



Implementing African Continental Free Trade Area: Lessons from Afro-pessimists and Afro-optimists

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Abstract

Global cooperation has been an acceptable strategy for addressing many of the world's challenges. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement which entered into force on 30 May 2019 was designed in a similar light for Africa's development. Its objectives among others are to create a single market for goods, and services, and deepen the economic integration of the African continent by the vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa as enshrined in the Agenda 2063. However, these benefits may not be realized unless member states garner concerted and sustained efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the AfCFTA. These efforts often elude most developing countries, and it is against this backdrop that this study attempts to investigate whether the contrasting perspectives of the Afro-pessimists and Afro-optimists could be of relevance to AfCFTA implementation. Using desk review methodology, the study synthesized both empirical and theoretical literature and found that Afro-pessimists are very critical and paint a gloomy picture of Africa. Whereas the Afro-optimists, are more positive looking with the claim that Africa is mistreated and its achievements are inordinately ignored. Significantly, both perspectives deepen understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Africa's development, providing a useful context for either the failure or success of the AfCFTA's implementation. The key lesson the study draws is for Africans to maximize their strengths as much as possible and minimize their weaknesses. This will actualize the "Africa rising" phrase and lead to the majority of Africans rising with Africa.

Introduction

Global cooperation has been an acceptable strategy to address many of the world's challenges. The resolve by the 189 member states (currently 193) of the United Nations (UN) to confront famines, drought, wars, plagues, and poverty which culminated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000 is a testament to this (Asante, 2020). Additionally, the ability of these UN member states to sustain the above efforts by replacing the MDGs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which consists of 17 goals when the former was defunct in 2015 reinforces the relevance of state cooperation (FAO, 2016; Asante, 2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement which was adopted and opened for signature on 21 March 2018 in Kigali and entered into force on 30 May 2019 was designed in a similar light.

The objectives of the AfCFTA among others are to create a single market for goods, services, and the movement of persons to deepen the economic integration of the African continent in accordance with the vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa as enshrined in the Agenda 2063. Also, it seeks to create a liberalized market for goods and services through successive rounds of negotiations, contribute to the movement of capital and natural persons, and facilitate investments, build on the initiatives and developments in the State Parties and Regional Economic Communities (RECs); lay the foundation for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage; and enhance the competitiveness of the economies of State Parties within the continent and the global market. It is acknowledged that a fully implemented AfCFTA will transform economies within the continent, raise incomes by 9% by 2035 and lift 50 million people from extreme poverty. It could also be a catalyst for further changes and attract investment from within Africa and beyond (World Economic Forum, 2023). However, these benefits may not be realized unless concerted and sustained efforts are garnered by member states to ensure the effective implementation of the AfCFTA.

As acknowledged in the extant literature, implementation involves carrying out basic policy decisions (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1979; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). It also consists of translating legal mandates into appropriate program strategies and structures to provide services or create goods (Shafritz et al., 2016). Furthermore, theoretical developments in policy implementation for many years have witnessed two dominant debates involving the top-downers and the bottom-uppers. Whereas the top-downers argued that implementation behavior is centrally controlled with little or no administrative discretion, the bottom-uppers believe that ambiguous policies require interpretation causing street-level bureaucrats to use administrative discretion (Fowler, 2019; Matland, 1995). Further theoretical development has led to an attempt to reconcile the above perspectives (O'Toole, 2000; deLeon and deLeon, 2002; Hill and Hupe, 2014). Policy implementation is observed to be a specific instance of collective action requiring collective choices and responsibilities from many actors (Hill and Hupe, 2014; Fowler, 2019). Additionally, recent discussions on implementation have further evolved into governance frameworks that seek to understand collective action in a collaborative and interdependent manner (Lynn et al., 2001; Hill and Hupe, 2014). It is in line with this current thinking that this paper seeks to examine AfCFTA's implementation.

Also, the extant literature is replete with challenges of implementation associated with multilateral and/or cooperative efforts of this nature in developing countries and by extension most African countries (Asare & Asante, 2014; Aung & Khaing, 2016; Patinvoh & Taherzadeh, 2019; Luna, et al., 2014; Sarvajayakesavalu, 2015; etc.). It is however against this backdrop that this study attempts to rope into the debate on AfCFTA implementation, two (2) important contrasting perspectives on Africa's development, popularly referred to as the Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism, and the extent to which vital lessons can be drawn from these respective viewpoints. The objective of the study is to draw attention to these perspectives and demonstrate the extent to which they can shape and strengthen the implementation of the AfCFTA for optimum benefit to all stakeholders. Specifically, this paper seeks to address the following question: To what extent can the contrasting perspectives of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism on Africa's development be relevant to implementing AfCFTA?

This study has become relevant and timely because of the quest towards sustainable development in Africa generally. Specifically, this study takes the position that implementation can be sustainable only if the context of implementation is comprehensively understood and factored into the implementation process. The Afro-pessimists, who frequently call themselves 'realists,' cite all the terrible things that have happened on the continent. Whereas the Afro-optimists, often state that there is a burgeoning African Renaissance, claiming that Africa is treated unfairly and its achievements downplayed (Schorr, 2011). These contrasting perspectives provide a holistic contextual foundation that can benefit AfCFTA's implementation. The rest of the paper following this introduction is organized as follows: literature review, methodology, presentation and discussion of findings, and conclusion with some policy implications.

Literature Review

Implementing AfCFTA – Key Notable Issues

Much of the extant literature on AfCFTA's implementation focuses on the elimination of some conditions prevalent in the member countries or among RECs to ensure its smooth implementation. Domain authors highlight the significance of the agreement as being the largest in terms of coverage next to the WTO (Fofack, 2020; Yoon & Kim, 2021; Moyer et al., 2021). Relevant emerging themes from the extant literature include the elimination of trade and non-trade barriers; good governance and infrastructural development; harmonization of trade procedures and harmonization of existing Regional Economic Communities (RECs) with AfCFTA. These are discussed in turn.

Moyer et al. (2021) focus on local and international factors likely to either augment or hinder the implementation of the AfCFTA. They note that lifting trade barriers as a result of trade agreements could bring economic benefits but could also lead to social dislocation and destabilization. They further observe that the implementation is dependent on the capacity and willingness of member states to implement the agreement, as well as their capacity and ability to coordinate and harmonize trade policies at the national, regional, continental, and global levels. Moyer et al. (2021) added that good governance and infrastructure development including information communication technologies are the other conditions for successful implementation. They then noted that citizens of member states should be knowledgeable of economic adjustments due to the AfCFTA's implementation and ways to circumvent these occurrences. They proposed two conditions for success consisting of the capacity and political will to implement the agreement and then the ability to maintain the agreement by realizing its potential benefits such as reduction in trade cost and increased investments.

On the other hand, Böschmeier et al. (2022) also noted that non-trade barriers are a chunk of the challenges that the AfCFTA does not specifically capture for redress. They indicated that the biggest focus of AfCFTA has been on the reduction of tariffs when there are non-tariff barriers (NTBs) that are hindering the implementation of the agreement. For instance, Nwankwo and Ajibo (2020) identified the poor infrastructure base of member states as a threat to the implementation of AfCFTA. In their view, a successful implementation of the agreement will depend on the building up of the infrastructure base such as roads and railways connecting member countries. Attia (2021) highlights the industrialization of Africa as a policy strategy to support the implementation of AfCFTA. However, concerning non-trade barriers, Penda (2023) pointed out that the AfCFTA Agreement has made some strides in the elimination of NTBs but at the same time observed the need for a more comprehensive legal framework geared towards addressing issues related to individual NTBs to a large extent. The study listed customs formalities, rules of origin, protectionist government measures, quantitative restrictions, import fees, transport, and infrastructure among others as sources of NTBs.

Apiko et al. (2020) raised the issue of corruption as a challenge to the implementation of AfCFTA. Later, Odusote and Aduak (2022) on their part suggested that the successful implementation of the AfCFTA is contingent on the willingness of the various countries to fight corruption. They advocated the inclusion of the provisions of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC) in the AfCFTA to ensure a smooth implementation of the agreement. Drawing on the AUCPCC and other conventions such as the UN Convention against Corruption, SADC Anti-corruption Protocol, and the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight against Corruption, Odusote and Aduak (2022) outlined some of the approaches to reduce corruption as consisting of prevention, criminalization, asset recovery, international cooperation, and public awareness. They noted that the approaches are complementary with no one approach considered superior to the other.

On the issue of harmonized trade procedures for the Implementation of AfCFTA, Kouty (2021) citing the WTO (2015), defined harmonization of trade procedures as the process by which all unnecessary duplication in the trade formalities, processes, and procedures are eliminated and made uniform across the board. The procedures also entail activities that facilitate the haulage of the finished goods from the factories to the port for export. Kouty (2021) estimated the impact of inefficient trade procedures with 49 African States. He then identified in particular that the number of documents required to import goods and the border compliance aspects of the trade procedure will negatively affect the implementation of AfCFTA. Attia (2021, p.597) on the other hand advocated harmonization of trade procedures to include "activities, practices, and formalities involved in collecting, presenting, communicating and processing data required for the movement of goods in international trade".

Finally on harmonization of existing Regional Economic Communities with AfCFTA, Nwankwo and Ajibo (2020) highlighted how the AfCFTA fails to clarify how the overlapping regional trade regimes will be reconciled and harmonized. Their study clearly outlined all the various challenges or hurdles that African states must overcome in order to have a smoother implementation of the agreement. These include freeloading by companies (from developed countries) outside the regime coming under the guises to establish in regions they

do not belong to, to the detriment of manufacturing concerns in the AfCFTA countries. They further emphasized that the harmonization of all already existing Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) is a crucial issue that the AfCFTA failed to outline but must outline. Gourdon et al. (2021) evaluated the issues on Rules of Origin (RoO) regarding it as being in two dimensions, the regime-wide rules (RWR) and product-specific rules (PSR) across the major multiple-membership Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) engaged in harmonization negotiations. Tsowou and Davies (2021) called for a clear framework for the RoO. They stated the need for fairness and transparency in the concessions given. They argued that cost-effective implementation is necessary in order to realize the AfCFTA RoO which would engender production hubs that can draw from the integrated African markets.

Additionally, Salami (2022) provided pointers to how the fragmented data protection regime across Africa, with each country either having a distinct data protection framework or none at all could be harmonized among the member countries to ensure seamless trade among member countries. He noted that harmonization of the data protection laws is critical for the harmonization of the various trade regimes and for the implementation of the AfCFTA. Demanding compliance with the various individual data protection laws across Africa will inhibit free trade. Some of these data protection laws include South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013, Kenya's Data Protection Act (No. 24 of 2019), Data Protection Act, 2012 of the Republic of Ghana, among others. Again, Böschmeier et al. (2022) recount the difficulty that both replacing the existing trade agreements with the AfCFTA and the AfCFTA co-existing with these other trade agreements will present. They are of the view that it will make it even more complicated for exporters to understand the trade policy landscape. These complexities make it imperative for the harmonization to be achieved as soon as possible, without which the implementation of the AfCFTA may continue to pose a challenge. In conclusion, Böschmeier et al. (2022) resolve that if the member countries are able to at least honour the tariff concessions they have to give under the agreement, then there may be hope for the desire of the AfCFTA to replace the different existing trade agreements.

Afro-Pessimists views on Africa's Development

Significantly, there seems to be a lack of consensus on a definition for Afro-pessimism by scholars (Louw & De B'beri, 2011; Schorr, 2011). However, in light of this discussion, Afro-pessimism emphasizes the persistent negative coverage of Africa in both Western and non-Western news media particularly in connection with its tendency toward arrested development (Wekker, 2021). Particularly, Afro-pessimism connotes a sense of pessimism about the continent's ability to overcome pressing challenges related to poverty, health, development, or governance. It is viewed as a postcolonial phenomenon that attests to the persistence of colonialism in contemporary discourses. The Afro-pessimism viewpoint is manifested in the strategy of assessing developmental progress by standards set by the West. This has become so pervasive that in the 2000 cover of the Economist magazine, Africa was captured as a 'hopeless continent' (Schmidt & Garrett, 2011; Nothias, 2012). In essence, Afro-pessimism is the perception that 'Africa' has always been and will continue to be a scary, backward, and poverty-ridden place (Schorr, 2011).

Furthermore, earlier writers have outlined some elements associated with the Afro-pessimists' perceptions. The first is the issue of homogeneity. The pessimists often see Africa as a country, not a diverse continent. Given this, there is a tendency to generalize the continent, which, more often than not, contributes to erasing the diversity of its 54 countries (Michira, 2002; Nothias, 2012; Schorr, 2011). The second element borders on its colonial image as the Dark Continent. With this as the backdrop, Africans are viewed as heathens with backward traditions, practices, and superstitions. In essence, Africans do not have a history and have contributed nothing to the advancement of humanity. Also, the continent is characterized as the abode of deadly illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and the like. Other writers are of the view that this characterization has its roots in colonial times where European colonialists were exposed to strange diseases and could not survive (Schorr, 2011; Nothias, 2012).

Also, reports of surveys that were conducted at certain points in time in some prestigious newspapers confirm some of the above perceptions. For instance, the New York Times between 1955 and 1995 found in their survey that Ebola and AIDS were topics mostly associated with coverage of Africa (Schraeder & Endless, 1998). Other studies also revealed violence as the most common, and followed by diseases that have a connection with promiscuity (Monroe, 2006). The connection of HIV/AIDS with Africa may be justified, given the prevalence rates in southern Africa, but rarely is it mentioned that some African countries have prevalence rates equal to places such as Washington D.C. Not only the above but also, Africa is associated with extreme poverty and hunger. In view of this, Africa is usually depicted as an abode for emaciated children sometimes with swollen bellies with flies hovering around their heads. Another Afro-pessimistic viewpoint is the attribution of

overpopulation on poor degrading soils and vegetation. Not only the above, the reference to violent tribal conflict is another Afro-pessimistic viewpoint suggesting Africans are naturally violent (Schorr, 2011; Besteman & Gusterson, 2005). Closely related to this are political instability and consistent violent riots. The increasing incidents of coups in the Sahel region give credence to this perception. One is therefore not entirely wrong when he or she holds the view that Africa is a poor continent that lacks good governance and needs to be fixed (Wahutu, 2018; Ongongo, 2023).

Subsequently, the notion of the corrupt African Big Man who rules through patrimonial networks and bribery is another feature associated with the continent by the Afro-pessimists. This so-called corrupt leader perpetuates his power through the manipulation of the courts, laws, and government institutions. Corruption is often cited in the literature to be a primary factor holding back Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), along with poor governance which is detrimental to development (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2023; Asiedu, 2004). These narratives and perceptions about the African continent portray it as a risky location and an unappealing investment abode. It could be argued that, these negative images have a great influence on the perceptions of rational business persons who may want to invest in the continent. Corroborating this, Alami's (2023) study in South Africa on emerging market financing observed a remarkable reluctance for international investors to invest in South Africa; and the penchant to move their money out of the country at the first sign of perceived trouble. This is based on the perception of South Africa being immature in governance (decolonized in 1994) and the fear that it may lapse into chaos just like its neighbours.

Afro-Optimists views on Africa's Development

Afro-optimism represents a more 'positive' discourse about Africa. The Economist, which was and still is vilified for its cover of "The Hopeless Continent", dedicated its December 2011 cover to "Africa Rising". The same could be said of The Times which captioned its June 2012 editorial as "Get into Africa. It's resource-rich, young and growing" (Nothias, 2012; Havnevik, 2015). Further, Havnevik (2015) notes that the 180-degree turnaround by many of the Western media concerning the plight of Africa's development tends to border on the following factors i.e. economy, demographic change, reduced conflicts, governance, and democratization (Havnevik, 2015).

On the economy, it is reported that during the period (2010-2015) most of the fastest-growing economies were located in Africa. For instance, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) after noting this reported that despite the impressive growth story of Africa, it has not translated into economic diversification that may eventually lead to employment opportunities and social development (UNECA, 2013; Havnevik, 2015). Additionally, it is recorded that stronger investment and trading ties with emerging economies and post-conflict recovery in some countries led to the above-registered growth. Significantly, the role of technology in all this cannot be underestimated. This is often connected with the spread of mobile phone usage on the continent connected to aiding financial transactions and information spread about prices and markets. Kenya is often cited as an example of this development (Havnevik, 2015).

On the aspect of trade, there is great improvement as China has emerged over the last decade as Africa's biggest trading partner, alongside others such as India, Indonesia, and Turkey (UNECA, 2013; Havnevik, 2015). Another optimism in Africa has to do with foreign investments. Also, the view that the demographic structure of Africa is an opportunity for the continent to take advantage of, often referred to as the demographic dividend is another advantage to the continent. Here, it could be deduced that Africa's population is estimated to double from its current estimate around 2050. This population increase will provide Africa with an active readily available labour force. It is reported that the East Asian economies benefited from this as well (May 2011; Havnevik, 2015). It must also be emphasized that many conflicts in Africa have reduced drastically during the last decade. Governance and democratization are also improving in spite of a couple of challenges that have led to some political instability particularly in the Sahel region in recent times. In view of all these, there is some seemingly stable political atmosphere that is likely to attract foreign investment and encourage indigenous domestic investments as well (Havnevik, 2015).

Subsequently, the Afro-optimists argue that despite the challenges facing the continent, incremental successes are being chalked by Africa. There is some kind of optimism among African and world leaders in connection with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Furthermore, Gordon and Wolpe (1998) strongly push forward their optimism debate by giving specific examples. They reveal that in South Africa, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Namibia, violent struggles and wars have given way to reconciliation and nation-building. Not only the above but also, Burkina Faso, landlocked, drought-plagued, and long viewed as one of the world's most nutritionally deprived countries, has reduced its food deficit by two-thirds through poverty-reduction initiatives and sound budget and agriculture policies. Finally, some African countries are

already reaping the fruits of new market-oriented institutions and policies. Botswana and Mauritius are cases in point. Also, the relevance of alternative media in changing the negative narratives about Africa has been gaining prominence recently (Holt et al., 2019; Ongongo, 2023).

Methods

The study adopted a desk review methodology or desktop qualitative descriptive method. This refers to the use of secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork (Adams & Asante, 2020). As acknowledged in the extant literature, the three ways of organizing reviews include meta-analysis, systematic reviews and narrative reviews (Sovacool et al., 2018). This paper adopts the narrative review approach. Although it is considered the least structured among the three, it provided the authors the opportunity to explore and to synthesize insights from a variety of perspectives on an emerging area like AfCFTA's implementation.

The approach allowed for the collection of both online and print sources consisting of journal articles, books, and organizational reports. The search engines used for the online sources included Google Scholar, Jstor, Scopus, and ProQuest, whereas author-affiliated-institution libraries were consulted for the print sources. The following search phrases or terms were used: Afro-optimism, Afro-pessimism, African Continental Free Trade Area Implementation, Afro-pessimism on Africa's development, etc. The selection process was purposive, as documents that had a direct bearing on the topic were chosen and analyzed. The evidence that emerged from the content analysis technique of the accessible literature informed greatly the thematic arrangements of the study. Despite the prospects offered by the narrative review approach, it is deficient in transparency and replicability. Data from various organisations were triangulated with each other to prevent single data bias. Also, all information used in the study has been adequately cited.

Results and Discussions

Afro-pessimistic Analysis of AfCFTA Implementation

Afro-pessimists argue that Africa is bedevilled with many challenges making it difficult for anything good to emerge from the continent. One of the key factors relied upon is the issue of bad governance. To either support or reject the issue of bad governance as the bane of Africa, the World Governance Indicators (WGI) data provide evidence. Additionally, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) and the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) are relied upon as well. The WGI for instance assesses the performance of countries on six broad dimensions of governance, consisting of voice and accountability (VoA), political stability and absence of violence/terrorism (PSAVT), government effectiveness (GE), regulatory quality (RQ), rule of law (RoL) and control of corruption (CoC). WGI estimate of governance falls within the range of -2.5 depicting weak governance to 2.5 depicting strong governance performance on the above indicators.

To begin with, the VoA estimate, depicts the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, association, and media. Collectively, none of the African countries come close to 2.5 on voice and accountability, albeit a few countries have demonstrated consistency in this governance indicator, example Mauritius, Seychelles and Botswana (see Table 1). Oduote and Aduak (2022) note that public awareness is one of the measures to reduce corruption, a crucial obstacle to AfCFTA's successful implementation. VoA measures are key in ensuring this which is absent or weak in many African countries.

Furthermore, the indicator of PSAVT focuses on the likelihood of political instability, and/or politically-motivated violence including terrorism. It is observed that only few countries have demonstrated consistency on this indicator (see Table 1). Countries that have maintained positive estimates throughout the period include Cape Verde, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles, although their figures do not travel above 1.0. Countries that are seriously at risk include South Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia (WGI Dataset, 2023). The recent increasing coup d'états on the continent suggest a weak performance on the above indicator (see Table 2). Aja (2023) argued that instability poses a serious risk to the already porous borders, as a result enforcement of trade and economic agreements like the AfCFTA, which is based on the free movement of goods and people can possibly result in the unintended increase in cross-border criminalities. This further corroborates the viewpoints of the Afro-pessimists that Africa is a conflict-prone and unstable region with no safe guarantees for investments.

Table 1: WGI estimate of governance for African best performing countries 2018 – 2022

Senegal	Botswana	Ghana	Seychelles	South Africa	Mauritius	Cape Verde	VoA Scores
0.19-0.24	0.44-0.46	0.39-0.55	0.19-0.63	0.64-0.77	0.60-0.76	0.91-0.98	
Rwanda	Sao Tome & P.	Seychelles	Namibia	Mauritius	Cape Verde	PSAVT Scores	
0.03-0.10	0.49-0.61	0.66-0.76	0.51-0.68	0.80-0.87	0.83-0.93		
Namibia	Rwanda	Botswana	Seychelles	Mauritius	GE Scores		
0.03-0.11	0.08-0.23	0.17-0.46	0.62-0.89	0.75-0.89			
Seychelles	Botswana	Seychelles	Mauritius	RQ Scores			
0.01-0.33	1.01-1.18	0.49-0.62					
Rwanda	Seychelles	Namibia	Cape Verde	Mauritius	RoL Scores		
0.06-0.17	0.23-0.46	0.32-0.40	0.33-0.45	0.38-0.47	0.69-0.89		
Sao Tome & P.	Mauritius	Namibia	Rwanda	Botswana	Cape Verde	CoC Scores	
0.13-0.28	0.19-0.44	0.22-0.33	0.52-0.57	0.61-0.72	0.76-1.02	0.86-1.69	

Note. Score estimates range from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong performance). Scores are based on 2018 to 2022 estimates, 54 African Countries are involved for the period under consideration. Scores represent a range of countries best performance.

Table 2: Recent Coups in Africa

Country	Date of coup	Ousted leader	Coup leader
Gabon	30-Aug-23	Pres. Ali Bongo	Gen. Brice C. Oligui Nguema
Niger	26-Jul-23	Pres. Mohamed Bazoum	Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani
Burkina Faso	24-Jan-22	Pres. Roch Marc Christian Kabore	Lt. Col. Paul-Henri S. Damiba
Burkina Faso	30-Sep-22	Interim Leader Lt. Col. Damiba	Capt. Ibrahim Traore
Sudan	25-Oct-23	Transitional Civilian Leaders	Gen. Abdel Fattah Al- Burhane
Guinea	5-Sep-21	Pres. Alpha Conde	Col. Mamady Doumbouya
Mali	18-Aug-20	Pres. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita	Military handed over to a Transitional Government
Mali	24-May-21	Transitional Government	Col. Assimi Goita

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2023.

Additionally, the GE indicator focuses on perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. Most African countries have demonstrated weakness as far as this indicator is concerned. There is excessive interference in the civil service and the quality of public service delivery has been at its lowest ebb recently. Government ineffectiveness is seen in many African countries as depicted by WGI Dataset (2023). Some examples include Burundi, South Sudan, Congo Republic, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, and Chad. However, despite the above gloomy territories, Mauritius, Seychelles, Botswana, Rwanda, and Namibia have shown some consistency (see Table 1). One could deduce from the above that the call by Boschemeier et al. (2022) for countries to at least honour the tariff concessions they have to give under the AfCFTA agreement will be a herculean task to accomplish. The issue of fragmented data protection regimes (Salami, 2022) will also be difficult to harmonize based on the above evidence.

Closely related to the above is RQ which focuses on perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development, shows another area of weakness for many African countries. The effective implementation of AfCFTA requires non-trade barriers such as poor infrastructural development, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and fragmented data protection regimes across Africa (Nwanko & Ajibo, 2020; Penda, 2023; Salami, 2022) to be comprehensively addressed for businesses to thrive, which happens not to be the case. The WGI Dataset (2023) reveals that a few countries like Mauritius, Botswana, and Seychelles have demonstrated consistent positive performance although with very low estimates. Additionally, RoL which reflects the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, etc. further demonstrates grave weaknesses among African countries (WGI Dataset, 2023). Corruption and mismanagement by public office-holders have led to the loss of trust in public institutions fueling the many coups in recent times (Vines, 2023; AJLabs, 2023).

Subsequently, CoC focuses on the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as the "capture" of the state by elites and private interests. The lack of effective controls as far as preventing and reducing corruption is concerned is seen in countries like South Sudan, Burundi, Somalia, Chad, Uganda, DR Congo, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Nigeria, Libya, Central African Republic, among others (WGI Dataset, 2023). In these countries, the fight against corruption which Odusote and Aduak (2022) and Apiko et al. (2020) state as a pre-condition for successfully implementing AfCFTA has been a major obstacle to surmount.

Corroborating the WGI CoC is data from the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Which uses a scale from 0 to 100 to measure perceived corruption among 180 countries (100 = very clean; 0=highly corrupt). Table 3 depicts Africa as consistently remaining at the bottom of the table for the period (2018-2022) with a slight improvement in 2021. It is striking to see that 44 out of the 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) assessed have consistently scored below 50. Seychelles is one African country that has consistently shown great performance scoring 66 in 2018, 2019, and 2020; and then 70 in 2021 and 2022. Other African countries that have scored above 50 include Botswana, Cape Verde, Rwanda, Namibia, and Mauritius. Countries like Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan have consistently scored very low marks often found at the bottom of the table.

Table 3: Average Regional CPI for the Period 2018 – 2022 [Scores are over 100]

Region/Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Western Europe and EU	66	66	66	66	66
Asia Pacific	44	45	45	45	45
Americas	44	43	43	43	43
Middle East and North Africa	39	39	39	39	38
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	35	35	36	36	35
Sub Saharan Africa	32	32	32	33	32

Source: Authors extraction from the Corruption Perception Report, 2023.

From the ensuing discussion, Africa has consistently shown weakness as far as the various indicators of governance are concerned. The 2022 IAG overall governance score of below average corroborates this position as well (see Table 4). Also, the fight against corruption has been at best ineffective whereas the effectiveness of governments keeps deteriorating. This feeds into the Afro-pessimistic negative outlook of the continent. Odusote and Aduak (2022) are right when they hang AfCFTA’s implementation success on the willingness of member states to fight corruption. This is because it is acknowledged that corruption has a way of retarding progress and dissipating gains made. The absence of serious efforts to reduce corruption to the barest minimum spells doom for AfCFTA’s implementation success.

Table 4: The 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance [IAG] Score

Overall Average Governance Score For 2021 (Out Of 100): 48.9		
Category	Sub-Category	Score
Security & Rule of Law	Security & Safety	49
	Rule of Law & Justice	
	Accountability & Transparency	
	Anti-Corruption	
Participation, Rights & Inclusion	Participation	46.7
	Rights	
	Inclusion & Equality	
	Women's Equality	
Foundations for Economic Opportunity	Public Administration	48.3
	Business & Labour Environment	
	Infrastructure	
	Rural Economy	
Human Development	Health	51.5
	Education	
	Social Protection & Welfare	
	Sustainable Environment	

Source: Authors extraction from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance Report, 2022.

Afro-optimistic Analysis of AfCFTA Implementation

It could be forcefully argued that the key assumption underpinning the formation of the AfCFTA is in tandem with the perspectives of the Afro-optimists. AfCFTA sends a signal that Africa has the potential of working well particularly in the area of trade and commerce. As a result, a number of factors as enumerated by the Afro-optimists support this line of thinking. To begin with, Afro-optimists are positive about Africa's population dividends which to a large extent has a direct bearing on the success of AfCFTA's implementation. Out of the approximately 7.96 billion people globally, Africa ranks second after Asia with 1.419 billion people (Statista, 2023). As clearly shown in Table 5, SSA has the highest population percentage under 15 years, and so with mortality rates dropping significantly, the next decade will witness the majority of the African population in the working age category (15-64 years). This promises abundant affordable labour and high consumption implying a potential increase in businesses in the production and services sector. This provides a useful context for AfCFTA to thrive and benefit all member countries.

Table 5: Global Age Distribution by Region 2021

Regions	Age		
	14 years and below (%)	15 to 64 years (%)	65 years and above (%)
Europe & Central Asia	17.94	65.03	17.03
North America	17.98	65.15	16.87
East Asia & Pacific	19.33	68.13	12.55
Latin America & Caribbean	23.55	67.46	8.98
South Asia	27.53	66.13	6.35
Middle East & North Africa	30.07	64.62	5.31
Sub-Saharan Africa	42.06	54.88	3.05

Source: Statista, 2023

Additionally, the Afro-optimists hold the view that for trade to bring in the needed economic growth, it has to be diversified (Havenik, 2015). Significantly, diversifying trade to include intra-African trade is endorsed by the Afro-optimists as the right path to thread. It is estimated that the percentage increase in exports from Africa, as a result of the implementation of AfCFTA will rise to about 29% and intra-African continental trade by more than 81% with the potential for tariff line liberalization rising to 97% and African's exports to the rest of the world by 19% by 2035 (World Bank Report, 2020).

Furthermore, the Afro-optimists draw on Fofack's (2020) observation that the AfCFTA is the game changer for Africa because of the potential of the agreement to help African countries break away from the exploitative trade relationship dominated by their colonial powers. Not only this, but Fofack (2020) also cautions that despite the possible gaining of prominence in the global market space, there would be some short-term costs that member countries must brace themselves for. He identified the need for complementary structural and policy reforms that will help foster peace and security, address supply chain constraints, and mitigate short-term fiscal adjustment costs to set AfCFTA on a successful implementation trajectory.

Again, another area of optimism is the issue of foreign investment. The flow of FDIs has been consistent, although compared to other regions of the world, the inflows to Africa remain consistently low (UNCTAD, 2022). From 2016 to 2021 the lowest FDI inflow for the period occurred in 2020 with 38,952 million dollars, whereas the highest for the period occurred in 2021 with 82,991 million dollars (see Figure 1). Within Africa, it is observed that the Northern Africa sub-region is showing some consistent FDI inflows (between 9,335 million dollars – 15,407 million dollars), the same with the West African sub-region (between 8,102 million dollars – 13,849 million dollars). Other regions are following closely with Southern Africa showing a lot of prospects with their 2021 estimate of 42,219 million dollars. With this at the backdrop, Afro-optimists argue that there are prospects as the 2021 year estimate suggests some increment that needs to be sustained. It can be argued

that if AfCFTA is implemented within a context of sustained FDI inflows, businesses will increase alongside trade, which will eventually lead to improvement in the welfare of the people living on the African continent.

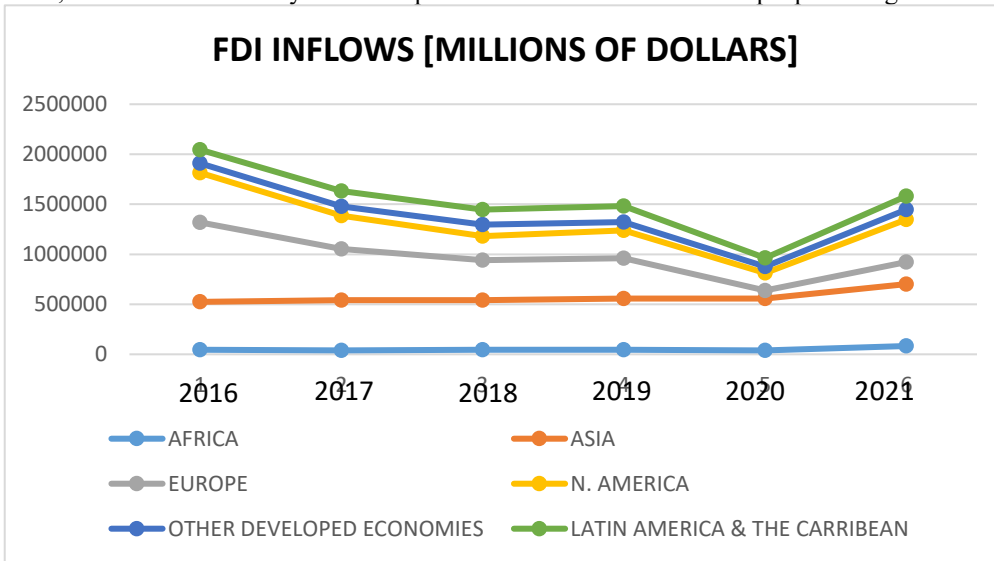


Figure 1: FDI inflows 2016-2021

Source: Authors extraction from UNCTAD (2022) World Investment Report.

Another important area that Afro-optimists often highlight is technology. They argue that technological advances have contributed significantly to global economic growth. It is argued to have powered the Industrial Revolution, helped build cities, and allowed easy movement of people and goods (UNDP, 2022). The integration of the global economy in recent times would not have been possible without technology. It is against this backdrop that the Afro-optimists propose that Africa should consolidate its gains and make frantic efforts to improve upon them. The AfCFTA and the AU Agenda 2063 are seen as major driving forces for the advancement of the digital economy in Africa. Most countries in Africa have achieved close to 100 percent mobile voice penetration with mobile internet following a similar trajectory. The deficiency however remains with the continent’s household internet access and digital data literacy (ITU, 2021; UNCTAD, 2021). The continent can as well focus on building capacity in artificial intelligence and leveraging it to augment labour demands. For instance, machine learning (a subset of AI) is opening up new possibilities to reduce the adverse impact of climate change in the agriculture sector, and aiding in predicting disasters by modelling climate change impacts. In health care, it can offer new ways to detect and diagnose diseases. Africa has the potential to take advantage of these emerging opportunities. Places like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, etc. are making inroads already.

Flowing from the above, the fight against corruption and promotion of peace at all times has not been encouraging but it is a possibility that is never beyond the reach of African citizens and their leaders. The fight against corruption can be won when African governments are committed to doing so. Finally, the role of the African media in the fight against deadly diseases like COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, etc. cannot be easily glossed over. The efforts by the media to educate, embark on advocacy, and run a series of adverts on prevention, and management measures have yielded dividends in the significant reduction in the rates of spread of the above deadly diseases, particularly that of COVID-19. These efforts should be replicated in the implementation of the AfCFTA for it to be successful. It is time for African media to rise to the occasion to change the narratives (Pointer, 2023), words they say are powerful and so positive narratives will definitely yield positive results.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the extent to which the contrasting perspectives of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism on Africa’s development could be of relevance to the implementation of AfCFTA. In pursuit of this venture, the study successfully identified that both Afro-pessimists and Afro-optimists have provided useful contextual issues that deserve attention. The Afro-pessimists pointed to the challenges that may work against AfCFTA implementation, particularly in the area of governance. The recent spate of coup d’états, economic hardships and lack of resilience to withstand external shocks gives credence to the Afro-pessimism perception of bad governance in Africa. Despite this, some African countries have shown some resilient performance in

many of the above indicators, for example, Seychelles, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, and Rwanda. On the other hand, Afro-optimists have identified that trade diversification that consists of intra-African trade alongside external traders should be exploited to the fullest. The youthful nature of the African population provides some future opportunities for the continent, alongside the inflows of FDIs to the Continent.

Subsequently, it must be highlighted that although Africans need to be positive, one cannot downplay the issues raised by the Afro-pessimists. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations are made: First, African leaders should demonstrate commitment to fight corruption which will in turn promote peace and stability. This is necessary because corruption has a way of destabilizing a country and retarding progress. In this corruption fight, governments must open up spaces to include the public in decision-making. People should be encouraged to speak against corruption and demand accountability from duty-bearers. Second, investing in technological advancement to improve human life and leveraging artificial intelligence to augment the demand for labour, and not a replacement of labour should seriously be considered. Third, AfCFTA member states should encourage public-private partnerships to address infrastructural deficits and the establishment of agro-based industries based on their comparative advantage to reduce unemployment. Fourth, new narratives about Africa rising, the new Africa, etc. should be encouraged by the conventional media platforms in Africa, complemented by the use of social media. Fifth, the harmonization of fragmented data protection regimes and of trade procedures should be given serious consideration. This has a direct bearing on the need for member countries to at least honour the respective tariff concessions they have to give under AfCFTA.

On the whole, there is a sense of ongoing revival on the African continent. This, however, should be accompanied by a new development paradigm built upon the recognition of Africa's resources, capabilities, history, and shortcomings, and the complementary efforts that can come from outside, determined by Africans themselves. Additionally, Africa needs governments led by people more seriously committed to economic progress and more democratically accountable to their citizens. Finally, both Afro-optimists and Afro-pessimists have insightfully reminded us of the strengths and weaknesses of Africa's development. The key lesson is to maximize our strengths and as much as possible minimize our weaknesses. When this is done, the phrase "Africa rising" would not be mere rhetoric but would see the majority of Africans rising with Africa as well. The dependence on only secondary data for this study may be considered a limitation however, the authors consider it as a first step towards more empirically-driven future studies.

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