitoring networks for the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer System is a project to harness water resources to support wheat cultivation in Sudan.

4. <https://www.au-pida.org/pida-projects/>





**Southern African Development Community (SADC):**

The Lobito Corridor Trade Facilitation Project enhances intraregional trade in Southern Africa by accelerating growth in cross-border trade and participation of small enterprises in value chains.

**Arab Maghreb Union (AMU):**

The Morocco-Algeria-Tunisia-Libya Corridor Mediterranean Highway Development, currently at the feasibility stage, will connect urban hubs and enhance tourism in Northern Africa. The North-Western Sahara Aquifer System and Iullemden Aquifer System Areas project, also at the feasibility stage, focuses on developing groundwater resources for intense agricultural operations and water irrigation.

**Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/**

**East African Community (EAC)/Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency:** The Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Highway Development Project, the Lamu-Garissa-Isiolo-Lokichar-Lodwar-Nadapal Highway, and the Lake Tanganyika Multimodal Transport Programme facilitate improved connectivity and multimodal transport to enhance regional integration and cross-border activity.

As with previous efforts on the continent, development corridors have shifted local economic development substantially, often dispossessing local communities and food producers, thereby altering the agricultural and food landscape significantly within these areas, and contributing to human rights violations.<sup>5</sup>

5. See <https://acbio.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Mozambique-2015-report-full.pdf>



# The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Agenda 2063 - the Africa we want

As the negotiations continue year after year under the UNFCCC and the impending COP 15 (CBD), it is clear that at this point in time, Africa will not take any positions to scale back industrial agriculture in any of these multilateral negotiations, despite its unique position to build inclusive, resource-efficient and climate-responsive societies. This would require learning from the mistakes made by developed countries and transition economies, taking advantage of existing and emerging knowledge and technology systems, fostering innovation, developing appropriate skills, especially on the part of the youth on the continent, and building up from the ground, rather than importing conceptions of what Africa should look like.

It is clear that Africa is committed to exploiting new-found fossil fuels at all costs to drive its development agenda. The question remains, what could a viable future be in Africa, and is it possible when our leaders continue to sell our land, resources, and people for the profits of corporations?

It is vital that Africa's productive assets are used to benefit its people, land, and future. While Agenda 2063 intends to do this, its current trajectory is set to benefit local and foreign elites, agribusiness, and the private sector almost exclusively, thereby perpetuating the same world economic order under neoliberal imperialism, through unabated extractivism and Eurocentric hegemony. The underlying motivation of many of the AU's policies puts agribusiness in the driver's seat, which will surely continue and deepen inequalities. Whether it be for nature-based solutions, neo-colonial conservation expansion, or campaigns for energy independence, current options all seem to favour state capture, even when alternatives may even offer more sustained, and better quality jobs for people, these are not being adequately considered.

**The main proponents of continued fossil fuel extraction and agribusiness expansion on the continent are politicians and those with vested interests in these industries.**

**None of these focus on the well-being of people. It is a highly distorted, politically and economically motivated landscape.**

Agenda 2063, while being worryingly focused on industrialisation at all costs, seems fundamentally contradictory and resembles a neo-imperialist agenda masked as pan-African. We firmly do not believe that industrialisation at all costs is the Africa desired by the majority on the continent.

Yet the AU's Climate Change Strategy may have some potential to guide activities for good outcomes for the continent if Africa can be delinked from perverse carbon and biodiversity markets, and move away from new neoliberal economic thinking to drive Africa's future.

As COP 27 of the UNFCCC has just been completed and as we enter negotiations on the future of biodiversity under the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at COP 15 of the CBD, we need to ask important questions about where and how this linkage between agriculture, biodiversity, and climate change converge, and how they are equitably addressed collectively. We are knowingly entering uncharted territories in our human history, and need to ask ourselves what would a just transition look like, and how can we get there.



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