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The African Continental Free Trade Area: Using Political Will to Map and Identify Factors that Influence its Implementation

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Dedication

To my dearest friends, family, peers, and those that have inspired me along the way.

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Abstract

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a cornerstone of the African integration project because it is a flagship project of the African Union and Africa Agenda 2063 that seeks to combine African economies into one single continental market that will potentially amount to US\$4 trillion. It is inherently linked to the values espoused by the Abuja Treaty which provides the framework for African integration. Therefore, if AfCFTA is properly implemented, it could potentially be a solution to Africa's developmental challenges.

The current study assesses the implementation of AfCFTA using unorthodox means. Using systems theory, this study seeks to examine the extent to which there is political will within the system of implementation. It also seeks to uncover the features of AfCFTA beyond its system of implementation. For example, it defines regional integration and free trade and seeks to link this to AfCFTA to uncover what AfCFTA seeks to achieve within the African continent. While there is a certain degree of political will within the African system, many hurdles must still be overcome to ensure that AfCFTA is aggressively implemented.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Abuja Treaty | Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community |
| AEC | African Economic Community |
| AfCFTA | African Continental Free Trade Area/ Agreement |
| AfCFTA NTBM | AfCFTA Non-Tariff Barriers Mechanism |
| AfCFTA RoO | AfCFTA Rules of Origin |
| Afreximbank | African Export-Import Bank |
| AMU | Arab Maghreb Union |
| ARII | African Regional Integration Index |
| AU | African Union |
| CEN-SAD | Community of Sahel-Saharan States |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa |
| EAC | The East African Community |
| ECCAS | Economic Community for Central African States |
| EU | European Union |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GTI | Guided Trade Initiative |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| OAU | Organisation of African Unity |
| PAP | Pan-African Parliament |
| PAPSS | Pan-African Payment and Settlement System Platform |
| REC | Regional Economic Community |
| RISDP | Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Regional integration is a process that seeks to increase the institutional, economic, and political links between countries that are within close geographic proximity (South Centre 2007: 3) and it symbolises a move to unify countries that share a geographic proximity. This process also entails the removal of trade barriers and other economic constraints to encourage cooperation and facilitate trade between countries.

The process of regional integration also strengthens trade between countries and seeks to connect the African continent to the global marketplace (African Development Bank 2015: 234). These economic benefits can also help the continent promote socio-economic development and allow the free movement of people, services, goods, and capital (Okafor & Udibe 2020: 8). This has the potential to create conditions that will accelerate economic development, alleviate poverty, and help the continent compete in global trade markets (Okafor & Udibe 2020: 8). According to Hartzenberg (2011: 3), countries across Africa remain on the periphery of the world economy, because they are characterised by low per capita income levels with small markets. These factors contribute to high costs of trade and ultimately make it more expensive to do business in Africa (Hartzenberg 2011: 3).

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is an initiative meant to redress these challenges and make trade and investment on the continent more attractive. Rooted in the Abuja Treaty (Organisation of African Unity [OAU] General Assembly 1991: 3), AfCFTA symbolises a concerted effort towards regional and continental integration. As of 2022, AfCFTA has been signed by 54 African Union (AU) member states and ratified by 47 of those signatories (TRALAC 2024). At its core, AfCFTA seeks to create one single market which facilitates the free movement of goods and services, people, and businesses (African Union General Assembly 2018: 4; Okafor & Udibe 2020: 7). The Agreement is poised to create the largest free trade area in the world since the World Trade Organisation (Ajibo 2019: 872) and in 2019, was thought to potentially increase the continent's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to US\$2.5 trillion. With 47 per cent of Africa's population listed as extremely poor (Oldiges

& Jennings 2020: 2), AfCFTA intends to create greater employment opportunities and boost production related work in 60 per cent of African countries (Maliszewska et al. 2020: 7).

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

Despite the vast economic benefits, AfCFTA and its provisions have not yet taken root and this study wants to understand why. The current study, therefore, aims to answer the broad question: *Is there political will amongst those that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA?* The following sub-questions break this question down and guide the study's investigation:

- What is free trade and what is its link to AfCFTA?
- What is regional integration and how does it link to what AfCFTA seeks to achieve?
- What system underpins AfCFTA?
- What is political will?
- What indicators of political will exist within the context of AfCFTA?

1.3 Preliminary Literature Review

There is a substantial body of literature that studies the concepts at the core of this study. This preliminary thematic literature review will discuss selected studies that have researched these themes. These include the concepts of free trade, regional integration, the system of integration within the AU, the objectives of AfCFTA, and possible systemic challenges to the implementation of the trade agreement which may indicate whether there is political will or not. Following is a brief overview of common terms—tariffs, non-tariff barriers, imports, and exports—that feature throughout the dissertation. The terms are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

1.3.1 Tariffs

Tariffs are defined by Smith (2019: 1) and Balaam and Dillman (2016: 132) as taxes placed on goods that are imported with the aim of increasing the prices of the goods. Such tariffs could make consumers less likely to purchase the goods, however, should consumers continue to purchase internationally produced goods, this would increase

government revenue (McDonald 2017: 41; Smith 2019: 1). Furthermore, by implementing tariffs, governments protect local industries from foreign producers (McDonald 2017: 41; Smith 2019: 1). A common argument regarding the use of tariffs, is that they contribute to the growth of domestic industries by encouraging citizens to purchase domestically produced goods (Chatzky & Siripurapu 2021: 1).

This inevitably makes products that are produced in a local area, region, country, or free trade area cheaper than imported goods (Smith 2019: 1). According to Chatzky and Siripurapu (2021: 1), tariffs are imposed by governments and are paid either by the consumer or the importer who buys the product from the country where the product is produced (Smith 2019: 2).

Tariffs play a key role in trade policy, since they are an effective mechanism of protecting and managing the market share that local firms have over domestic industries (Tarr 2000: 2). Felder (1986: 78) states that tariffs provide protection that encourages local firms to have a significant share of their local market. Tariffs further maximise the benefits that come with protecting local goods (Tarr 2000: 2). For example, tariffs generate income that can be used to increase state revenue, they protect growing industries, they reduce imports and as bargaining tools, they gain concessions from trading partners (Felder 1986: 77; Smith 2019: 2; Tarr 2000: 2).

Smith (2019:1) contends that there are two effects of tariffs. First, consumers suffer significantly because products that are produced internationally are more expensive with the tariffs applied (Smith 2019: 2). Second, domestic producers benefit greatly because they can increase their selling prices and sell their products to more domestic consumers (Smith 2019: 2).

1.3.2 Non-tariff barriers

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2012: 1) defines non-tariff barriers as policy measures apart from other customs tariffs that impact international trade. Non-tariff barriers are further defined by Yalcin et al. (2017: 5) as any government trade policy that encourages discrimination against foreign traders in relation to domestic traders. Balaam and Dillman (2016: 132) add that non-tariff barriers are defined as alternative ways of limiting imports from foreign producers. In other words, non-tariff barriers are a different form of protectionist policies taken by

countries (Quambusch 1977: 79). Non-tariff barriers may occur through many forms such as customs duties, government standards, legislation, and licensing requirements which make it difficult for international producers to export goods (Balaam & Dilman 2016: 132; Quambusch 1997: 97).

Non-tariff barriers can also be broad and require a set of specific classifications (UNCTAD 2012: 1). The UNCTAD coding system, for example, states that non-tariff barriers comprise of measures that are technical, such as environmental and sanitary protection measures (UNCTAD 2012: 1). Further, non-tariff barriers also comprise of traditional instruments such as export and import restrictions, quotas and trade protection measures, and traditional instruments of policy, such as price control, export and import restrictions, quotas, and behind-the-border measures such as measures taken to restrict the movement of goods and services (UNCTAD 2012: 2).

Import quotas are an example of measures taken by governments to restrict the movement of goods and impose limits on the quantity of items that can be imported into a country (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132). The price of goods is increased as a political tactic which restricts competition from international firms (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132).¹ An example is the British Corn Laws Act, which enacted legislation that would limit imports of grain into Britain through trade barriers (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132). Non-tariff barriers are also used to enact trade defence measures such as anti-dumping laws and consist of safe-guard measures; these barriers significantly restrict international imports (Yalcin et al. 2017: 3).

1.3.3 Imports and exports

An import occurs when goods and services are received from another country (Gould et al. 1993: 1). This is beneficial for countries that seek to procure goods and services that are either too expensive to be produced domestically or that simply cannot be produced domestically (Gould et al. 1993: 1). Furthermore, “imports of merchandise are goods that add to a country’s stock of material resources by entering its territory” (UNCTAD 2012: 84). Conversely, exports are defined as both tangible and intangible

1. Paul and Amawi (2013: 40) suggest that the theory of mercantilism is “a set of state policies first and a theory of International Political Economy (IPE) second”. Mercantilist practices were designed as a framework for “state-building projects” of early western monarchs (Paul & Amawi 2013: 40). These policies discouraged free trade and instead believed that tariffs and restrictions must be imposed “on the export of money” (Paul & Amawi 2013: 40). Petman (2012:111) further added that mercantilist policies believe that local industries must be protected through the control of imports with the use of trade barriers (Petmann 2012: 111)

goods that are sold outside of the territory of the producing country (UNCTAD 2012: 84), and the statistical territory of a country comprises its economic territory within the global trade system (UNCTAD 2012: 48). This refers to the territory where goods enter and leave a country freely (UNCTAD 2012: 48).

Exports are goods and services that are domestically produced and sold overseas, while imports are goods that are produced abroad and are purchased domestically. Therefore, imports are received, while exports are sold abroad (UNCTAD 2012: 48).

1.3.4 Free trade and regional integration

Adam Smith (1775) argued that “the wealth of nations can only be increased through free trade which would allow countries to specialise in the production of certain goods and services” (quoted in Terzea 2016: 245). This is a concept that Herlitz (1964) and Milner (1999: 92) developed further citing that such trade encourages exports and limits imports through tariff barriers and trade concessions (Herlitz 1964: 108). Moreover, developing countries have sought to implement “less controlled and more export-oriented” policies that dismantle protectionist barriers and integrate their economies (Milner & Kubota 2005: 108). Essentially, this process improves “structural efficiency and resource allocation in order to give different members the means to specialise in the production of different final and intermediate commodities” (Plummer et al. 2010: 48). Regional integration is a structural initiative designed to guide the implementation of free trade initiatives (Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 92; Patterson 2013: 1). Madyo (2018: 12) and Mutharika (1972) define regional integration as the act of coordinating economic activities to accelerate the development of the continent. Madyo (2018: 12) explains that this is the process of integrating various economies in one “given area or region into one single unit for the purpose of regional economic development”. Bárcena et al. (2014:9) contend that regional integration is a multidimensional process while Harloov (1997: 15) suggests that this process establishes “mechanisms and techniques that minimize conflicts and maximize internal and external economic, political, social and cultural benefits of their interaction”.

Draper (2010: 7) maintains that there has been a strong desire amongst African leaders to integrate the continent’s economies. However, both Draper (2010: 7) and

Gumede (2021: 458) posit that African economic integration suffers from many problems such as a lack of 'political will' and 'unfulfilled commitments' which hamper the integration process. For this reason, this study will establish the factors that undermine such political commitment.

Africa pursues a linear approach to integration which Hartzenburg (2011: 3) and Mukamunana and Moeti (2005) suggest that it is pursued through several stages. These stages aim to establish: a Free Trade Area; a Customs Union; a Common Market; and an Economic and Monetary Union. To this end, Hartzenburg (2011 :3) argues that African integration should begin with labour, goods, and capital markets, before moving towards monetary integration (Hartzenburg 2011: 3). Africa's eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are key building blocks of integration and of the African Economic Community (AEC) (Hartzenburg 2011: 3), because the RECs can harmonise trade policies, coordinate regional and continental policies, and rally regional actors under an integration agenda (African Union Commission 2014b: 152; Uzodike 2009: 31; Yihdego 2011: 587).

For Uzodike (2009: 27), the consensus on how regional integration can benefit the continent has served as the main basis for how RECs have been formulated. These benefits refer to a greater market size, expanding trade, and productivity due to an increased economy of scale and a more effective means of negotiations with economic actors in the global economy (Uzodike 2009: 28). The Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 10) states that the AU will use the RECs to strengthen economic, social, and cultural integration on the continent. Moreover, RECs are tasked with coordinating the interests of AU member states within the AU arena and play key roles in areas such as "peace, security, development and governance" (African Union Commission 2014b: 152). RECs are, therefore, key institutions for facilitating integration in the African continent and this study aims to understand the broader systemic impact on regional integration. Therefore, there is a need to identify the different elements that are designed to facilitate integration within this system. This will aid in establishing the role of RECs and regional integration with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA.

1.3.5 The African Continental Free Trade Area

AfCFTA is a “flagship project” of the AU’s Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission 2014: 15). Agenda 2063 refers to “Africa’s development blueprint to achieve inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development over a 50-year period” (African Union Development Agency 2022: 14). AfCFTA seeks to facilitate free trade by dismantling non-tariff barriers and eliminating import tariffs on 97 per cent of goods and services that are traded on the continent (Tayo 2021: 1). Perron-Welch (2021: 6) argues that AfCFTA achieves this by creating one continental market for goods and services, which includes the free movement of goods and people (Perron-Welch 2021: 6). AfCFTA will liberalise trade and facilitation instruments across the 55 member states of the AU to cover a market with a GDP of US\$2.5 trillion.

The Agreement, according to Geda and Yimmer (2022: 3), will likely boost free trade within Africa by between 25–30 per cent. The authors note that free trade will accelerate “intra-regional trade and stimulate economic growth and lift people out of poverty” (African Union General Assembly 2018: 22; Geda & Yimmer 2022: 3). Furthermore, Nkomo et al. (2020: 1) express that AfCFTA is an “important vehicle for realising the Pan-African vision of regional integration and structural transformation of Africa’s economy”. Ouma (2021: 24) expands on this view, noting that AfCFTA seeks to promote free trade through the institutionalisation of regional integration. Asiedu (2018: 2), Echandi et al. (2022: 1), and Nshimbi (2019: 190) corroborate and suggest that AfCFTA seeks to encourage regional integration by removing trade barriers on goods and services across the continent.

An example of a harmonising policy which seeks to implement regional integration through AfCFTA is the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods, which provides a framework for a “liberalised market for trade in goods in accordance with Article 3 of the agreement” (Oladeji 2021: 1). Moreover, it serves as a procedural guide that determines the “rules and modalities” for the liberalisation of trade in accordance with AfCFTA (Oladeji 2021: 1). Perron-Welch (2021: 15) noted that the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods seeks to: eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers; foster greater customs efficiency; manage the removal of technical barriers to trade; develop and promote regional and continental value chains; and, use free trade to promote socio-economic development across Africa. While there have been many studies that have

identified the objectives of AfCFTA, there is a need to determine what systems have been put in place to aid the implementation of AfCFTA. Further, while AfCFTA seeks to facilitate continental integration, socio-economic development, and free trade across the continent, there is a need to understand why AfCFTA has not been aggressively implemented.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The current study uses systems theory to guide its analysis. According to Skytner (2006: 3), systems theory seeks to understand how an environment and its elements act and interact with each other. For Skytner (2006: 51), systems theory perceives an organised entity as a “whole in which the parts, though distinguishable, are interdependent. They have certain characteristics produced by their inclusion in the whole, and the whole has some characteristics belonging to none of the parts.” The current study further analyses the AU as such a system since it is designed to manage the interaction between states as they pursue continental goals (Yihdego 2011: 567) such as AfCFTA. Using systems theory as a theoretical framework reveals who the key actors are, what the feedback loops of the trade agreement are on these actors, and uncovers key features of the system that implements AfCFTA. Ultimately, understanding the strategic motivations of this complex network of actors and how they interact with other aspects of the regional integration process, will aid this study in determining the key features of the system and how the agreement is supposed to be implemented.

1.5 Research Approach

This study applies a qualitative analysis approach and uses AfCFTA as a case study. A qualitative analysis is designed to understand how regional integration influences the relationships between actors, especially those in charge of trade, migration, and economic development. It uses data from both primary and secondary sources, such as articles, books, studies related to the topic, academic papers, and policies related to the topic. In addition to these essential academic sources, the key policies and treaties that are referred to throughout the study include the Abuja Treaty, the AfCFTA Treaty, and the measures enacted to legitimise integration from their perspective. This

study focuses extensively on the definitions of political will to uncover indicators of political will, and to identify them within the African system. Further, the current study refers to Raile et al.'s (2014: 660) framework to create a criterion that can be used to assess the extent of political will within the African system.

A qualitative codebook was used to capture the data (Lal et al. 2012: 1). The study used system theory to assess the data to determine the following: the actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA, the interactions of the system within which these political interactions operate; how the various actors involved in the system interpret and manage the implementation of AfCFTA; and, uses feedback loops to identify what motivates the establishment of AfCFTA (Easton 1957: 386; Rogow 1966: 144). As Rogow (1966: 144) suggests, the flow of these effects creates a unique set of inputs, demands, support, or resistance. This study uses this framework to analyse how the trade agreement is being implemented.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Studying this topic will generate data that can track the actors involved in AfCFTA and assess their systemic impact on the implementation of the free trade agreement. It further seeks to offer an alternative approach to studies that focus on regional integration by determining how certain indicators of political will influence the implementation of regional integration. This approach could potentially change how regional integration is studied, and can also highlight policy strengths and weaknesses, linking them to implementation. The study further intends to bolster integration efforts across the African continent by highlighting the issues that influence free trade on the African continent and work towards solutions to improve the implementation of current trade policies.

1.7 Chapter Outline

The following chapters will guide the research as follows. Chapter 1 is an overview of the study, its aims, and main concepts as well as the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review, which identifies the key features of AfCFTA by providing an overview of important concepts of trade and what other scholars, studying integration

efforts on the African continent have found. It also presents the debates on the key themes. Chapter 3 is the research methodology which explains how the data was chosen and how it will be collected. It discusses political will, and how it will be used to assess the implementation of AfCFTA. Chapter 3 further defines and discusses the benefits of using systems theory. Chapter 4 discusses AfCFTA and the African system more extensively as the case study of this research. Chapter 5 details the data captured by using specially constructed graphs and diagrams to show how the system operates and is interpreted. It further uses indicators of political will to assess the extent to which political will influences the implementation of AfCFTA within the African system. This is meant to highlight the system of implementation and AfCFTA. Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter which briefly highlights the study's key findings and recommendations in terms of what future studies on the topics could generate more solutions that can enhance the implementation of AfCFTA.

Chapter 2: The Theoretical Foundation of the African Free Continental Trade Agreement

2.1 Introduction

This is a thematic literature review that provides conceptual clarity on AfCFTA. The literature review focuses on key concepts that are inherently linked to AfCFTA and the objectives of the current study. This chapter critically assesses the literature on free trade, the aims of AfCFTA, regional integration, and political will.

The review begins by assessing the framework for international trade. This is followed by a discussion on key terms and classical theories of trade. These themes demonstrate how free trade features significantly in AfCFTA and regional integration and is consequently seen as a solution towards Africa's developmental challenges. It is, therefore, important to discuss a key theory of international political economy, namely economic liberalism, which provides the foundational basis for free trade.

In discussing the theoretical framework for free trade, it establishes the priorities that guide policymakers who support free trade. This is followed by a section that explains the goals of AfCFTA by first defining regional integration, which includes identifying the method used to pursue regional integration in Africa and aligning it to AfCFTA by finding links with African regional integration and the goals of AfCFTA. The last section discusses the concept of political will. This provides a definition for a concept that could be important for the implementation of political will, and will aid the study in identifying whether there is political will amongst policymakers and political actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA.

2.2 Introduction: International Trade

The concept of trade can be traced back to Aristotle (translated by Ross 1999: 75) whose *Nicomachean Ethics* refers to trade as an act of reciprocity. Soudek (1952: 45) expands on this argument by noting that a central feature of Aristotle's conceptualisation was that goods are exchanged according to equivalents.

Balaam and Dillmaan (2016: 129), Brenton and Soprano (2018: 4), and Sira and Dubravka (2015: 1211) agree that international trade occurs when services and goods are exchanged across national boundaries for money or other goods and services. Furthermore, such trade makes it possible for a receiving country to gain more in quality and quantity of the goods and services that it consumes (Gould et al. 1993: 1). However, the foreign producer stands to generate more profit compared to selling their product domestically (McDonald 2017: 40). International trade is further affected by political and economic factors such as globalisation, trade barriers, and various trade agreements (Sira & Dubravka 2015: 1211).

2.2.1 Defining free trade

This section aims to look at how free trade has been defined within a regional context with a view to show how it has contributed to the AfCFTA proposed implementation.

Free trade is a form of international trade that occurs when services and goods are exchanged internationally without trade tariffs and barriers to ensure that commerce flourishes between countries (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132; Brenton & Soprano 2018: 1211; Milner 1999: 92; Sira & Dubravka 2015: 1211). This differs from mercantilism which advocates for policies that focus on creating state revenue by ensuring that domestic products are sold both domestically and internationally, while using trade barriers to prevent national citizens from buying products that are internationally produced (Mun 2013: 42). Plummer et al. (2010: 18) add that free trade influences two factors. Firstly, the economies of scale, which refers to a decrease in production costs because of a larger market of consumers (Plummer et al. 2010: 18). This results in an increase in output, which effectively lowers the cost of production (Plummer et al. 2010: 18).

Secondly, free trade influences structural policies regarding implementing and legitimising free trade by ensuring that participating nations must enact harmonised trade policies (Plummer et al. 2010: 18).² The process of trade liberalisation is defined by Balaam and Dillman (2016: 132) as state measures with the aim of reducing the

2. According to Erasmus (2022: 1), the harmonisation of policies occurs when participating states respect and implement similar policies. This also refers to "technical standards or rules" with the aim of preventing fragmentation and unpredictability (Erasmus 2022: 1). Further, the member states are responsible for determining how harmonisation is agreed, adhered to, and formulated (Erasmus 2022: 1).

price of exported products through the removal of tariffs and trade barriers. This makes it attractive for foreign buyers to purchase products from a nation (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132), which is why developing countries have adopted more liberalised trade policies and worked to forge more integrated economies by removing barriers that are protectionist (Milner & Kubota 2005: 108).

Furthermore, proponents of free trade, such as Herlitz (1964: 108), believe that protectionist policies encourage exports while limiting imports through tariff barriers, and that trade concessions hamper economic growth and development while free trade stands for the removal of tariff barriers to encourage both exports and imports.

Gould et al. (1993) provide a pragmatic perspective to the case of free trade. According to Gould et al. (1993: 1), free trade facilitates the acquisition of goods and services that cannot be produced domestically—or can be produced domestically at a “cost that is greater than the cost of obtaining them indirectly by exchanging them for the exports it produces”. Ricardo (1911: 119) posits that the value of foreign goods is defined by “the quantity of the produce of our land and labour, which is given in exchange for them” and that the value of trade lies in the exchange of foreign goods given to the equivalent value of the receiving country.

2.2.2 The case for free trade

According to Letwin (1951: 35), the first academic case for free trade was made by Sir Dudley North in 1691. Letwin (1951: 35) explained that Sir Dudley North’s work, titled *Discourses on Trade (1691)*, served as the first exposition of the doctrine of free trade. North (1691) maintained, laws that seek to restrict trade are detrimental—while noting that trade and wealth rely on conditions that encourage free trade (North 1691: 37).

The origins of the doctrine of free trade are also rooted in the thinking of classical political economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and David Hume (Dimand 2005: 49). According to Letiche (1960: 13), Adam Smith believed that free trade was a prerequisite to economic development. Economic development is a process that structurally transforms an economy through the implementation of policies and measures with the aim of increasing the standard of living of citizens (Panth 2020: 1). These policies and measures include the improvement of state infrastructure and

requires socio-economic and political factors to facilitate this process (Panth 2020: 1). Economic development improves the living conditions of populations and significantly increases state capacity. Free trade occurs when structural policies are designed to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers between trading countries to encourage commerce between trading countries (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 132; Brenton & Soprano 2018: 4; Milner 1999: 92; Sira & Dubravka 2015: 1211). Therefore, with these barriers eliminated, economic development can be accelerated with nations giving their producers and sellers the freedom to trade and exchange without restrictions (Letiche 1960: 13; Mill 2004a: 174; Mill 2004b: 87; North 1961: 37; Smith 2003: 615).

Smith (2003: 595) argued that the imposition of tariffs to pursue this aim was the equivalent of a prohibition of trade. Mill (2004a: 87), another proponent of free trade, shared Smith's sentiments and argued that free trade could create wealth for nations. In a different study, Mill (2004b: 87) argued that fair trade is rooted in "leaving the producers and sellers perfectly free", adding that restrictions on trade imposed by states are restraints and should be considered an evil.

Mill (2004a:172) added to Smith's (2003)³ argument, which also sought to argue for the benefits of free trade. In this essay, Mill (2004a: 172) notes that while all nations can produce goods and commodities, if other nations specialise in certain products, it is then cheaper for nations to import than it is to produce them domestically. Mill (2004a: 173) also addresses what the author refers to as a misconception regarding the benefits of international trade and refers to this misconception as the idea that trade should only generate wealth for merchants who sell and produce on behalf of their respective nations. According to Mill (2004a: 174), international trade allows for cheaper production, which in turn, means that the consumer (citizens of a state) should ultimately benefit because the products that they purchase are cheaper.

Smith (2003: 595) debunks the notion that states must protect themselves through trade barriers by arguing that while free trade can be advantageous to one nation, it does not mean that it can be disadvantageous for the other (Smith 2003: 596). As part of the author's case for free trade, the study further suggests that free trade between

3. The following classical works: Smith's *Wealth of the Nation* was originally published in 1776. Mill's collection of essays on *International Trade* were published in 1848. The years provided are sourced from contemporary reprints.

nations is equally advantageous to all involved nations. Smith (2003: 615) contends that the restraints and protectionist measures in which mercantilism is founded is not sufficient for development. Ricardo (1911: 120) provides a perspective by arguing that the profits that accrue through trade significantly increases state revenue. The author further argues that in a system where trade is completely free, it is easier for nations to devote their capital to the products which they specialise in (Ricardo 1911: 125).

When two nations trade with one another, the doctrine of free trade suggests that if there is an even balance neither party will have losses or gains. Smith (2003: 615) further noted that free trade which is regularly conducted between two nations creates a shared advantage and value between trading nations.

In defining the value, Smith (2003: 616) refers to factors beyond the potential profitability and instead states that “each will gain and replenish the capital used in the different market” and both will indirectly drive each other’s revenue on a consistent basis. Therefore, proponents of free trade believe that free trade is a win-win game (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 33).

Terzea (2016: 245) and Ukwandu (2015: 15) present similar sentiments, arguing that a country will benefit more if a foreign country is able to deliver goods that are cheaper to purchase than what they would have been if produced domestically. Ukwandu (2015: 15) further notes that one of Smith’s (2003) arguments on the necessity of free trade, was that resources that are unutilised should be exported abroad to generate “much-needed income to enhance the development of local economies”. Smith (2003: 20) explains further, that when any product produced domestically “exceeds what the demand of the country requires, the surplus must be sent abroad, and exchanged for which there is a demand at home”. George (2010: 7) argues that state interventions on international trade reduces its efficiency and stops it achieving what would otherwise be an optimal distribution of scarce resources. George (2010: 7) expresses further, that the removal of trade barriers should theoretically result in more trade between nations. In other words, trade increases as barriers are removed (George 2010: 7).

It is important to interrogate the case made for free trade by classical political economists since they provide the theoretical root of the notion of the act of free trade. They further underpin efforts of regional integration which relies on the notion that

development can be achieved when countries in one geographic area engage in free trade amongst each other. Free trade has also been identified as a key feature of the global economy (Milner 1999: 10). Rodrik (1994: 62) noted that developing countries have “flocked to free trade as if it were the holy grail of economic development”. Moreover, free trade has been identified as an inherent feature of regional integration within the African continent (Danso 1995: 14). This is reflected in the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 10), which provides a framework for the integration of the African continent through free trade.

2.3 Regional Integration

To expand on the definition of regional integration provided in Chapter 1, regionalism is defined as “a process consisting of a group of countries that implement a set of preferential policies designed to enhance the exchange of goods and/or factors of production among themselves” (Walter 1995:78). Regional integration, on the other hand, is a process that expands on this explanation and refers to a group of nations who voluntarily “share each other's markets and establish mechanisms that maximise economic, social, cultural and political benefits” (Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 92). Asante (1997: 20) and Harloov (1997: 15) corroborate this, defining regional integration as a process where countries in a similar geographical area unite to pursue shared economic goals to achieve development. Balassa (1961: 174) provides further context, defining integration as a process which combines parts to create a whole that includes measures created to eliminate any forms of discrimination amongst economic units that belong to different states (Balassa 1961: 174). This is delved into further by Mutharika (1972) who argues that such an initiative brings different economies within a region together to form a single unit with the shared purpose of economic development.

When two or more countries agree to pursue such a strategy, they agree to the same policies and objectives to ensure that mutual advantages are exploited by all participants (Asante 1997: 8; Harloov 1997: 15). Madyo (2008: 12) concurs that regional integration coordinates economic activities within a specific region with the aim of enhancing development. Parallels can be seen here with one of the tenets of free trade which Balaam and Dillman (2016: 132), Milner (1999: 92), Milner and

Kubota (2005: 108), and Plummer et al. (2010: 18) raise, which requires participating countries to enact harmonised trade policies through the limitation of trade and protectionist barriers to integrate their economies to encourage free trade.

Haas (1970: 612) presents different academic definitions of regional integration. For example, the author defines regional organisations as a network of organisations that have international links within a defined geographical area (Haas 1970: 612) and a regional system as interactions that occur within these settings. Haas (1970: 612) further notes that studying regional integration consists of “dynamic concerns”, which require an analysis of the different elements that make up the system. The author highlights the need to study the links between concerns, local ties, and the world in which they coexist (Haas 1970: 612).

Haas (1961: 367) brings the concept of the political community into the fold, arguing that nation-states constitute communities which are seen as amalgamations of states that form part of other communities. The author notes that a political community exists when there is a “peaceful exchange in a setting of contending groups with mutually antagonistic claims” (Haas 1961: 367), and that this condition is attained through integration. Haas (1961: 367) further defines integration as a process that occurs when a “group of political actors in close territorial settings are convinced to shift their objectives, loyalties and political activities towards one shared and larger political centre, which has institutions that have jurisdiction over existing national states”. Haas (1961: 368) also notes that social and economic factors are conditions that should merely be used as indicators to measure the extent to which integration occurs.

Balassa (1961: 1) and Marinov (2015: 23) define regional integration as a process which entails harmonisation of trade policies within a shared geographical area, and further removes discriminations which are enacted on national borders. Nye (1968a: 857) expands, by defining integration as “the attainment of institutions and practises strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful exchange among the population”.

Trade is a fundamental feature of regional integration (Mukamunana & Moeti, 2005: 92) because the process is governed by trade agreements between participating countries which removes trade restrictions between nations (Madyo 2008: 13). Regional integration as an approach to develop third world countries first began in

Latin America and has featured in post-independence Africa (Zormelo 1995: 5). Zormelo (1995: 5) notes that many developing countries have begun to look to regional integration as a means of development. Links between developing countries, regional integration, and free trade are made by Milner and Kubota (2005: 108) who state that they embraced free trade by shifting towards liberalised policies, which has resulted in nations opting to integrate their economies by steadily dismantling trade barriers (Milner & Kubota 2005: 108).

Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 92), both political economists, refer to Hurrell (1995: 38) who finds the concept of regionalism to be ambiguous. Hurrell (1995: 333) notes that the concept consists of multiple dimensions. These dimensions are economic, through the harmonisation of trade and economic policies, and can also refer to political factors such as the joining of regimes, as well as organisational integration through the establishment of formal institutions tasked with overseeing a specific region. Regional integration incorporates an array of economic, social, and political dimensions that are organised based on geographical proximity, and thus, requires a geographical scope (Hurrell 1995: 333). Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 92) further state that this ambiguity also applies to the concept of regional integration or regional cooperation (Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 92).

In addition, Harloov (1997: 15) found that this process establishes mechanisms that seek to limit conflicts while maximising internal and external socio-economic benefits of their interaction (Harloov 1997:15). Regional integration relies on trade agreements between a group of nations that are designed to remove restrictions and foster cooperation. This is corroborated by Barcena et al. (2014: 9) who contend that regional integration is a multidimensional process which, beyond trade and economic issues, also encompasses social, political, and cultural concerns.

Regional integration has also been utilised as a strategy by the global south to better position themselves in global markets (Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 91). Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 91) argue that globalisation has encouraged them to draw inspiration from regional economic blocs such as the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Arrangement, and the Association of South East Asian Nations.

This has resulted in the consolidation of regional markets, which create bigger markets, and by extension, increased economies of scale (Mukamunana & Moeti

2005: 91). Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 91) and Nye (1968b: 288) further noted that the coordinated national economic policies can also foster an easier mobilisation of factors of production which has the potential to dramatically accelerate economic growth. However, Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 91) argue that the benefits of regional integration in Africa could be hampered by “poor economic growth, low levels of intraregional trade and an inability to attract investments”.

Draper (2010: 7) contends that there has been a strong desire amongst African leaders to integrate the continent’s economies, however, the author adds that African economic integration suffers from many problems such as a lack of political will and commitment which hampers the integration process. Aworaro (2015: 6) corroborates noting that regional integration formed a crucial part of discourse amongst African political leaders before independence, referring to Nkrumah (1963: 46) who “canvassed” for continental integration to be an efficient strategy for solving Africa’s economic, social, and political problems post-independence.

The *‘All African People Conference’* played a role in encouraging African leaders to move towards regional integration. This resulted in the creation of the United Nations Economic and Social Council’s Terms of Reference for the Economic Commission for Africa, which on 29 April 1958, established the Economic Commission for Africa. This Commission, along with other bodies, was tasked with ensuring African development through integration (Aworaro 2015: 6). Integration in Africa has historically been seen to benefit the continent not only economically, but also to address a series of divisions that were created by the legacy of colonialism (Aworaro 2015: 6).

This led to the creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was created in 1963 (Aworaro 2015: 6; OAU General Assembly 1963: 11). This organisation has now evolved into the AU, which is the system in which African states operate. Hartzenberg (2011: 5) links regional integration and AfCFTA by advocating for combining the different regional constructs into a single united African economy, the AEC, as envisaged by the Abuja Treaty (Hartzenberg 2011: 5).

The Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 2) serves as a key framework for the implementation of regional and continental integration. Article 4(d) of the treaty states that one of the objectives of the treaty is to coordinate and harmonise policies amongst African countries to facilitate the creation of the AEC. Further, one of the main and

underlying objectives of the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 9), according to Article 4 (2), is to abolish tariffs, customs duties, and non-tariff barriers amongst member states to facilitate free trade on the continent. Thus, free trade also features significantly here, and is a direct manifestation of integration. The significance of the Abuja Treaty in Africa's integration project should not go unnoticed.

2.4 Political Will

Understanding political will can greatly aid policies by generating indicators that can assess levels of political will, particularly when assessing how policies are implemented. For instance, it can be used to answer questions that investigate what drives actors within the AU and AfCFTA institutions and can also generate solutions that are geared towards creating political will within the system.

One of the most challenging issues when it comes to understanding political will, is highlighted by Thuynsma (2022: 68), who argues and notes that many scholars fail to provide an adequate explanation of political will because few studies define political will and its determinants. Policymakers also blame a lack of political will for policy failures, however, political will is not studied to determine how it can be used to encourage policy implementation (Thuynsma 2022: 68).

Persson and Sjöstedt (2012: 617) argue that political will is seen as a silver bullet for policy problems to policymakers. They further understand political will as the extent to which leaders seek to sustain and initiate reform, and therefore, it is an essential factor in the policymaking and implementation process (Persson & Sjöstedt 2012: 617). The authors simultaneously argue that there is a need to define political will to develop a greater and more analytical approach through the incorporation of institutional factors, which are central to political systems (Persson & Sjöstedt 2012: 617). Hammergren (1998: 12) highlights this, stating that political will is usually defined by a lack of it.

According to Bradley (1902: 438), will is an internal or outward inclination towards an action. Thuynsma (2022: 69) expands, arguing that will is complex, and is a volitional action. While Bradley (1902: 446) found that it consists of two stages. The first stage refers to the emergence of a specific idea or desire, while the second stage refers to the actions taken towards advancing beyond the idea towards a physical outcome.

This extends to volitional factors such as values, customs, and norms which influence how policymakers act towards a goal (Thuynsma 2022: 69).

Political will, therefore, refers to the extent to which an actor is willing to spend energy towards a certain political goal, and is therefore, a prerequisite to whether certain policy objectives are achieved or not (Treadway et al. 2005: 235). Malena (2009: 17) and Thuynsma (2022: 70) describe political will as a motivating factor that influences political actors, which refers to an array of stakeholders that include elected and appointed leaders in governance (Thuynsma 2022: 70).

Raile et al. (2014: 654) identify political will as a concept that is only used and defined where it is absent. A consequence of this is that it is usually abandoned to the domain of political rhetoric (Raile et al. 2014: 654). However, it needs to be pulled out of this domain as it can contribute significantly to understanding what drives political actors to implement policy decisions (Raile et al. 2014: 654).

Political will is a catalyst of political behaviour and is measured by the energy utilised by a political actor and their willingness to act towards, and to implement a policy decision (Treadway et al. 2005: 235). Political will, therefore, refers to how a political actor behaves towards a political objective and contributes to the extent to which they are motivated to achieve it (Brinkerhoff 2000: 1; Thuynsma 2022: 70; Treadway et al. 2005: 235).

Before engaging in political behaviour that demonstrates one's willingness to achieve an objective, one must have willingness and motivation to actively achieve it (Treadway et al. 2005: 231). Thuynsma (2022: 70) and Brinkerhoff (2000: 1) noted that political will refers to the extent at which political leaders are committed to undertake actions that will result in the achievement of objectives, which will require them to bear the costs of these actions. Thus, political will is a prerequisite towards political behaviour and the attainment of objectives that are set to be achieved (Treadway et al. 2005: 231). When the concept of political will is used by scholars, particularly in its absence, it refers to situations where it seems to assess the extent at which policymakers are driven to implement certain policy objectives. Based on the definition of political will provided in the current study, it can be concluded that strong political will is crucial for the implementation of AfCFTA and is, therefore, important to investigate where it lacks.

Browne (1994: 282) highlights the importance of political will with regards to the integration process, arguing that integration can be achieved, and the impending obstacles overcome, if African countries have the political will to achieve integration. Browne (1994: 282) further argues that the push for integration is a long-standing desire from African leaders and intellectuals, since they view integration as a long-term strategy for joint self-reliance.

Indications of political will come from the escalation of integration policies and frameworks established by the OAU and the AU, such as the Lagos Plan of Action (OAU 1980), the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 4), the Africa Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission 2014a) and the treaty establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018) which shows steps taken by African leaders to create a framework and a system of integration.

An indicator of political will is demonstrated by the 1991 OAU summit that established the Abuja Treaty by two key figures. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who was also serving as the 1991 Chairperson of the OAU argued that the Abuja treaty is a cornerstone for African development (Museveni 1997: 94). Salim Salim, the Secretary-General and one of the high-ranking officials of the OAU at the time of the establishment of the Abuja Treaty, highlighted that the treaty was as historic and significant as the OAU Charter itself (Salim 1997: 107).

The Abuja Treaty also symbolised the evolution of the OAU from an institution that focused on the political liberation of African countries from colonised powers to one that focused more on the integrated socio-economic development of Africa. Continental integration was also identified as the foundation of socio-economic development (Salim 1997: 107). This was to be realised by the establishment of the AEC which is outlined by the Abuja Treaty. At its core, the AEC is a fully economically integrated Africa. The objectives of the treaty are outlined in Article 4 of the Abuja Treaty, which in summary, are to promote the development and integration of African economies through the coordination and harmonisation of policies. Free trade features greatly. For example, Article 31 of the Abuja Treaty focuses specifically on the elimination of trade and non-tariff barriers, stating that all member states must gradually abolish trade and non-tariff barriers, and must further refrain from imposing any trade restrictions on member states. What must be highlighted here, however, is

that this indication of political will focuses on policy level objectives, and does not focus on how the objectives to implement regional integration and free trade were driven.

Another facet of political will is introduced by Faleg et al. (2021: 18) who argue that support amongst African citizens could serve as a catalyst for the successful implementation of AfCFTA, stating that the success of AfCFTA could come from “more than just rhetorical support” (Faleg et al. 2021: 18), and instead requires will from individual member states to create national institutions and structures that push legislation which support the harmonisation of trade laws.

2.5 Conclusion

This thematic literature review has discussed key concepts that are linked to the implementation of AfCFTA. This was done by analysing literature that defines and contextualises international trade, first by defining key terms that will be used throughout the study in the context of trade. Further, the key findings that were made indicate that trade and international trade are the exchange of goods and services between nations. Second, an investigation was conducted into what underpins free trade. It was determined that free trade seeks to harmonise trade policies through structural initiatives and policies with the aim of enhancing economic development. This was an important finding since the literature also suggests that free trade is a key feature of AfCFTA because it is an activity that AfCFTA seeks to achieve. Further, regional integration is a structural initiative aimed at harmonising and encouraging free trade within countries that share a geographic region. Political will as defined in the literature review, can further be considered as a motivating force that influences the extent at which a policy is implemented.

These concepts were built upon further by literature that discusses regional integration, which, in its simplest form, is the removal of trade barriers and tariffs between states that operate within a shared geographical block. This is followed by an investigation into regional integration within the African context which serves the dual role of contextualising integration in Africa, and by showing how regional integration is a key feature of AfCFTA. Last, political will which refers to the willingness of political actors to implement and pursue certain policy objectives must be assessed in the

current study to ascertain whether this can lead the research to any factors that have hampered or bolstered the implementation of the trade agreement.

Thus, by assessing these key themes, they serve as a framework for AfCFTA in Africa as well as highlighting the importance of these themes when contextualising them with the implementation of AfCFTA.

This does not negate the need to answer certain questions that must still be touched on throughout this study. For example, it is important to define the features of the system that governs the trade agreement and how it represents the African framework of integration. Further, it is important to understand the process of regional integration in Africa, and to expand on how it is linked to AfCFTA. In identifying the objectives of AfCFTA, it is important to link these to free trade, and to gain an understanding of the socio-economic factors that influence the implementation of the trade agreement. Answering and discussing these questions could provide some insight towards what may be required for the correct implementation of AfCFTA. Furthermore, the concept of political will must be understood to determine the extent to which it could potentially influence AfCFTA. This requires an identification of indicators of political will so that they can be applied to the implementation of AfCFTA.

However, before answering these questions in greater depth, it would prove to be detrimental if the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented is not discussed and understood, which is the purpose of Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research approach and justifies the use of systems theory as the theoretical framework for the inquiry into the implementation of AfCFTA. To justify the use of systems theory, fundamental questions must be answered including: what is systems theory; what is its relevance to the study; and, how does it provide an empirical assessment to measure how AfCFTA, considering the chosen case study, has been implemented. This is followed by a discussion on the concept of political will, which provides a definition for a concept that could be important for the implementation of political will and will aid the study in identifying whether there is political will amongst policymakers and political actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA. A set of indicators will be developed to identify indicators of political will within the context of AfCFTA. This is followed by a discussion of the study's research design and data collection. While AfCFTA has been introduced in earlier chapters, the discussion here highlights the importance of understanding the system of AfCFTA.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is systems theory, which this study uses to understand the components and functioning of the AfCFTA system. In doing so, the study developed an understanding of what influenced these interactions and defined how the different parts of the system interact with AfCFTA with the intention of explaining why certain policy decisions succeed or fail.

3.2.1 Defining a system

This chapter provides an extensive discussion on what systems theory is and how it is applied in this study. To provide a practical framework to the data that was gathered and analysed, a brief theoretical review explains below how systems theory has been applied to political sciences and international relations before defining how the theory applies to the African political system.

Miller (1965: 193) and Von Bertalanffy (1969:15) are considered the pioneers of systems theory and both define a system as a “set of units with relationships amongst them” (Harary & Batell 1981: 29). The authors also observed that there is a hierarchy of systems, each containing lower levels of systems and interactions, which contribute to the main system (Harary & Batell 1981: 29). In dissecting what a system is, Harary and Batell (1981: 29) conclude that there are two common features – that it involves “a set of units and their interrelationships”.

3.2.2 Systems theory

For systems theorists, a system is a “uniform analytical procedure within an explicitly defined frame of reference” (Parsons 1951: 360). The theory itself originates in the field of biology, however, it is also studied and interpreted by different fields (Lai & Lin 2017: 1). Proponents of systems theory, such as Boulding (1956) and Von Bertalanffy (1969) describe as a skeleton of science that has the aim of analysing a structure and its elements to understand how a system operates (Boulding 1956: 208).

Skytner (2006: 3), who applied systems theory to the discipline of sociology, contends that the main aim of systems theory is to understand how an environment and its elements act as part of “interacting systems” and that these interactions can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Lae and Lin (2017: 3) add that the aim of systems theory is to analyse the nature of relationships and the interdependent components of a particular system. In addition, these components may have their own motive forces and intended purposes within the system (Lae & Lin 2017: 4). Skytner (2006: 49) expands by stating that “the underlying assumptions and premises of systems theory ... has certain common ... features and that a hidden connection exists in everything”.

In an earlier study, Von Bertalanffy (1969: 15) stressed that to understand the characteristics of a system, the elements and their relations within a system must be understood. For system theorists, “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (Skytner 2006: 49), however, Von Bertalanffy (1969: 15) dissects it further, stating that “constitutive characteristics are not explainable from the characteristics of isolated parts” and that all parts in a system and their behaviour can be deduced from how the parts behave. Systems theory was further studied by Jay Forrester (Lane & Sterman

2011: 363), who used the theory to develop systems dynamics as a discipline, and is credited with using systems dynamics to model complex systems (Lane & Sterman 2011: 363). Therefore, systems theory expands the scope of observation by concentrating on the “function and behaviour of whole systems” with the aim of providing an explanation and understanding (Skytner 2006: 34).

A system is, therefore, a hierarchical structure that consists of a set of units which are interrelated and influence the entity holistically, based on how they interact with one another. The aim of systems theory is ultimately to gain a better understanding of this structure to identify how these interactions influence the greater structure. Systems theory makes an investigation more practical by focusing on “strong interactions” between key components of a system that dictate how it functions (Von Bertalanffy 1969: 19). In this regard, the study focuses on the interactions between key actors who are tasked with influencing the implementation of the trade agreement.

From a political science perspective, systems theory is studied from a narrower perspective (Kaplan 1968: 32). Kaplan sees the system as being composed of interdependent variables that interact with one another. The system is also organised to regulate how power is distributed (Kaplan 1968: 37). The legitimacy of a political system also depends on its acceptance by other important actors in the system (Kaplan 1968: 37).

Buzan and Little (1994) note that the phrase ‘international system’ is commonly used in the field of international relations and is generally used to refer to a “nexus of actors and interactions” (Buzan & Little 1994: 232). This can immediately be linked to Skytner’s (2006: 51) research which seeks to understand an environment / system and how its elements interact.

Easton (1957:383) contends that the study of politics concerns itself with understanding how decisions are created and implemented for a political society. A greater understanding of a political phenomenon can be made by assessing all its different aspects (Easton 1957: 383). The author elaborates using practical examples. For example, when trying to understand the political system of a country, one can study the functions of its institutions, such as “political parties, interest groups, government, voting” as well as certain consequences of certain political practices within these institutions (Easton 1957: 383). This reveals the structure in which these

interactions occur, providing an idea of what happens in a political system (Easton 1957: 383). Moreover, Easton (1957: 383) contends that political life must be viewed as “a system of interrelated activities”.

Easton’s understanding of the political system, as well as the principles of an international system in the context of international relations was combined because they are linked and provide a holistic analysis of a system (Easton 1957: 383).

Analysing these systems requires studying a unit, the environment in which it operates, the other elements in this environment and how each interact with one another. To do so, systems theory utilises the steps discussed below (Skytner 2006:15).

First, identify a system to be analysed. The system which was identified for the study was the African political system, in which AfCFTA is being implemented. Second, the behaviour [and interaction] of the units and the properties of the identified system must be recognised and analysed. This study examined the interactions between states and how they behave. Third, the properties (units, their interaction, as well as the behaviour of the interacting elements) of a system must be explained as “a part or function of the system” (Skytner 2006: 15).

It is important to briefly touch on regional integration as the process in which systems theory will be applied. Regional integration is defined by Balassa (1961: 1), a key thinker of regional integration studies as the removal of discrimination between areas that share a geographical proximity (Hosny 2013: 133). This complex process requires a significant understanding of systems theory to identify how the process unfolds through its components, their interactions, and how they create the outcome of regional integration.

Systems theorist Haas (1970: 608), applies regional integration to systems theory by stating that it is a normative process which requires the units and actors of integration to be studied to determine how regional integration is organised. Further, regional integration, according to Haas (1970: 608), is concerned with perceptions, tasks, and transactions and is, therefore, preoccupied with how actors within the system can be analysed to depict the process of integration. Haas (1970: 610) further contends that studying national behaviour can be made practical if the interactions between actors of the regional integration process are studied.

In a study on European integration, Haas (1961: 367) argued that regional integration was not a conscious choice, rather a process that occurs when governments are forced to maximise their economic benefit by cooperating with each other through the centralisation of policies and institutions. Haas (1961:372) further argues that this ‘spillover’ phenomenon can produce other unexpected pressures as cooperation in one sector leads to cooperation in others not previously identified.

3.2.3 Complex systems: Feedback loops

Complex systems are defined by the fact that the sequences between its components are unplanned and unexpected, and therefore, must be identified by the relationships between them (Kavalski 2007: 438). Feedback loops play a role in understanding a complex system by identifying the interaction between its components and its subsystems (Kavalski 2007: 438).

The study, therefore, utilises feedback loops which were developed by Forrester (1988: 1) and further, refer to a system as a grouping of parts and components that work together to achieve a common purpose. Forrester (1988: 2) argued that the need for complex systems arises from the fact that not all systems can be understood from the perspective of general systems theory, therefore, highlighting the need to understand the functioning of a specific system and structure. To this end, Forrester (1988: 7) developed the feedback loop, which the author defines as a closed structure system which links a decision and an action as well as the levels within the system.

Figure 1 below is an excerpt taken from Forrester’s (1988: 7) work which demonstrates the feedback loop. As demonstrated by Figure 1, the feedback loop scientifically demonstrates how certain actions and factors within a system result in a certain outcome. This loop here demonstrates interactions within a complex system and shows how it is influenced by an external source, which then results in an undesirable or desirable outcome. Chapter 5 of the study will use and design feedback loops that demonstrate the interactions within the components of the African system which will be defined as the study progresses.

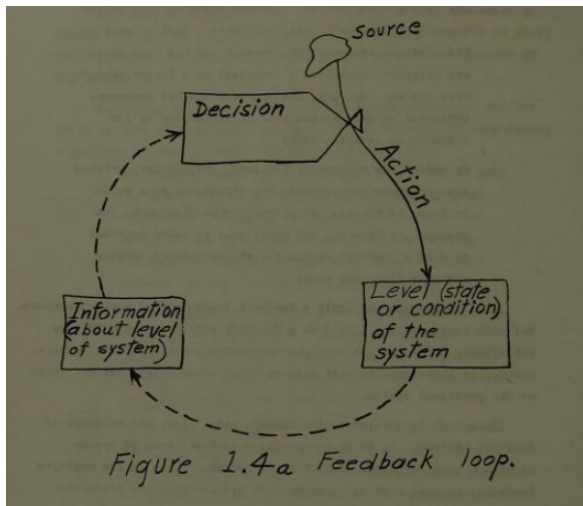


Figure 1: Feedback loop
Source: Forrester (1988: 7)

Gadinger and Peters (2016: 252) further state that feedback loops are inherently applicable to real-life situations. For instance, an interaction between units of a system means that they will be confronted with both controllable and uncontrollable outcomes of their actions, each requiring consistent adjustment (Gadinger & Peters 2016: 252). Therefore, feedback loops are instrumental in understanding how the output of a system affects its input, and again, its subsequent output (Gadinger & Peters 2016: 254). Deutsch and Singer (1964: 393) apply this to the international system noting that when the international system exhibits negative feedback, it seeks to self-correct in response to stimuli.

Therefore, a system will try and control its environment to ensure that its purpose is fulfilled (Gadinger & Peters 2016: 256). In the context of international relations, feedback loops must tie together an analysis of both international structures and state actors into one framework (Gadinger & Peters 2016: 256). Feedback loops are rooted in the notion that information controls how a system functions and is a paradigm for transformation within casual thinking (Mobus & Kalton 2015: 13). Feedback loops aided the study by equipping the theoretical framework with a means to analyse the process and change how AfCFTA is implemented, by allowing the study to analyse critical features of the system of implementation and to provide a linear framework of the causality of the parts and features of the system (Mobus & Kalton 2015: 16). It is for this reason that feedback loops were used to understand the system that will implement AfCFTA. This is demonstrated in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this study.

3.3 Qualitative Research

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 3), qualitative research can provide an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, including, in the case of the current study, the factors that influence the implementation of AfCFTA. Throughout the inquiry, key themes were identified from the literature review and described from the identified sources (Kumar 2018: 19). Investigating the implementation of AfCFTA proves to be a process that is complex. There was a need to investigate the economic, social, and political factors of the trade agreement to present a thorough finding of how successfully the agreement is being implemented. Qualitative research provides the means of gaining a deeper and holistic understanding of the trade agreement. Its descriptive approach provides the means to study and describe the varied data, and to uncover potential ways to improve the implementation of the trade agreement.

The implementation of AfCFTA is a nuanced process. It involves key actors, such as countries, international organisations, regional bodies, and institutional mechanisms. A qualitative approach provides a means to describe how these actors influence the implementation of AfCFTA, particularly with regards to the kind of data that has been utilised for purposes of the current study.

3.4 Research Design

The AfCFTA case study provided the means for an in-depth exploration of the elements of the African system and regional integration (Kumar 2018: 131). It further allowed for incorporating evidence-based policy decisions into the analysis that may have influenced the trade agreement by providing a detailed understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the data.

To understand what motivates actors within the AU and AfCFTA institutions to act (or not), this study assesses the level of political will within the system. The concept of political will helps the study identify the challenges influencing the implementation of AfCFTA.

3.5 Defining Political Will

One of the most challenging issues when it comes to understanding political will is highlighted by Thuynsma (2022: 68), who argues that many scholars fail to provide an adequate explanation of political will, since there are not many studies on political will and its determinants. Thuynsma (2022: 68) goes further, arguing that the lack of political will is frequently highlighted by policymakers, yet is rarely used to create the means for policymakers to commit to policy decisions.

Persson and Sjöstedt (2012: 617) argue that political will is seen as a silver bullet for policy problems to policymakers. The authors further understand political will as the extent to which leaders seek to sustain and initiate reform, and therefore, as a causal factor in the policymaking and implementation process (Persson and Sjöstedt 2012: 617). At the same time the authors argue that there is a need to understand political will from a more causal understanding to develop a greater and more analytical approach through the incorporation of institutional factors, which are central to political systems (Persson and Sjöstedt 2012: 617). Hammergren (1998: 12) highlights this point, stating that political will is usually defined by a lack of it.

According to Bradley (1902: 438), will is an internal or outward inclination towards an action. Thuynsma (2022: 69) expands on this view, arguing that will is complex, and is a volitional action, extending to volitional factors such as values, customs, and norms which influence how policymakers act towards a goal.

Political will, therefore, refers to the extent to which an actor is willing to spend energy towards a certain political goal, and is a prerequisite to whether certain policy objectives are achieved or not (Treadway et al. 2005: 235). Malena (2009: 17) and Thuynsma (2022: 70) describe political will as a motivating factor that influences political actors which refers to an array of actors and stakeholders that include elected and appointed leaders in governance.

Thus, political will must be withdrawn from the domain of political rhetoric, as it can contribute significantly to understanding what drives political actors to implement policy decisions (Raile et al. 2014: 654). Such commitment is a catalyst for political behaviour and is measured by the energy utilised by a political actor to act towards

and to implement a policy decision (Brinkerhoff 2000: 1; Thuynsma 2022: 70; Treadway et al. 2005: 235).

Brinkerhoff (2000: 1) and Thuynsma (2022: 70) add that political will refers to the extent to which political leaders are committed to undertaking actions to achieve certain objectives, which will require them to bear the costs of these actions. Based on the definition of political will provided here, it can be concluded that a strong political will is crucial for the implementation of AfCFTA. It is, therefore, important to investigate where AfCFTA lacks political will.

Browne (1994: 282) highlights the importance of political will with regards to the integration process, arguing that integration can be achieved, and the impending obstacles overcome, if African countries have the political will to achieve integration. Browne further argues that the push for integration is a long-standing desire by African leaders and intellectuals, since they view integration as a long-term strategy for joint self-reliance (Browne 1994: 282).

Indications of political will came from the escalation of integration policies and frameworks established by the OAU and the AU, such as the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 4), the Africa Agenda 2063 (2018) and the treaty establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018), which shows steps taken by African leaders to create a framework and a system of integration.

Another facet of political will is introduced by Faleg et al. (2021: 18) who argue that support amongst African citizens could serve as a catalyst for the successful implementation of AfCFTA. Faleg et al. (2021: 18) state that the success of AfCFTA could come from “more than just rhetorical support”, and instead requires will from individual member states to create national institutions and structures that push legislation which support the harmonisation of trade laws. However, what lacks here, and must be investigated further, is whether this support exists, and what can influence individual states to establish these institutions and garner public support. While investigating this aspect, it is important to briefly determine what will underpin civic participation. However, this will be determined as the study progresses.

3.6 A Framework for Indicators of Political Will

This section will map how political will reinforces the implementation of AfCFTA by using the data collected to identify indicators of political will. This will be used to inform the various feedback loops that demonstrate political will in Chapter 5 of this study.

Political will is unpredictable because it is greatly influenced by organisational, individual, relational, and social factors (Malena 2009: 19; Thuynsma 2022: 72). It is, therefore, considered a motivating factor within a system that influences how elements within the system interact and can determine the inputs and outputs within a system. Political will, therefore, refers to the extent to which resources are committed to a policy decision and is further influenced by a set of factors that shape this commitment (Raile et al. 2014: 659; Thuynsma 2022: 73). It is further shaped by the influence of political actors and policymakers, and the environment in which the policy decision is taken (Thuynsma 2022: 73).

While political will has been previously defined in Chapter 3 of this study as a motivating factor that influences how political actors undertake certain actions to achieve political and policy objectives, there is a need to expand on this by identifying reinforcing elements or indicators of political will within this system. Based on the definition provided from the discussion in the previous section, it can be ascertained that political will reflects the extent of commitment and action taken towards the implementation of a policy and its objectives.

Political will is a measurable force and tool that can aid in determining whether issues are reflected within policy decisions. It also demonstrates a force that leads to inputs and outputs within a system. By extension, this constitutes political will as a force that results significantly in political action or inaction if there is a lack of it (Charney 2009:1; Stachowiak et al. 2016: 1). Measuring political will is important in determining whether a policy is implemented or not. Charney (2009: 1) and Stachowiak et al. (2016: 1) further contend that political will can be measured using a combination of three key factors: a decision maker's *opinion* about a policy decision; the *intensity* of the opinion; and the *importance* of the policy decision at hand. This strengthens the assertion made in the current study, that political will serves as a motivator and indicator of commitment towards a policy decision and its implementation within a system.

While dissecting the concept of political will, Malena (2009: 17); Raile et al. (2014: 659); and Thuynsma (2022: 69) determined that political will can be indicated by: how policymakers act on policy decisions; how they measure this commitment; how institutional or individual capacity influences political will; and what exactly it is that influences the said commitment. Measuring political will is important, particularly when attempting to find indications of it in certain policies. This importance is underscored since political will must be measured to determine its influence within the AU system. The following discussion strives to do so by defining indicators that can aid in measuring political will.

3.6.1 Indicators of political will

Political will is reflective of a system which is influenced by the action or inaction of policymakers and can further provide a lens through which the dynamics of policymaking can be better understood and analysed (Thuynsma 2022: 74). Owing to the nature of political will, it must be mapped out to ascertain where it features within understanding the dynamics of this system. Based on the findings made in this study, political will can be identified where there is institutional capacity to act and the will to implement policy decisions (Thuynsma 2022: 70; Woocher 2001: 169). In plain terms, political will refers to the willingness of policymakers, bureaucracy, and political office bearers to act and implement. Conversely, it is also defined by negative indicators that impact their willingness to act.

Malena (2009: 18) provides a set of indicators that can help measure political will. While Malena (2009: 18) refers to these indicators in the context of participatory governance, this study applies these indicators to a more general context. These indicators derive from the following: efforts made by the state to initiate and/or provide support to governance practices; to intentionally identify issues; the creation or reforming of legal and regulatory frameworks; the creation of mechanisms and platforms; and the allocation of resources (Malena 2009: 18). This extends to three mutually enforceable features of political will which are *political can*, *political want*, and *political must* (Malena 2009: 19; Thuynsma 2022: 71).

3.6.2 Key elements of political will

This figure below (Figure 2) demonstrates the key elements of political will as identified by Malena (2009: 8). These key features refer to political can, political want, and political must. These features will be expanded on below.

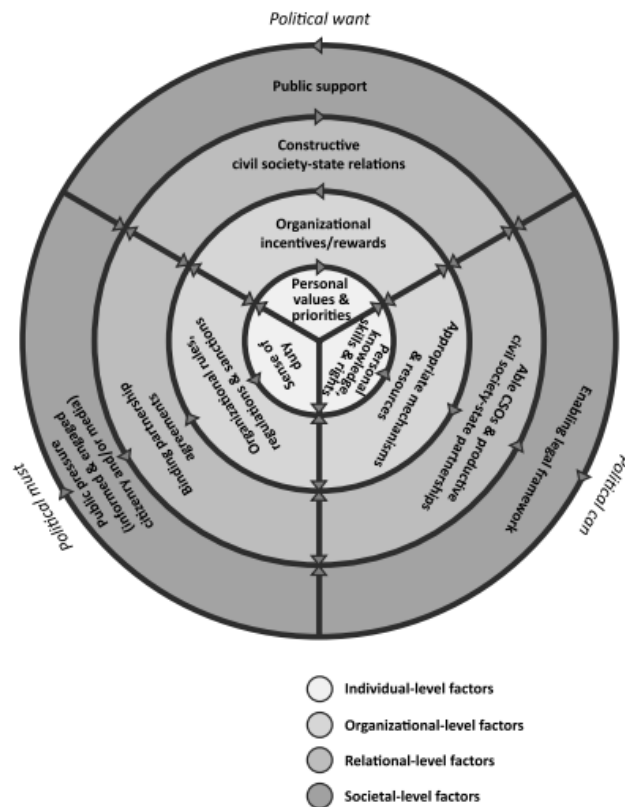


Figure 2: Elements of political will

Source: Malena (2009: 8)

Political can refers to whether a policymaker can implement a policy decision (Malena 2009: 20), thereby, making it an essential feature of political will. This is because *political can* is an indication of the capacity of policymakers and political leaders to implement policies. This capacity is reflected through available resources, skills, abilities, support, and mechanisms, meaning that political will is readily available when there is capacity to create and implement a policy (Malena 2009: 20).

Political want refers to the extent to which political leaders and policy-makers are cognisant of the benefits, and *genuinely want to* accept, support the principles of, and implement policy decisions, therefore *wanting* them to happen (Malena 2009: 20).

Political must refers to a compelling force that is generated by political pressure which demands action and can be generated by socio-economic and political factors (Malena 2009: 22). This highlights the need for a certain policy decision to be implemented, and can be created through legal reforms which compel policymakers to implement policy decisions (Malena 2009: 22).

Thuynsma (2022: 74) illustrates a framework developed by Raile et al. (2014: 660) that measures political will within a system, and refers to Brinkerhoff (2000: 1) who identifies eight indicators which can be used to map and measure political will. The first indicator refers to the fact that there must be a cohort of decision-makers. Second, the creation of genuinely and technically sound and attainable policies. Third, an indicator that refers to the extent to which government interacts with and consults civil society and the private sector on the policy matter. The fourth indicator refers to the extent to which there is public support for the policy decision. The fifth indicator is the extent to which resources are allocated towards the implementation of a policy, whilst the sixth indicator refers to how compliance is enforced through the creation of sanctions. The seventh indicator assesses how consistent implementation of the policy is, and the continuous availing of capacity thereof. The last indicator (eighth), refers to the strength of monitoring and evaluating mechanisms in place, which allows for a dynamic adaptation and adjustment to arising circumstances. This highlights the fact that political will is tied inherently to action which results in the creation and implementation of a policy and further reflects the level of commitment to its successful implementation (Thuynsma 2022: 71). Raile et al. (2014: 660) and Thuynsma (2022: 74) further illustrate the measuring of political will into four components as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Indicators of political will

| DEFINITION COMPONENT | OPERATIONALIZATION | ASSESSMENT TARGETS |
|--|---|---|
| (1) Sufficient set of decision markers | Set of actors capable of approving, implementing, and enforcing public policies. | Institutions and factions |
| (2) With a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda | (a) Use of similar frame and terminology. (b) Status as “problem” on formal agenda. | (a) Commonality and convergence in statements of decision makers with regard to problem. (b) Importance and prominence of decision makers discussing problem; volume of discussion. |
| (3) Is committed to supporting | Distribution and strength of specific decision maker preferences. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives and disincentives for political actors (institutional, electoral, and others); • Allocation of analytical sources; • Credibility and obligation of statements (based on reputational costs); • Position of key constituencies (domestic and international) and accountability relationships; • Bargaining mechanisms; • Cultural characteristics and constraints. |
| (4) Commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution. | (a) Use of similar frame and terminology; (b) Avoidance of known sources of ineffectiveness; (c) Capacity for policy effectiveness. | (a) Commonality and convergence in statements of decision makers with regard to proposed solution; (b) Non-use of short-term “fixes”, knowingly ineffective policies, and diversionary tactics; (c) Funding commitment; (d) Inclusion of potentially effective sanctions and enforcement mechanisms; (e) Implementation resources and support of implementers. |

Source: Raile et al. (2014: 660)

Table 1 provides a means to measure political will through four components. The first component refers to whether there is a sufficient set of decision-makers. This is operationalised by identifying whether there are actors that have the means to approve, make, and implement certain decisions through their institutions. The second refers to whether there is a common understanding of the policy problem at hand, which is operationalised through the status of the problem on the agenda and is reflected by how high the issue is on the agenda. The third component refers to the commitment towards supporting and implementing the policy decision. This is operationalised by the strength of the decision-maker’s preferences and is reflected through the resources that are made available to support the implementation of the policy decision. The last component refers to whether there is cohesion on the policy solution and is operationalised through a policy solution that is commonly perceived on the agenda, which can be measured by the commitment to ensure that the policy is implemented and that the implementation is sustained.

Conversely, a lack of political will is also reflected through a lack of follow through on declarations or promises, the failure to allocate resources to policy initiatives, a failure with regards to the implementation of policies, a lack of sanctions enforced for noncompliance, and a demonstrated lack of prioritising governance initiatives (Malena 2009: 19). This provides a simple framework for understanding where certain challenges may arise from with regards to understanding the challenges that impede the implementation of AfCFTA.

The framework provided by Thuynsma (2022: 74) that uses the elements described in Table 1, was tested and used in Chapter 5 of this study to measure the extent of political will with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA using a feedback loop.

Mapping political will within the system of the AU, and measuring it in the implementation of AfCFTA, is a complex process. However, the framework presented in Table 1 above, guides how this study determines the extent of political will within this system. This is crucial in determining the presence or absence of political will.

3.7 Data Collection Method

Data was collected from a combination of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources refer to data collected directly from the AU in the form of policies which provided the key frameworks in terms of how AfCFTA must be implemented. The Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 4) is the key policy that provided the framework for regional integration. The Treaty also provides a framework for the use of RECs and how they should facilitate regional integration in line with its framework. The Abuja Treaty serves as the framework for how African economic integration will be pursued. The Abuja Treaty is supplemented by a second key policy, the agreement establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018), which serves as the official policy of the trade agreement and provides a clear framework for its implementation. Other key policies used in this study include the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which legitimises the existence of the AU. The Protocol on the relations between the AU and the RECs is another policy, which serves as a framework for addressing numerous challenges between the AU and the RECs, such as overlapping memberships and how the AU and RECs must interact. The Protocol on the Statutes of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights (African Union

2008b) is a further policy which provides a legal framework with the jurisdiction to address issues that may arise regarding the treaty establishing the African Economic Community (OAU General Assembly 1991: 5). This is intrinsically linked to AfCFTA which will be further proven throughout the study. Last, is the African Union Handbook (2022), which provides data on key actors of AfCFTA.

Secondary sources were collected in the form of academic texts that provided an in-depth analysis into the facts surrounding the trade agreement. Data was sourced from articles, texts, academic journals, and essays. Much of this is demonstrated and detailed in the literature review.

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data according to the steps described by Maguire and Delahunt (2007: 3353). First, the data collected was read and analysed multiple times to ensure appropriate familiarity and that a proper understanding of AfCFTA was developed. Second, the data was coded and a codebook was developed. AfCFTA is a broad topic which meant that the study needed to identify key themes and concepts that would efficiently uncover the research questions and achieve the desired research objectives. Ultimately, free trade, regional integration, the African political system, AfCFTA, and trade were identified as the main themes of the dissertation and were refined further to focus to the study.

Therefore, the methodological concern of this study is to understand the roles that components of a system play, particularly in defining the system as a whole. It is important to note that there is a sub-set of processes and relationships within the international system (Stewart & Ayres 2001: 81). Moreover, systems theory was used to apply systemic models that seek to understand the process based within the system and the interlinkages between its components (Stewart & Ayres 2001: 81).

3.8 Codebook

This codebook provides a look into recurring themes that guide this inquiry which provides a systemic structure to the collection of the data by identifying and sorting the main themes that were identified for the purposes of the study. It outlines the codes and definitions used to shape the thematic literature review. Moreover, it demonstrates

that recurring themes were identified, adding validity to the inquiry, and ensures that the themes are rigorous and effective.

A codebook was used because it attaches “meaningful attributes to qualitative data” (Wicks 2017: 169) which facilitated categorising the data, detecting patterns, and ultimately analysing the data (Damyanov 2023: 1; Wicks 2017:169). Using Damyanov’s (2017: 1) framework, the following steps were taken during the formulation of the codebook.

First, the data was reviewed and key concepts, themes, and emerging patterns were identified. This was done through analysis of texts, policies, and the data material identified. Second, using the research objectives and the thematic nature of the data review, six codes were identified. Third, each code was defined in clear and specific terms. Fourth, a coding hierarchy was developed to specify how the codes are related. A short paragraph linking the codes to one another, and the research objectives was then developed thematically as follows.

The first research objective is to understand regional integration and its importance to AfCFTA. It will, therefore, be incorporated into the codebook and will be defined through an analysis of documents to uncover the role of regional integration in the implementation of AfCFTA. Second, free trade is another feature of AfCFTA. This was investigated through document analysis and featured in the codebook. The third research objective is AfCFTA, which is the present case study. The investigation was done through an analysis of policies that have established AfCFTA and its mechanisms. The fourth research objective involves the key actors and their roles as designated by policy to implement the trade agreement. Fifth is political will, which must be linked to AfCFTA as a driver of integration. Sixth is the African political system, which has been identified as the system in which the trade agreement is being implemented. There is a need to understand the system and to uncover how it functions, specifically with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA.

Thus, these are the main themes of the study and needed to be sorted in the codebook and as a result, were given specific codes. The codebook below (Table 2), further highlights how these themes were investigated. The codebook was refined as and when adjustments were made to ensure that it remained accurate and reflected the data findings made.

Table 2: Codebook

| No. | Code | Definition | Links & Evidence |
|-----|--------|--|-------------------|
| 1. | REGINT | Regional Integration | Document Analysis |
| 2. | FT | Free Trade | Document Analysis |
| 3. | AfCFTA | African Continental Free Trade Agreement | Policy Analysis |
| 4. | KA | Key Actors | Policy Analysis |
| 5. | PW | Political Will | Document Analysis |
| 6. | APS | African Political System | Document Analysis |

Source: Author's own

The codebook ensured that the data that was collected related to the above themes. The codes were adjusted according to themes such as regional integration, free trade, AfCFTA, key actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA, indicators of political will and the African Political System. This resulted in the collection of and sorting of the data that was used to compile the literature review and the creation of the feedback loops which feature in Chapter 5.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explained and identified the theoretical framework which will define the study as systems theory, since it serves as the best means of investigating the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented. The data was collected from secondary sources in the form of existing policy documents that provided the framework for regional integration and AfCFTA, as well as academic texts. The data found provided a broad view of what AfCFTA is, and provided an informed investigation into what the investigation entails as well as what it seeks to achieve. The qualitative research approach was utilised since the study is more descriptive in nature and it allowed for a holistic and deep understanding of the trade agreement. This approach also contributed to a thematic analysis of the data which was sorted with the use of a codebook. There is, however, a need to uncover the case study which will provide more information on AfCFTA. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Case Study: The African Continental Free Trade Agreement

4.1 Introduction: Case Study

This chapter will discuss AfCFTA as the case study. Further, systems theory will be used as the framework since it will help uncover and trace the actors involved in the implementation of the trade agreement, their roles, and what influences certain decisions have within the African system. The study investigates certain elements within the international system and can also provide an understanding as to why certain actions within the international system fail or succeed. This makes it possible to uncover certain dynamics within the system. The first section identifies and describes the system of implementation of AfCFTA. The second section discusses the role of regional integration in the implementation of AfCFTA, followed by the third section which discusses the framework of integration. The fourth section provides a background of AfCFTA and its features to provide a comprehensive background on AfCFTA. This is followed by a conclusion.

4.2 The AU as the System of Implementation

The AU is an international structure that consists of state actors and was established with the aim of serving as a political union with effective decision-making powers throughout the African continent (Yihdego 2011: 566). Central to this are key principles and frameworks which seek to foster economic, cultural, and social cooperation amongst member states (Yihdego 2011: 566). The formation of the AU is highly influenced by globalisation, a global commitment to human rights, free and fair elections, democracy, good governance, and a need to further achieve economic development through integration (Sesay 2008: 14). The AU has nine key organs, namely the Assembly of the Union, the Executive Council, the Pan-African Parliament, the Court of Justice, the Commission, the Permanent Representative Committee, the Economic Social and Cultural Council, the Peace and Security Council, and the Partnership for African Development (Yihdego 2011: 577).

Regional integration requires countries to shift their individual objectives and loyalties towards a single political centre which is enabled by the creation of institutions that have jurisdiction over the existing states (Haas 1961: 367). In line with this, the AU institution that is tasked with coordinating and driving integration and economic development on the continent by ensuring full participation from African countries, is the Pan-African Parliament (Yihdego 2011: 579).

The AU Act (African Union General Assembly 2001) takes the principles and objectives of the AEC into account (Yihdego 2011: 585). Article 4(1) (c) of the Abuja Treaty strives to ensure that cooperation is promoted to raise the living standards of African people through economic stability, better relations between member states and to ensure that economic integration is developed within the continent (Yihdego 2011: 585). Yihdego (2011: 585) further argues that regional integration is a precondition for this. RECs are crucial actors for this agenda, since they can be utilised to foster trade policy harmonisation, to coordinate regional and continental policies, and to rally regional actors under the integration agenda (Yihdego 2011: 587).

Therefore, the actors who support and resist the system in which AfCFTA will be implemented must be identified. In the process, the actors must uncover their motives, and the procedures that influence the decision-making that leads to the trade agreement. Most importantly, how did these factors lead to the implementation of the trade agreement?

RECs have the purpose of driving regional integration between member states (African Union General Assembly 2001: 6). Furthermore, RECs are one of the many key tenets of integration on the continent. RECs are mandated by the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 13) to coordinate the interests of member states, and to implement integration in line with the aims of the AU, AfCFTA, and the AEC (African Union General Assembly 2021: 38). Article 3 of the AU Act (African Union General Assembly 2001: 5) states that some of the AU's objectives are: to achieve greater unity and solidarity amongst its member states; to establish conditions which can enable Africa to have a greater standing in the global economy; to promote the integration of African economies; to promote cooperation of human activities within the continent to "raise the standard of living for African people"; and to harmonise activities and policies of RECs to meet the objectives of the AU and the AEC.

The role of regional integration in the implementation of AfCFTA ought not be neglected. It is important to investigate the role of integration and how this links with the implementation of AfCFTA to gain a holistic understanding of the mechanisms and methods undertaken to implement this aspect of the African system. This gradual process towards integration requires these countries to combine their resources and harmonise their policies to enhance the economic development of their region (Madyo 2008: 12). In other words, two or more countries unite to pursue policies in the name of a shared common interest (Asante 1997: 15). Trade and fiscal policies are required to be harmonised amongst these countries as well to ensure that discriminations are removed on the borders of existing states (Balassa 1961: 1; Marinov 2015: 23).

Therefore, the data presented suggests that regional integration is a building block of AfCFTA and utilises specific frameworks to attain this goal. It links regional integration to the African system by mapping the role of RECs. This necessitates the need to investigate the key features of the eight RECs and how well they are integrated. The reason being that the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 13) and the AfCFTA Agreement (African Union General Assembly 2018: 5) identify RECs as key building blocks of AfCFTA and the AEC (African Union General Assembly 2018: 2; OAU General Assembly 1991: 30). The role of RECs in the implementation of AfCFTA will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 Regional Economic Communities

Regional integration has been a longstanding goal for African countries. According to the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 11), the strategy is for member states within RECs to integrate, and for RECs to merge with one another after this is done to make the implementation of AfCFTA easier and streamlined. There are eight RECs which are identified as key drivers of regional integration (African Union 2021: 38). RECs are considered the building blocks towards the establishment of the AEC and are mandated to facilitate integration and trade amongst member states (OAU General Assembly 1991: 19; Manja & Silumbu 2021: 76).

There are eight recognised RECs which are listed as follows:

- The Southern African Development Community (SADC)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
- Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)
- Eastern African Community (EAC)
- The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (African Union Commission 2014b: 125).

RECs are defined as “regional groupings of African states, each lead by a head of state on a rotational basis” (African Union Handbook 2022: 144). They are mandated to facilitate regional economic integration between REC members, and through the AEC (African Union Handbook 2022: 144). The need for RECs to facilitate integration stems from both the Abuja Treaty and the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action for the Development of Africa, which called for the creation of RECs as one of the key tenets for African integration. The idea is that RECs will first facilitate and implement regional integration amongst member states before facilitating continental integration amongst themselves (OAU General Assembly 1991: 13; African Union Handbook 2022: 144). They are further mandated by the Abuja Treaty, the AU Constitutive Act, and the Protocol on Relations between the RECs and the AU (2008b), Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the African Union Peace and Security Council (2002), Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the AU, RECs and the Regional Mechanisms (RMs) for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution of Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern and North Africa; and Agenda 2063 (African Union Handbook 2022: 144).

It is important to identify key features of the RECs such as their GDP, population, and geographical features. Institutions such as the African Development Bank, The AU, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa have developed the Africa Regional Integration Index (ARII) to measure regional integration. All RECs are given a score out of a maximum one. The ARII obtains data that is compiled and measured according to five dimensions. The AU provides definitions for these dimensions which are as follows:

- Trade Integration
- Productive Integration

- Macroeconomic Integration
- Infrastructural Integration
- Free Movement of People.

These dimensions are used to measure the extent to which each REC member state is integrated according to each dimension. This is then calculated to determine a score which indicates how integrated they are. The dimensions of integration were developed from the milestones set out by the Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063 and thus, are directly taken from the four main objectives outlined in Article 4 of the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 19).

It is, however, a concern that only two reports have been released since the establishment of the ARII. The first being released in 2016, and the latest report from the ARII was shared in 2019. While this data will be used in the current study, it may not provide the latest figures on the level of integration in the continent, however, it does provide a basic idea of the effort that African states are putting towards integration. The 2019 report will be consulted to provide an idea of how African countries are approaching regional integration, particularly since the ARII is institutionally recognised (African Union 2019b: 9). However, the data reflected may not be as accurate, given the five-year gap between the present and the publication of the ARII in 2019, however, it still serves as an important indicator due to the validity of the institutions that have created the ARII index.

In the section that follows, the eight RECs will be further discussed according to their geographical features, GDP, key features, and the extent to which they are integrated according to the ARII.

4.3.1 The Southern African Development Community

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is in the Southern Africa region. It evolved from the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, which was a 'loose association' to SADC, in which all states are members as part of a legally binding agreement. The SADC region comprises a population of 345 million, with a GDP of US\$721.3 billion, and covers a land area of 556 781 square kilometres (SADC 2023: 1).

The SADC aligns its regional integration activities with the SADC 2050 Vision (SADC 2020: 3) document which outlines the integration goals of the SADC which must be achieved by 2050. Through the SADC 2050 Vision, the SADC aims to be fully integrated into AfCFTA, by deepening regional integration and being more involved in the continental market (SADC 2020b: 5).

SADC has formalised the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020-2030 (RISDP) as its framework towards regional integration. The RISDP provides three key pillars of focus for regional integration (SADC 2020a: 12). The foundation of the pillars is peace, security, and good governance. The first pillar is industrial development and market integration. The second pillar refers to infrastructure development related to regional integration. The third pillar refers to human capital and social development. While this may be unrelated to the thrust of the current study, it does provide an example of a regional framework for integration.

The RISDP details its regional response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic (SADC 2020a: 15). The SADC established regional operation centres, collectively agreed to switch towards virtual conferences, tasked a technical committee to coordinate and monitor the SADC Protocol on Health, mobilised resources amongst SADC member states to mitigate the socio-economic effects brought by the pandemic, created joint procurement services systems to pool resources towards the supply of medical supplies, facilitated cross-border transport measures, and continuously monitored the economic impact of the pandemic on the SADC economy (SADC 2020a: 15). While this is not directly related to trade or AfCFTA, it is a demonstration of regional integration and a regional response to a national crisis that posed a threat to the region.

Large efforts have been made to implement regional trading agreements, with a focus on facilitating informal-cross border trade (SADC 2023: 4). According to the ARII, the SADC scores a low 0.337 out of 1 (African Union 2019b: 12). The score is attributed to the low levels of trade integration and productive integration but develops a response as part of the RISDP (SADC 2020a: 25). The response in this regard, will be the implementation of strategies that will improve production, infrastructure, the removal of non-tariff barriers to trade, and the harmonisation of financial sectors. The RISDP further states that SADC member states must ratify the AU Protocol on Trade

in Services (SADC 2020a: 26). Intra-SADC trade has grown from 20 per cent in the year 2020/21 to 23 per cent in 2021/22 (SADC 2022: 18).

As part of its role in AfCFTA, the SADC region also forms part of the Tripartite Free Trade Area which consists of COMESA, the EAC, and the SADC as means to fast-track continental integration (SADC 2023: 18). Madagascar is the only member state that has not ratified AfCFTA. Member states from the SADC region are currently negotiating with regards to when certain commitments should be met (SADC 2023: 19).

Further, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Lesotho, and South Africa trade the most within the region (SADC 2023: 35). The establishment of the Southern African Customs Union has contributed significantly to integration within the SADC (SADC 2023: 35). However, questions of whether efforts to integrate economically are successful must be answered due to its low ARII rating.

The SADC member states include: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

4.3.2 The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is an REC for countries that form part of the southern and eastern African regions. COMESA aims to foster development, bolster economic activity, and to ensure cooperation amongst member states with regards to cross-border trade (African Union 2022a: 147). COMESA was initially established as a Preferential Trade Area for eastern and southern Africa in 1981 and transformed to COMESA in 1994.

COMESA consists of 21 southern and eastern African countries, with a population that is estimated at 583 million and a GDP of US\$805 billion (Manja & Silumbu 2021: 76; Wanyonyi & Chemnyongoi 2020: 3). This population accounts for half of AfCFTA's market (Wanyonyi & Chemnyongoi 2020: 3). COMESA's aim is to serve as a common market that bridges trade between eastern and southern African countries (Wanyonyi & Chemnyongoi 2020: 3). The ARII score for COMESA sits at 0.367 out of one (African Union 2019b: 15).

The COMESA member states are: Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

4.3.3 The Community of Sahel-Saharan States

The Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) was formed in 1998 for Sahel-Saharan states. It seeks to create an economic union and to facilitate free trade and movement of individuals. CEN-SAD is the largest REC in Africa, comprising 29 member states, a population of 1175 million, and a combined GDP of US\$1.6 trillion (Du Toit 2023a: 12). However, the REC is performing poorly with regards to integration with an ARII score of 0.377 out of one.

The CEN-SAD member states are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Cape Verde, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, and Tunisia.

4.3.4 The Arab Maghreb Union

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) consists of five Arab member states with a combined population of 102.3 million, however, the forecast is that the union will reach a population of 129.5 million by 2034 (Yeboua 2024: 4). AMU has a combined GDP of US\$551.2 billion (Yeboua 2024: 4). AMU is also part of the Mediterranean region (Parshotam 2020: 2).

Furthermore, AMU member states have close ties to the EU and are part of EU-led integration processes, through initiatives such as the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, and the EU-Mediterranean Free Trade Area with the aim of ensuring that they have close ties with other mediterranean countries and the EU. The AMU region also formulated Arab initiatives such as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (Parshotam 2020: 2). The AMU region still performs moderately low on the ARII index, with a score of 0.488 out of one.

The AMU member states are Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

4.3.5 The East African Community

The East African Community (EAC) is an REC comprising of countries from the east African region. The EAC region has a population of 275.8 million, a GDP of US\$190.8 billion, and has a land area of 4.8 million square kilometres (Jobarteh 2023: 9) The EAC is mandated to facilitate integration between countries in the east African region (East African Community [EAC] 2016: 12). Integration is pursued through the implementation of a set of five-year plans in line with the EAC Vision 2050 integration goals and strategy (EAC 2016: 12). It has a fully operational Customs Union and Common Market (EAC 2016: 14). The EAC is in the process of formulating a Monetary Union, as well as the establishment of a political federation and in this vein, have established three governance arms which are as follows. First is the EAC Secretariat which will be given executive functions; followed by the East African Community Legislative Assembly, which will be given legislative powers; and last the EAC Court of Justice, which will have judicial powers over the EAC. Efforts have also been made to ensure that its member states have harmonised trade policies (EAC 2016: 14). The region has fully eliminated tariffs amongst its member states and is well integrated with a score of 0.537 out of one on the ARII index (African Union 2019b: 14).

The EAC member states include Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

4.3.6 The Economic Community for Central African States

The Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) comprises central African states, namely Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, São Tomé, and Príncipe (Cilliers 2023: 1).

ECCAS has a combined GDP of US\$734.8 billion, a land area of 5.2 million square kilometres, and has a population of 386.9 million (Cilliers 2023: 8). ECCAS has a score of 0.442 on the ARII index and is considered moderately integrated (African Union 2019b: 12).

4.3.7 The Economic Community for West African States

The Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) comprises mainly west African states, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo, Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The ECOWAS region has a population of 386.9 million people, a GDP of US\$816.4 billion, and has a land area of approximately 6.14 million square kilometres (Aikins 2023: 4).

ECOWAS is in the process of implementing the ECOWAS Vision 2050 (Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] 2022: 22) which serves as a framework for integration within ECOWAS. Significant strides have been made towards consolidating a common market and ECOWAS has worked towards liberalised trade (ECOWAS 2022: 22). They have further established a Customs Union which will operate under a Common External Tariff (ECOWAS 2022: 23).

ECOWAS has achieved the following objectives: first, joint planning of the integration around community programs; second, to prioritise regional policy formulation; third, to involve citizens on consultation platforms on regional integration; and fourth, to develop monitoring mechanisms on integration (ECOWAS 2022: 24).

Further, ECOWAS performs best in the movement of persons dimensions, as it seeks to create a borderless region through the creation of open visa policies across the REC (African Union 2019b: 13). It scores moderately on the ARII Index with a score of 0.425 out of one (African Union 2019b: 13).

4.3.8 The Intergovernmental Authority on Development

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is an REC that consists of states that form part of the Horn of Africa. The IGAD consists of the following states: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. IGAD has a GDP of US\$274.7 billion and a population of 281.7 million (Du Toit 2023b: 9). The region amasses an area of 5.2 million square kilometres, and is defined by its agricultural economy (Intergovernmental Authority on Development 2020: 1) IGAD's

integration score on the ARII index currently sits at 0.438 out of one (African Union 2019b: 14) which indicates that IGAD is moderately integrated.

4.4 RECs and the System of Implementation

RECs are identified as the actors that are tasked with implementing the trade agreement within the African political system. This is because RECs are mandated by Article 88(1) of the Abuja Treaty and reaffirmed as building blocks of AfCFTA by the preamble of the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018: 1), to coordinate and harmonise policies towards the creation of the AEC and the implementation of AfCFTA. This highlighted the need to identify these actors as central to the investigation. In this regard, the theoretical framework of systems theory will be applied to the policy aspect of the trade agreement. Stewart and Ayres (2001: 82) note that systems theory can be used to understand policymaking to understand what happens when policies are made. It can further benefit policies by serving as a means of generating “concepts, ideas, and modes of action” when policymakers provide solutions for policy problems (Stewart & Ayres 2001: 82). However, it is essential to use systems theory to navigate “through the problem” (Stewart & Ayres 2001: 83).

Anyebe (2018: 13) and Easton (1957) note that public policy is influenced by the demands made from a systems environment. In understanding the implementation of AfCFTA, it is important to identify the demands that arise, and to identify the inputs, outputs, and what or who influences them. What must be identified is what demands led to the creation of AfCFTA, and what influenced the way in which RECs implement the trade agreement? Understanding these factors will prove vital in assessing the implementation and identifying what hinders it from taking root.

After analysing the evidence from the data presented above, it was concluded that the AU system will be analysed. It comprises key actors that have been tasked with implementing the trade agreement, namely RECs which have been mandated by key legislation to serve as building blocks of the trade agreement. The data clearly indicates that the AU is the main arena in which key decisions have been made towards the facilitation of integration.

After identifying the system to be analysed, the next task was to identify policies generated within the AU that were created to serve as a framework for AfCFTA. The first policy identified was the treaty establishing the African Economic Community (OAU General Assembly 1991:1), which provided a clear framework for AfCFTA. This policy will be referred to as the Abuja Treaty going forward. This is discussed in the next section.

4.5 The Abuja Treaty and The African Economic Community

The treaty establishing the AEC (OAU General Assembly 1991: 1), also known as the Abuja Treaty was signed on 3 June 1991 in Abuja, Nigeria by 51 African countries (Mukisa & Thompson 1995: 56). The objectives of the treaty sought to create a framework for the AEC to create an environment that was conducive for sustainable development, to have better living standards for African citizens, to create economic self-reliance, and to create a framework for continental integration (Mukisa & Thompson 1995: 56). It further provides a foundation for the development and mobilisation of resources to be directed towards the integration process (Danso 1995: 31).

Article 4 (1) of the Abuja Treaty adds that the objectives of the treaty are to integrate African countries to increase economic self-reliance of the continent, and to harmonise and coordinate policies among regional economic communities to “foster the gradual establishment of the community” (OAU General Assembly 1991: 10). The Abuja Treaty legitimises how this integration must be attained.

The Abuja Treaty provides a framework for the establishment of the AEC, which seeks to create an economic community that covers Africa in its entirety (Oppong 2010: 1). Further, RECs are identified as building blocks of the AEC (Oppong 2010: 1). Article 88(1) of the Abuja Treaty states that the AEC will be established through the “coordination, harmonisation and progressive integration of the activities of RECs” (OAU General Assembly 1991: 72). The African Union (2022a: 30) classifies RECs as “regional groupings of African states” which are tasked with facilitating regional economic integration between members of the RECs “and through the wider African Economic Community which was established under the Abuja Treaty (1991)” (African Union 2022a: 144). The African Union (2022a: 30) provides further background,

stating that RECs were created as the foundation for “wider African integration, with a view for facilitating regional and eventual continental integration” (African Union 2022a: 144).

After perusing the Abuja Treaty, it was determined that the next step would be to provide a definition of AfCFTA, and to look for links between the Abuja Treaty and AfCFTA, since they appear to have the same goal of achieving continental integration. This is discussed in the section that follows.

4.6 The African Continental Free Trade Area

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) was signed on 21 March 2018 by 44 African heads of states in Kigali, Rwanda (Asiedu 2018: 1). It is one of the largest free trade areas, and encompasses 1.2 billion citizens with a market potentially worth US\$4 trillion (Asiedu 2018: 1).

According to Nshimbi (2019: 191), the negotiations leading up to the signing of the trade agreement consisted of two phases starting from 2012 to its signing in 2018. The first phase addressed the incorporation of “trade in goods and services” followed by discussions on “investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, and e-commerce” (Nshimbi 2019: 191), after which the trade agreement was signed. South Africa and Nigeria, two of Africa’s biggest economies, declined to sign the agreement at the summit, however, South Africa signed at the 2018 July summit that took place in Mouakchott, Mauritania.

AfCFTA seems to implement and amalgamate the vision espoused by the Abuja Treaty. Nshimbi (2019: 191) goes further and expresses that AfCFTA will create one common continental market that will incorporate all 55 member states of the AU (Nshimbi 2019: 191). Collectively, all members of AfCFTA will have a GDP of US\$2.5 trillion.

According to Nshimbi (2019: 191), the trade agreement will cover a land area of “approximately 11.7 million square miles”. Further, AfCFTA will foster regional integration and African trade by “lowering tariffs” below the “current level of 6.1%” (Nshimbi 2019: 191). AfCFTA is a clarion call by African leaders for the economic integration of Africa, and a means for “standards and procedures to facilitate trade” to

be legitimised (Nshimbi 2019: 191). AfCFTA was designed with the aim of implementing continental integration, and as a means of addressing the issue of overlapping membership of RECs (Asiedu 2018: 2). This stems from the need to resolve the challenge of countries that form part of multiple RECs, which according to Asiedu (2018: 2), “reduces, to a larger extent the efficiency and effectiveness of these organizations”. An example of this is Tanzania, which belongs to both the EAC and the SADC and Kenya which belongs to the EAC and COMESA (Asiedu 2018: 2). Upon perusal of the list of RECs and member states in this chapter, overlapping membership in RECs is a prevalent feature.

Currently, there are still a set of negotiations that are taking place that will determine the final resolution regarding the rules of origin, schedules for tariffs, and a set of priority sectors to integrate (Takefman 2023: 1). Further negotiations are currently underway to conclude regulations on investment, intellectual property rights, and competition policy; however, trading under AfCFTA has now commenced (Takefman 2023: 1). AfCFTA is significant because its scope presents high potential for economic growth and the transformation of African markets and economies (Takefman 2023: 1). The AfCFTA Secretariat (2023: 1) indicates that the successful implementation of the trade agreement will result in an increase of intra-African trade by 52.3 per cent, and will also grow the worth of Africa’s economy to US\$29 trillion by 2050 (AfCFTA Secretariat 2023: 1).

AfCFTA will drastically increase trade in Africa by US\$35 billion, and it will bring intra-African trade to levels shared by global regions such as the EU (Asiedu 2018: 2). According to Article 3 of the AfCFTA Agreement (African Union General Assembly 2018: 4), the main aim of AfCFTA is to achieve the creation of a “single market for goods, services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African continent”, and to “create a liberalized market for goods and services through successive rounds of negotiation” (African Union 2018: Article 3a & 3b).

Further, AfCFTA seeks to harmonise trade across the continent to accelerate the growth of African economies. To demonstrate this desire, signatories of the agreement have agreed to remove tariffs on up to 90 per cent of goods (Asiedu 2018: 2).

AfCFTA and regional integration are not only intrinsically linked, they complement one another to attain economic development on the African continent. Okafur and Udibe (2020: 8) note that regional integration enables the “free movements of goods, services, people and capital between national markets”. In the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 1), this feat is promoted through the utilisation of RECs, which identifies RECs as building blocks of eventual continental integration by achieving regional integration first. Okafur and Udibe (2020: 9) note that regional integration is a “development strategy” which is to be utilised to amalgamate African economies into one common market.

This is highlighted by key legislation that has been identified as the Abuja Treaty which provides the framework for African continental integration. Article 6 (2) of the Abuja Treaty details six stages required to achieve continental integration. The first stage as stipulated by Article 6 (2)(a) of the Abuja Treaty, states that RECs were to be strengthened and established where they do not exist within a period of five years after the establishment of the treaty.

The second stage as stipulated by Article 6(2)(b) of the Abuja Treaty, states that established RECs must:

stabilise tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers, customs duties, and internal taxes existing at the date of entry” within eight years after the establishment of the treaty, and must develop timeframes for the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to regional and intra-community trade as well as the “harmonisation of customs duties in relation to states” (OAU General Assembly 1991: 21).

RECs are also tasked with harmonising regional trade and must proceed to harmonise trade amongst themselves and future economic communities. By the third stage, as stipulated by Article 6(2)(c), a free trade area must be established, which will oversee the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, to facilitate the creation of a Customs Union and a common external tariff.

The fourth stage as indicated by Article 6 (2)(d) requires all RECs to coordinate non-tariff and tariff systems amongst themselves, with a view of establishing a Customs Union at a continental level. The fifth stage as indicated by Article 6(2)(d) states that an African Common Market must be established, through the adoption of a common

policy at a continental level. Fiscal, monetary, and financial policies must be harmonised, and people must be able to move freely throughout the continent. The sixth stage, according to Article 6(2)(e), calls for a total implementation of continental integration. This includes the consolidation and strengthening of the African Common Market through the free movement of “people, goods, and services” (OAU General Assembly 1991: 22), total political, social, economic, and cultural integration at a continental level, the establishment of a single domestic market, the creation of an African currency, and an African Central Bank. Further, the right for African citizens to elect the Pan-African parliament through “single continental universal suffrage” (OAU General Assembly 1991: 23) and the implementation of the final stage of harmonisation and coordination of the activities of the RECs.

It is evident that RECs are a crucial feature of African continental integration, as indicated by the Abuja Treaty. Proof linking AfCFTA to the Abuja Treaty was uncovered upon perusal of the treaty establishing AfCFTA. Section two of the preamble reads:

COGNISANT of the launch of negotiations for the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area aimed at integrating Africa’s markets in line with the objectives and principles enunciated in the Abuja Treaty during the Twenty-Fifth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 14-15 June 2015 (Assembly/AU/Dec. 569(XXV) (African Union 2018a: 2).

Based on the above, it was concluded that the trade agreement is an extension of the Abuja Treaty, and seeks to build on the principles and stages outlined in the framework for the AEC.

RECs are instruments of implementation of AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, and forms a focal part of the vision enshrined through the AfCFTA trade agreement, which seeks to ensure the co-existence of several regional free trade areas amongst each other (Erasmus 2021:1). Another important aspect is that integration is a process that occurs when governments seek to maximise their economic benefit by leaning towards economic interdependence through the centralisation of policies and institutions (Moravcsik 2005: 351). This is necessary for the implementation of AfCFTA.

However, there remains a need to identify the actors that are tasked with implementing the trade agreement and how they interact within the complex system of the AU. This will be expanded on in the next chapter.

4.7 Conclusion

The case study, which is AfCFTA, was outlined with the aim of understanding the system in which it is being implemented. This system has now been identified as the African political system which has key components that are crucial with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA. It provided a framework which sets out variables to investigate the system from a theoretical perspective. With the theoretical approach identified in Chapter 3, there is a need for the organisation of recurring themes and the means to link them to recurring patterns found during the research process. The specifics of this will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Mapping the Data: The AfCFTA System of Implementation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on mapping out key elements of the political system that governs the implementation of the trade agreement to gain an understanding of the system in which AfCFTA will be implemented. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there remains a need to determine what influences interactions of the actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA within the AU system. This requires a more complete understanding of how AfCFTA and the AU interact with each other to determine the challenges that influence whether certain policy decisions are successful or fail. This resulted in five key questions that will be answered in this chapter. Firstly, who are the actors that support or resist the system? In other words, which actors or institutions are designated to implement AfCFTA, and how do they interact? Secondly, how does political will contribute to the implementation of policy decisions, and does it exist regarding the implementation of AfCFTA? Thirdly, what procedures lead to the implementation of the trade agreement? Fourthly, have operational tools been designed to implement AfCFTA? And finally, what challenges are associated with implementing AfCFTA. To achieve this, the policy system will be designed using feedback loops which are followed by an analysis of the political will to implement AfCFTA present within the system. These questions are answered in the sections that follow. The first section identifies the actors or institutions that have been tasked with implementing and governing AfCFTA. The second section uses a feedback loop to map out how they interact with one another, whilst the third section applies Thuynsma's framework which was introduced in Chapter 3 to assess the level of political will present within the system.

This framework is then applied to AfCFTA and a feedback loop provides a practical framework for the integration process. The second section maps out the interaction between these actors and institutions to illustrate how they are meant to interact with one another to implement the trade agreement.

5.2 Mapping the Key Political Actors of the Trade Agreement

This diagram below (Figure 3) illustrates and identifies the key political actors within the African system that are tasked with implementing and facilitating AfCFTA. As demonstrated below, the AU is the structure in which this process occurs. The remaining identified actors are tasked with implementing AfCFTA, and will be discussed more extensively below.

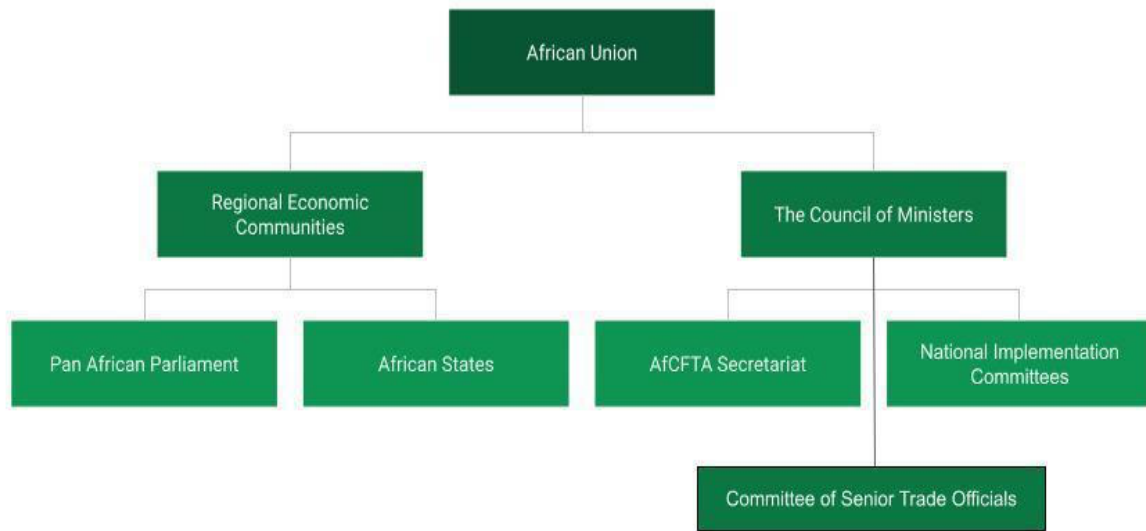


Figure 3: Actors tasked with implementing AfCFTA

Source: Author's own

Systems theorist Haas (1961: 367) argued that regional integration was not a conscious choice, but rather a process that occurs when governments decide to maximise their economic benefit by cooperating with each other through the centralisation of policies and institutions. It therefore, requires a system in which this process can occur. Understanding this system and its components as well as their interaction, provides a better understanding of how this process unfolds.

To analyse a system, one must first identify the system, its units, and the interactions of its units. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a system is a hierarchical structure which consists of an array of units and actors that determine how a system operates. Figure 3 demonstrates not only the structure; it illustrates the actors that form part of this structure. Figure 3 also identifies the system of implementation and demonstrates the 'set of units' which are indeed interrelated through their interactions. The interactions between the set of units will be illustrated further on in this chapter. It is, however,

important to illustrate the structure of the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented before uncovering how these elements interact with one another.

According to Sesay (2008:14) and Yihdego (2011: 566), AfCFTA is implemented within the AU which is also given the power to oversee integration across the continent. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the structure of the AU is composed of state actors to empower the AU to serve as a union and a structure that has decision-making powers on the African continent (Yihdego 2011: 566).

RECs, which are regional groupings of African states, are tasked with facilitating integration amongst African countries (African Union 2022a: 144; OAU General Assembly 1991: 31). They are further recognised by the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 33) as the building blocks of continental integration, and to facilitate integration amongst member states. To this end, the RECs are structures that are designed to drive integration between AU member states, and to play a significant role in continental integration by coordinating the interests of AU member states within their regional groupings (African Union 2022b: 144).

The African Union (2001: 13; 2022a: 114) and the OAU General Assembly (1991: 30) identify the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) as a vehicle which is responsible for the participation of African people in the integration process. PAP consists of members that are nominated from their domestic legislatures and is tasked with overseeing how AU policies are implemented, coordinating the policies of the RECs, and ensuring that continental solidarity is strengthened amongst AU member states (African Union, 2022a: 114). The PAP is identified as a key organ by Article 6 of the Abuja Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 23) as it is envisaged as a key feature of the final stage of integration, where it will serve as an official African legislature that is elected through the means of continental universal suffrage. It is legitimised by the protocol to the treaty establishing the African Economic Community Relating to the PAP (African Union 2001: 2).

The council of ministers is designated by Article 11 of the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA Secretariat (African Union General Assembly 2018: 7). The council consists of ministers of trade from African countries and is mandated to: implement and enforce the trade agreement; take measures to achieve the objectives set out by the trade agreement; collaborate with other existing AU organs; play a role in harmonising

policies taken by the AU in the name of implementing the trade agreement; oversee the activities of the AfCFTA Secretariat; approve the work programmes of AfCFTA; and, make recommendations to the AU assembly on the “authoritative” interpretation of the trade agreement (African Union General Assembly 2018: 7). All decisions taken by the council of ministers are legally binding on member states who form part of the trade agreement (African Union General Assembly 2018: 7). Thus, the council of ministers oversee the implementation of the trade agreement.

National implementation committees are committees which are run by national ministries of trade from different member states of the AU (Sebahizi et al. 2023: 2). These committees are tasked with: formulating the positions of their countries on trade negotiations; facilitating national implementation, and to advise their governments on policy reforms which will aid the implementation of AfCFTA; developing strategic plans for the implementation of AfCFTA; monitoring and evaluating the implementation of AfCFTA; collaborating with all national stakeholders; facilitating the interaction between the AfCFTA Secretariat and their countries; and monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the AfCFTA (Sebahizi et al. 2023: 3).

The AfCFTA Secretariat is set out by the Council of Ministers in accordance with Article 13 of the Agreement establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018: 10). There is, however, no formal policy that specifically outlines the role of the secretariat. Article 13 of the Agreement establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018: 9) provides provisions for the establishment of the secretariat by indicating that the AfCFTA Secretariat will serve as an autonomous and functional body within the AU. Its role and responsibilities will be further mandated by the Council of Ministers of Trade (African Union General Assembly 2018: 10). The data and policy documents do not specifically determine the roles and responsibilities of AfCFTA Secretariat by the council of ministers of trade. However, it forms an integral part of the AfCFTA institutions tasked with implementing and overseeing the implementation of the trade agreement, as indicated in the feedback loop below, which further shows the structure of the AfCFTA institutions and how these interactions result in the operation of these AfCFTA institutions.

5.2.1 Feedback Loop: AfCFTA institutions

The feedback loop in Figure 4 below, demonstrates the interactions between the AfCFTA institutions that are designed to operationalise AfCFTA. More detail is provided below.

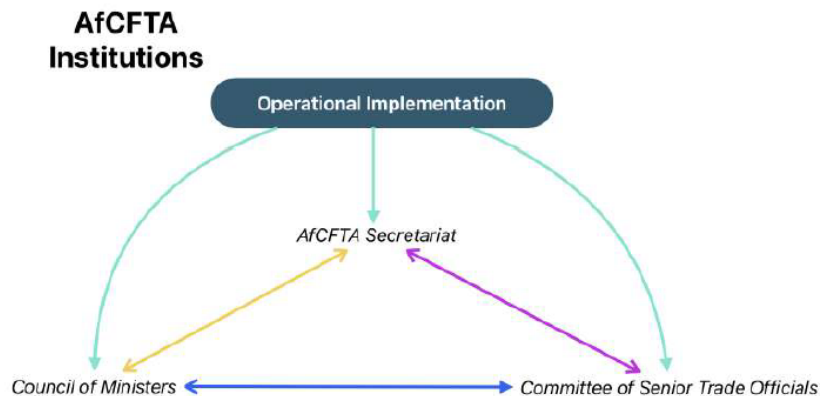


Figure 4: Feedback loop of AfCFTA institutions

Source: Author's own

AfCFTA institutions are tasked with the Agreement's implementation from a technical perspective. Figure 4 represents key institutions within AfCFTA that are responsible for the technical implementation and reviewing of AfCFTA. According to the feedback loop presented in Figure 4 above, the Council of Ministers is the most senior structure and is tasked with over-seeing the implementation of AfCFTA. It interacts with the Committee of Senior Trade Officials, which, according to Article 12 of the Agreement establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018: 9) implement decisions made by the Council of Ministers. It is further tasked with: developing programmes and action plans for the implementation; overseeing and reviewing the functioning of AfCFTA operational structures; creating committees; giving directives to the AfCFTA Secretariat and ensuring that the RECs are represented in an advisory capacity. It also consists of African states and oversees the functioning of the AfCFTA Secretariat (African Union General Assembly 2018: 9). These interactions reinforce one another to enforce the implementation of AfCFTA. The arrows reflected in Figure 4 illustrate how the institutions interact with one another to implement AfCFTA.

5.3 Feedback Loop: Mapping the Interaction Between all Actors of Implementation

Now that the structure and its units have been identified, a feedback loop was created to illustrate an understanding of how the different actors within the AU system interact to implement AfCFTA. As stated previously, it is important to identify the strong interactions between these key actors to determine the function and behaviour of the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented (Skytner 2006: 34).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the identified system is the African political system and as highlighted in Chapter 4, the AU is the system which legitimises the implementation of AfCFTA through the existence of structures that oversee the implementation, which answer to the AU and are empowered by the AU. The steps taken hereafter, are an attempt to uncover how these actors interact with each other to implement AfCFTA.

The feedback loop that was developed aims to understand what policies empower these actors, how these policies determine the roles and responsibilities of the different actors within this system, and then how they all interact. Figure 5 below, illustrates these interactions.

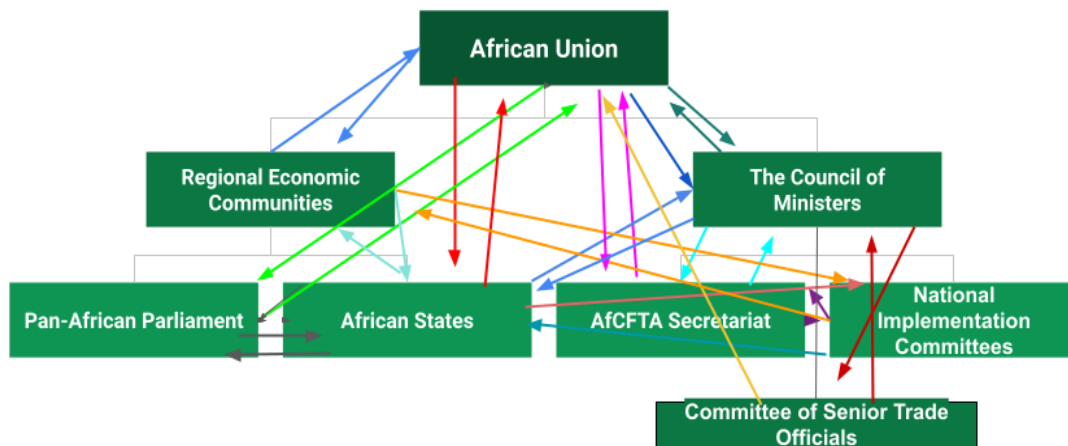


Figure 5: Feedback loop: Interactions between actors of implementation
 Source: Author's own

The feedback loop shown in Figure 5 illustrates the interactions between all actors within the system of the AU. AfCFTA is implemented within the AU system and the arrows link the actors that interact within it. Meaning that AfCFTA is inherently an AU

policy since all actors operate within this system and are assigned different roles with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA. As set out in the Abuja Treaty (1991) and the Treaty Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (2018), RECs are tasked with facilitating regional integration (OAU General Assembly 1991: 5; African Union General Assembly 2018: 4). They further consist of member states in their regional groupings and thus, interact with the AU, nation states, and the National Implementation Committees. The PAP is tasked with facilitating integration and thus, interacts with the RECs, nation states, and the AU. The Council of Ministers interact with African countries, the AU, the AfCFTA Secretariat, National Implementation Committees, and the Committee of Senior Trade officials. The AfCFTA Secretariat provides administrative support to the Council of Ministers and the Committee of Senior Trade Officials. The Committee of Senior Trade Officials receives a directive from the Council of Ministers.

Therefore, the components of the African system that interact to implement AfCFTA consists of an array of actors who are inherently linked to the AU. Thus, the system also incorporates African states using the PAP. RECs, identified as key building blocks of continental integration are utilised, which is followed by the AfCFTA institutions who are tasked with administering the trade agreement. Member nations form part of every component of the system. Therefore, this system encompasses an array of actors who interact amongst themselves to implement AfCFTA.

The next section turns to political will as a force that influences how these units have formulated policies that have facilitated regional integration and the implementation of AfCFTA.

5.4 Measuring and Identifying Political Will: Measures Taken to Implement AfCFTA

First, before mapping out the degree of political will within the AU and AfCFTA system, it is useful to understand the process of regional integration by explaining its key steps. According to the table by Thuynsma (2022: 74), political will can first be ascertained by identifying a set of decision-makers who are empowered by an institution to implement and create policies. As section two of this chapter demonstrates, there are credible decision-makers who are empowered by the institutions illustrated in Figure

3 within the AU. These are led by state representatives who contribute to the passing of policies to achieve this aim. This is demonstrated by the discussion in Chapter 4 which highlights the role of RECs and the AU which consists of member states (African Union 2001: 6; OAU General Assembly 1991: 13). Further, the agreement establishing AfCFTA (2018) consists of a list of signatory states who have agreed to its establishment. This highlights the complex nature of the African system and designates the decision-makers of this process.

5.4.1 Raile's Framework: Application to AfCFTA implementation

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Raile's (2014: 660) framework of indicators below (Table 3), as illustrated by Thuynsma (2022: 73) will now be applied and discussed.

Table 3: Raile's Framework: Application to AfCFTA implementation

| Definition Component | Operationalisation | Assessment Targets |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Sufficient set of decision-makers | Actors capable of implementing policies | AU institutions; AfCFTA Secretariat; RECs; African States; National Implementation Committees; Pan-African Parliament. |
| 2. Common understanding of a problem and formal understanding of agenda | Use of similar frame and terminology; status as problem on agenda | Reflected in the design of policies and institutions designed to implement integration to create African independence and foster economic development. Rhetoric strongly linked to the emancipation of the African continent from legacies of colonialism and the need to foster economic development features greatly in policies towards regional integration. |
| 3. Commitment to support | Distribution and strength of specific decision-maker progress | Incentives created for African citizens through encouraging free trade as a means to foster economic development; financial aid for private sector. |
| 4. Commonly perceived potentially effective solution | Avoidance of known sources of ineffectiveness Capacity for policy effectiveness | The creation of operational tools to consolidate, enforce, and oversee the implementation of AfCFTA. |

Source: Adapted from Thuynsma (2022: 73) and Raile (2014: 660)

Based on the content of Table 3, it is important to identify factors that demonstrate political will.

The feedback loops in this section will map out indicators of political will and how they positively or negatively reinforce the implementation of AfCFTA. Positive reinforcements are indicated using green arrows, while negative reinforcements are indicated using red arrows. It is, however, important to first discuss the positive and negative indicators of political will in greater detail.

Regional integration and the implementation of AfCFTA is the process that is meant to unfold within this system which is why it features within this system. It is, therefore, important to understand how the actors within the AU system have outlined for regional integration to unfold.

According to Balassa (1961: 1) and Makumunana and Moeti (2005: 93), regional integration “encompasses measures designed to abolish discrimination between economic units belonging to different national states” and is established when there is a noticeable absence of “various forms of discrimination between national economies”. Mirus and Rylska (2001: 3) note that integration consists of “step-by-step agreements” which abolish discrimination between a set of states. The discrimination that the authors refer to are tariffs and import quotas, which result in the establishment of common external tariffs and quotas, which allow for “the free movement of goods, services and workers, harmonise competition, structural, fiscal, monetary and social policies, and lastly, unify economic policies through the establishment of supra-national institutions” (Mirus & Rylska 2001: 3). Further, according to Madyo (2008: 12), regional integration is the coordination of economic activities between countries in a set region, and features principles of free trade as highlighted by Balaam and Dillman (2016: 132), Milner (1999: 92), Milner and Kubota (2005: 108), and Plummer et al. (2010: 18). These authors contend that free trade requires harmonised trade policies to integrate economies.

Nshimbi (2019: 192) creates more links suggesting that a core feature of regional integration is the requirement for services, products, and other factors of production to move freely across borders. Moreover, Leshoele (2023: 8) contends that regional integration is rooted in the free movement of factors of production, labour, capital, and goods. To this end, regional integration is in fact a deeper and more organised form

of free trade. As has been highlighted throughout the current study, AfCFTA, by extension, is a policy that has been designed to attain this end.

Political *want* features here. There are four factors which can be considered indicators of political will to drive African integration and are the opinions of the decision-makers by extension (Nshimbi 2019: 188). These four factors also demonstrate a statement of intent and political will by African leaders to implement AfCFTA, therefore, referring to political want which refers to a common agreement amongst political leaders and policy-makers that there are benefits, and that they want to implement, support, and accept policy decisions (Malena 2009: 20; Thuynsma 2022: 71).

The four factors are “political liberation, a desire for unity, globalisation” and a “greater leverage that Africa can have in international affairs from showing a united front” (Nshimbi 2019: 188). This stems from what Nshimbi (2019: 188) refers to as a response to the colonial period which inspired integration, of which African leaders took the decision to attain African independence sought to create a pan-African vision which included integration as one of the means of liberating the continent and its people (Nshimbi 2019: 188). Another indicator uncovered in the literature review points to the fact that free trade and the implementation of AfCFTA is a policy measure taken to enhance economic development within the African continent. Economic development significantly improves the socioeconomic conditions of the citizens of the African continent, increases state capacity and can be exacerbated through free trade which consists of structural policies that are designed to eliminate barriers to trade between countries within a particular region (Brenton & Soprano 2018: 4; Milner 1999: 92; Panth 2020: 1; Sira & Dubravskva 2015: 1211).

African leaders have historically demonstrated political will in this regard. This is seen by Nkrumah (1963: 46), who when addressing African heads of states at the first summit of the OAU, argued that a unified continental economic plan would correct the ills brought by colonisation—and can only be successful if Africa is unified. In Nkrumah’s (1963: 46) address to African leaders, the author makes the following key arguments.

Firstly, Nkrumah (1963: 44) argues that the struggle against colonialism did not end with independence and that there is a need for African states to unite to address the ills brought from colonialism, arguing that African Unity is a key response to

colonialism (OAU General Assembly 1963: 44). Further, Nkrumah (1963: 45) contends that African unity can only be gained by political means. Nkrumah (1963: 46) further provided key features of African unity in which he envisioned the establishment of an African Common Market and an African Currency.

Faleye (2014: 5) expands on this, asserting that African integration was in fact a response to colonisation, which sought to “justify western hegemony by degrading Africa of its culture and unity, through the adulteration of western influences”. Regional integration, thus, also aimed to emancipate Africa from western ideas, actors, and influences brought from colonisation.

Nshimbi (2019: 188) links this to regional integration, arguing that the colonial crusade included their “commercial, missionary and economic ventures”. Africans, as a result, fought for emancipation and unity on the continent—and this is where the contemporary beginnings of integration can be traced, as African leaders unitedly expressed “these aspirations” in the 1963 Charter of the OAU, and the Abuja Treaty (1991), which established the African Economic Community (AEC) (Nshimbi 2019: 188).

Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 95) posit that treaties such as the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (1991) were indicative of a desire by African leaders to integrate the continent. Further policies mentioned below, highlight the steps that African states felt were necessary to achieve this integration. These policies demonstrate a statement of intent and political will towards the establishment of AfCFTA.

5.4.2 Policy objectives as indicators of political will

Figure 6 below, shows a feedback loop which demonstrates how the escalation of policies reinforced the establishment of AfCFTA.

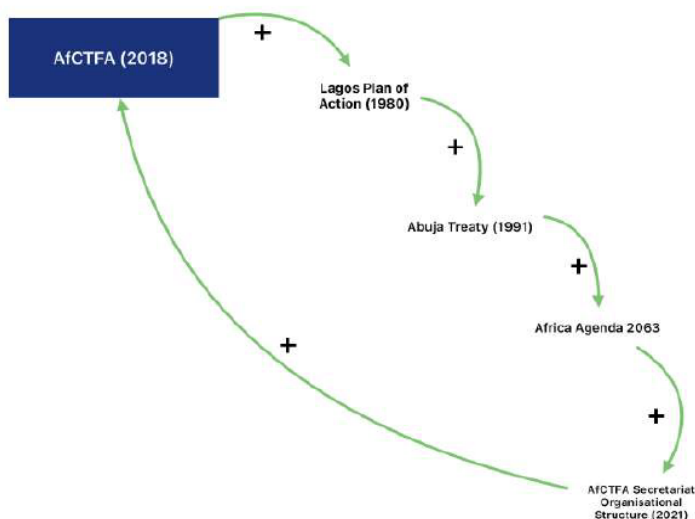


Figure 6: Feedback loop: Reinforcing policies of AfCFTA

Source: Author's own

The feedback loop in Figure 6 shows how the policies provide positive reinforcements that demonstrate an intent to implement AfCFTA and are discussed in chronological order below:

Lagos Plan of Action (1980)

The Lagos Plan of Action (1980), provides a framework for member states of the OAU to develop regional structures that would aid continental integration.

- Section 3 of the Preamble of the Lagos Plan of Action sought to develop legislation that would facilitate political support towards “rapid self-reliance and self-sustaining development and economic growth” (OAU 1980: 4).
- Section 3 (ii) states that the Lagos Plan of Action seeks to promote the economic integration of Africa.
- Section 3 (iii) expands this provision stating that the Lagos Plan of Action seeks to establish regional institutions which will achieve what it defines as “objectives of self-reliance and self-sustainment” which will result in the creation of the African Economic Community (OAU 1980: 2).

- The Lagos Plan of Action (1980) was adopted by the OAU, the predecessor of the AU, with the aim of developing a long-term continental development plan for the integration of the African continent (Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 95). An attempt to harmonise economic policies of member nations of the OAU can be seen in Section 272 of the LPA which requires African countries to give *political commitment* to the pursuit of integration.
- Annexure I of the treaty stipulates that all member states of the OAU agree to adhere to the following plan of action: member states declare that they will create and set up and strengthen existing regional structures in preparation for the eventual establishment of an African Common Market, which will lead to the creation of the AEC (OAU 1980: 99).

Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (1991)

This treaty refines the LPA by providing a framework for continental integration. A key feature of this treaty is the steps laid out that actively define continental integration, as well as the establishment of RECs as building blocks of continental integration (Mukamunana & Moeti, 2005: 95). This can also be seen in Article 6 of the Treaty (OAU General Assembly 1991: 13).

Protocol on Relations between the African Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (2000)

This policy is in line with the objectives set out by the Abuja Treaty (1991) and expands on it by seeking to coordinate, consolidate, and ensure cooperation between RECs and the AU to streamline the harmonisation of their policies to facilitate integration (African Union 2008b: 3). Figure 6 reflects the timeline of the policies that lead to the creation and implementation of AfCFTA.

Abuja Treaty (1991)

The Abuja Treaty symbolised the evolution of the OAU from an institution that focused on the political liberation of African countries from colonised powers to one that focused more on the integrated socio-economic development of Africa. Its purpose was to realise full economic and political integration of Africa, which includes

continental universal suffrage and enable all African citizens to elect members to the PAP. To do this, continental integration was identified as the initiative's foundation (Talba 1997: 107) and it was to be realised by the establishment of the AEC, which is a grouping of African countries which are tasked by the Abuja Treaty to implement the following:

- The objectives of the treaty are outlined in Article 4 of the Abuja Treaty and promote the development and integration of African economies through the coordination and harmonisation of policies.
- Article 31 further emphasises the notion of free trade focusing specifically on eliminating trade and non-tariff barriers between member states and stipulates that member states must refrain from imposing any trade restrictions on other members.
- It also reaffirms the core role of the RECs and in Article 6 (i-vii), builds on previous policies such as the treaty establishing the AEC (OAU General Assembly 1991: 4) and Protocol on Relations between the AU and RECs (2008) (African Union 2008b: 3) to outline a gradual step-by-step integration process. These include:
 - RECs must be established where they do not exist and strengthen existing structures;
 - Gradual removal of trade barriers within RECs;
 - Establish Free Trade Areas within RECs;
 - Establish Customs Unions amongst the RECs;
 - The establishment of a continental Customs Union; and
 - Creation of an African Common Market.

Hartzenberg (2011: 6) expanded on this process and explains that the Abuja Treaty identifies 'regional integration areas' that "will form part of a single African economy". Hartzenberg (2011: 6) cites, for example, the SADC roadmap and the EAC integration plan as reflecting this linear approach to integration.

An additional indicator of political will is demonstrated by the opinions shared by two crucial figures during the 1991 OAU summit that established the Abuja Treaty. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who was also serving as the Chairperson of the OAU, argued that the Abuja Treaty was a cornerstone for African development (OAU General Assembly 1991: 94). Salim Salim, the Secretary-General, the highest-ranking operation official of the OAU at the time, highlighted that the treaty was as

historic and significant as the OAU Charter itself (OAU General Assembly 1991: 107). Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. (2014: 1) argue that the “free movement of goods, services, people and capital between national markets” or regional integration is an aspiration of independent African states.

Africa Agenda 2063 (2014)

This policy calls for a continent that is integrated and politically united by accelerating progress towards continental unity and integration to ensure growth, trade, free movement, and capital. It proposes establishing a fully integrated Africa, prioritising a Continental Free Trade Area, and enhancing continental connectivity through links by “rail, road, sea and air” (African Union Commission 2014a: 13).

Treaty Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (2018)

The treaty effectively enacts the objectives of Agenda 2063 and provides a clear framework and policy for the establishment of AfCFTA.

The above discussion reflects the policy level objectives as indicators of political will and does not focus on how these objectives, to implement regional integration and free trade, were driven. The next section discusses the tools the AU has created that are tasked with operationalising the trade agreement. To illustrate their effect, it is necessary to identify and map out these operational tools using a feedback loop to understand what action has been taken to implement AfCFTA.

5.4.3 AU’s tools to operationalise AfCFTA

The tools created to operationalise AfCFTA include: the Rules of Origin (AfCFTA RoO) and the Non-Tariff Barriers Mechanism, which is enabled by the AfCFTA Protocol in Trades and Goods (African Union 2019a: 2). It is important to note that this stems from a policy that differs from the treaty establishing AfCFTA (African Union General Assembly 2018: 4) and the Pan-African Payment and Settlement Platform. A brief overview of the Rules of Origin, the Non-Tariff Barriers mechanism, the Pan-African Payment, and Settlement Platform will be provided to demonstrate how certain tools have been developed to operationalise the implementation of AfCFTA. There is,

however, a lack of data that suggests that efforts have been made to assess their performance thus far.

The feedback loop in Figure 7 below, illustrates how the identified operational tools positively reinforce the implementation of AfCFTA.

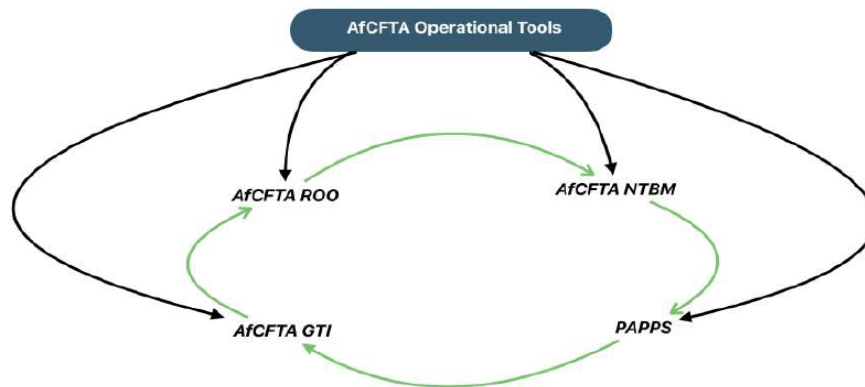


Figure 7: AfCFTA operational tools

Source: Author's own

These operational tools that were created to operationalise AfCFTA will be expanded upon in more detail below. Their features will be discussed to clearly explain how they function and aid in the implementation of the Trade Agreement. This will also aid in explaining how the features align in the system of implementation, and demonstrates how they positively reinforce the implementation of AfCFTA as positive indicators of political will.

AfCFTA Rules of Origin

The AfCFTA Rules of Origin (AfCFTA RoO) is a set of guidelines, criteria, and conditions that determine whether goods traded between states qualify as originating goods (African Union 2022b: 12). The criteria for originating goods are defined by the African Union (2022b: 13) as goods that have been produced mainly by states that are signatories to AfCFTA. If the goods meet the criteria and are produced by member

states, they are exempt from tariffs and non-tariff barriers (African Union 2022b: 13). Further guidelines define an originating product as something that has been “wholly obtained in the state party” or that has gone through “substantial transformation in that state party” (African Union 2022b: 13). Therefore, the aim of AfCFTA RoO is to provide a framework that will determine which goods are exempt from tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The distinguishing feature of these goods is that they must essentially be produced by member states of AfCFTA and must be traded amongst member states. AfCFTA RoO further provides an incentive for member states to trade goods amongst themselves to avoid the costs that come with imposing tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

AfCFTA Non-Tariff Barriers Mechanism

The AfCFTA Non-Tariff Barriers Mechanism (AfCFTA NTBM) is legitimised by Annexure 5 on Non-Trade Barriers from the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods (2019). The Protocol on Trade in Goods (2019) calls for non-tariff barriers to be eliminated and a mechanism to be created that will ensure that member states are held accountable if they do not comply (African Union 2019a: 2; Daniel 2022: 9). The AfCFTA NTBM is defined as an online mechanism where traders can file complaints (African Union 2022b: 1). It has the following features: allows all private sector entities to register online and report any complaints; encompasses National Focal Points which receive all complaints immediately and are tasked with resolving the complaints within a set period; addresses any linguistic gaps through the integration of an automatic translation mechanism that accommodates all languages; and includes an SMS feature which accommodates traders that do not have internet access (UNCTD 2023: 1).

Pan-African Payment and Settlement System Platform

The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System Platform (PAPSS) is a finance infrastructure created by the AfCFTA Secretariat and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) that is designed to facilitate instant cross-border transactions between African traders from different countries in their own respective local currencies (PAPSS 2021: 1). It began its rollout in 2021 (PAPSS 2021: 1) and was created to mitigate some of the challenges created by different currencies across the African diaspora (PAPSS 2021: 1). The PAPSS is, in other words, a centralised continental

payment settlement system that will allow African companies to make payments for transactions in their respective currencies (PAPSS n.d.: 1; United States of America Department of Trade 2022:1). This allows for payments to be made instantly, and drastically reduces administrative costs that arise from payments that would have initially been made in third currencies (United States of America Department of Commerce 2022: 1).

In other words, PAPSS facilitates cross-border transactions by enabling the trader/company from the first country to make a payment in their local currency. The funds are then received by the receiving trader in the second country in their own local currency (Central Bank of Nigeria 2021: 1).

Therefore, the role of PAPSS is to facilitate the transactions made between transacting states by converting the currencies of the payments made into the local currencies of the transacting actors. Ogbalu (2022: 1) highlights the fact that PAPSS is, therefore, a payment infrastructure that will be the monetary circulating system of AfCFTA. The creation of this infrastructure will enable⁴ payments to be made in real time, and through this system, eliminates trade customs and tariffs that would arise if countries were to transact in foreign currencies such as the US Dollar (Ogbalu 2022: 1). It also allows for a swifter flow of money between African traders.

For example, if a clothing producer in South Africa purchases textile materials from a Nigerian textile manufacturer, they would be able to make payments instantly to the Nigerian manufacturer through the infrastructure. The Nigerian manufacturer can use the funds immediately to either source the required material or to export the material to South Africa immediately. PAPSS, therefore, is an important mechanism for the financial and monetary integration of the continent.

AfCFTA Secretariat Guided Trade Initiative

4. PAPSS is enabled through the following means. The sending party sends a payment instruction in their local currency to their local bank or payment service provider, who then forwards this instruction to the central bank of the sending country, who then facilitates the transaction with PAPSS. PAPSS, through Afreximbank which is the implementing agent, then facilitates this transaction by sending the funds to the local African bank of the receiving country, who sends it to the local bank or payment service provider of the receiving party and is then received by that party in their own local currency (United States of America Department of Commerce 2022: 1).

The AfCFTA Secretariat Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) was established in July 2022 by the AfCFTA Secretariat (Bama 2023: 1) and seeks to ensure that trade under the guidelines of AfCFTA is established amongst member states who meet the required threshold for commercial trade according to the conditions outlined by AfCFTA (Bama 2023: 1). Current states that form part of the GTI are Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Tunisia (Bama 2023: 1). South Africa joined the GTI in 2024, as announced by the South African Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (South African Government 2024: 1).

The GTI develops a foundation for legal, trade, and environmental policies in Africa. The GTI has two aims, first, to identify the practices related to business relations, customs procedures, and logistics. Second, to accelerate the creation of an effective trading relationship between African countries (Walakira & Mushiri 2023: 11). There are four key objectives that the GTI seeks to achieve which are outlined below:

- To enhance the efficiency of the legal instruments of AfCFTA;
- To assess the efficacy of the national legal and institutional systems with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA;
- To assess the state of readiness of the country's private sectors to actively participate in AfCFTA; and
- To identify future steps to be taken to increase trade under AfCFTA amongst participating countries.

Countries are only allowed to participate in the GTI if they meet the requirements set out by AfCFTA which are to deploy the AfCFTA E-Tariff book, the RoO manual, and to publish their rates for tariffs. Once established, the countries are then subject to approval from the AfCFTA Secretariat (Walakira & Mushiru 2023: 11).

The GTI also demonstrates a commitment to Article 3 (g) of the AfCFTA Agreement, which states that member states must promote development through the implementation of regional value chains, diversification, and agricultural development (African Union General Assembly 2018: 4; Bama 2023: 2). The first phase of the GTI requires countries to focus on trading 96 products which includes agricultural products and specialised products such as ceramic tiles, sisal fibre etcetera (Bama 2023: 2).

An example of the role played by the National Implementation Committee can be seen in the case of Cameroon, where it mandated the creation of an ad-hoc subcommittee

consisting of the ministry of trade and public and private sector actors to facilitate the GTI (Bama 2023: 3). Some of the objectives of this ad-hoc committee were to support the National Implementation Committee in implementing the AfCFTA GTI and monitoring imports and exports within Cameroon (Bama 2023: 3). Therefore, the GTI seems poised to be an effective administrative and monitoring mechanism of the implementation of AfCFTA once all AU signatories form part of it (Faleg et al. 2021: 17).

The operational tools, namely the AfCFTA RoO, AfCFTA GTI, AfCFTA NTBM, and PAPSS positively reinforce one another with the aim of operationalising and overseeing the implementation of AfCFTA.

5.4.4 Resources committed towards AfCFTA

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the operational structure that has been tasked with the technical implementation of AfCFTA is the AfCFTA Secretariat. Malena (2009: 20), Raile et al. (2014: 659), and Thuynsma (2022:73) highlight that the allocation of resources towards the implementation of a policy demonstrates the presence of political will. This section outlines the financial resources that have been allocated towards the implementation of AfCFTA to indicate that there is a measure of political will towards AfCFTA within the system of the AU.

As already highlighted, there are no clear provisions with regards to the actual roles and powers of the AfCFTA Secretariat, since these roles are mandated by the Council of Ministers of Trade (African Union General Assembly 2018: 10). The TRALAC conference (2019) raised some concerns with regards to the resources committed to the functioning of the AfCFTA Secretariat, the first being, the structure lacks financial autonomy (Chaytor 2019: 5). The AfCFTA Secretariat funding is derived from the AU budget and is, therefore, subject to the AU funding system to the processes within the AU (Chaytor 2019: 5). A challenge here is that there is no direct indication of the exact amount of funds or resources that it has received thus far to implement and finance the implementation of the trade agreement. It brings into question the powers and functions that AfCFTA Secretariat may have with regards to overseeing the implementation process. Upon further investigation, however, it was found that the

African Development Bank provides financial support to the AfCFTA Secretariat. Upon its formal conception, the AfCFTA Secretariat received seed funding as well as a financial package worth US\$11.02 million (AfDB 2022: 1). This package has been structured to provide institutional strengthening towards the AfCFTA Secretariat, financial aid towards the private sector, and assistance towards regional and continental value chains to increase trade within the continent (AfDB 2022: 1). However, the lack of financial autonomy of the AfCFTA Secretariat does indicate limited commitment. Therefore, while there is a positive indicator of political will which is suggested by the allocation of resources towards AfCFTA as the chief implementer of the trade agreement, a negative indicator of political will is highlighted by the limitations that come with the conditions of its funding.

To this end, it could be argued that the implementation of AfCFTA demonstrates political will by AU institutions and member states to maximise their economic benefit by liberalising trade amongst themselves. The discussion above demonstrates the actions taken to implement and formulate policies that point to positive indicators of political will with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA within this system. It also highlights the complex nature of the implementation of AfCFTA, its links to regional integration and how these positive indicators indicate a certain degree of commitment.

Future studies need to uncover indicators of political will that assess the performance of these measures taken towards driving and implementing AfCFTA. This, however, is sufficient to show that there is a certain degree of political will within this system. The question that remains is whether there is enough political will to make AfCFTA happen. This question highlights the need to identify challenges that have impeded the implementation of AfCFTA, which can indicate where political will lacks in terms of implementing the trade agreement. This will be discussed in the next section.

5.4.5 Challenges towards the implementation of AfCFTA: Negative reinforcers and negative indicators of political will

While assessing the implementation of AfCFTA within the system, challenges were identified regarding the implementation of AfCFTA. These identified challenges indicate negative indicators as shown in the feedback loop below. This section will discuss the challenges uncovered within this system. African challenges are highlighted here and are considered the main metrics in assessing the barriers of implementation.

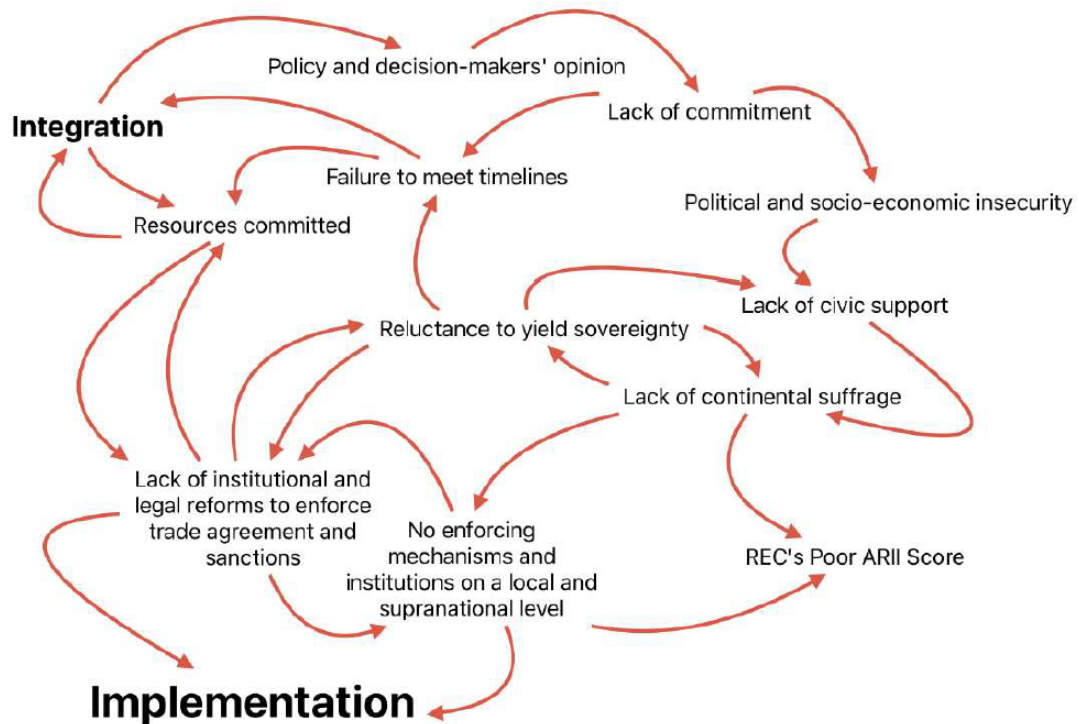


Figure 8: Feedback loop: Negative indicators of political will
 Source: Author's own

After identifying the African system and the key actors that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA, it became evident that there was a need to identify the issues that prove to hinder the implementation of the trade agreement as part of the case study. It remains important to highlight them in this section to provide a background to the challenges that are faced in Africa, and how these can potentially threaten the successful implementation of the trade agreement. While these negative indicators are highlighted in Figure 8, they will be discussed in greater detail below.

Sako (2006: 6) notes that the success of integration has been limited because there is little commitment to implement integration agreements. Hartzenberg (2011: 7) and Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. (2014: 1) argue that while African nations support regional

integration, there are few success stories because many regional integration arrangements do not have realistic time frames towards deep integration.

Nshimbi (2019: 191) further suggests that there are multiple issues that could impede the implementation of AfCFTA. The first issue the author highlights is a lack of political will which has negatively impacted “previous regional goals” and can be attributed to a reluctance from African states to risk their sovereignty (African Union 2019: 2; Khosa 2021: 24). Danso (1995: 37) contextualises further, noting that total integration requires a “supranational authority whose decisions are binding on all member states”. This includes the full removal of all existing obstacles to the free movement of labour, capital, and persons (Danso 1995: 37). While the Abuja Treaty calls for harmonised monetary and social policies, the establishment of a supranational authority which binds its decisions on all member states could prove to be a serious challenge if states are not willing to cede their sovereignty. This could prove to be detrimental towards the creation of a singular monetary, social, and economic policy of member states, as required by AfCFTA and the AEC by extension.

Moreover, African states and RECs must be cognisant of the fact that integration should strike the balance between countries with “a voluntary will” to participate and a concerted willingness to “consult other states in the pursuit of certain policies” (Danso 1995: 38). Integration must be flexible enough to embody the cultural, political, and economic considerations of all states and RECs involved in the integration process (Danso 1995: 38). For this to be achieved, states would also need to voluntarily combine the act of ceding their sovereignty as well as to demonstrate unwavering political will towards a free trade area. This requires an intensive investigation into what it would take to do this.

Another point to consider is that states who are reluctant to cede their sovereignty are also not willing to enable important enforcing mechanisms. African states have developed institutions tasked with implementing regional integration (African Union 2019c: 2:), however, these same institutions do not have the power required to enforce and bind African states to the decisions that they make (African Union 2019c: XVII).

Another issue that could hamper the integration process, is the lack of civic participation in the integration process. Carpentier (2011: 1) attempts to conceptualise civic participation through the lens of democracy, asserting that its fundamental

concern is to include citizens in the decision-making process of governments. Lively (1975: 30) contributes to the discussion on civic participation by providing a list of ways to ensure that citizens are involved in the decision-making process: (1) citizens must govern, (2) crucial decision-making should involve citizens, (3) those that are in power must be held accountable to citizens and their representatives, (4) citizens must choose those who rule them, and (5) those in power must act in the interest of the citizens. Smith (2017: 77) goes further, asserting that political participation consists of opinion forming mechanisms of deliberation and debate throughout the decision-making process. Adding to this, civic participation consists of mechanisms which incorporate speech, listening, action, and protest (Smith 2017: 77). Therefore, civic participation relies on the idea that citizens be given the means to be involved in the policy-making process through voting, being given the platform to publicly discuss and influence issues and decisions, and to directly participate in decision-making (Smith 2017: 72).

Faleg et al. (2021: 18) argue that widespread support amongst African citizens is a catalyst for the successful implementation of AfCFTA, stating that the success of AfCFTA came from “more than just rhetorical support”, and instead “required a willingness of individual member states and their leaders to implement the agreement” through the creation of national institutions and structures that worked to push relevant legislation which agreed to harmonising trade laws and standard. At its core, AfCFTA calls for the free movement of persons, goods, and services. This is the most basic feature of regional integration, and are intrinsically interlinked to civic participation. Faleg et al. (2021: 18) raise this issue and argue that citizens are key units of integration, however, they miss out on the process of integration and have not been actively involved in formulating the process of African integration.

The African continent is also marked by high levels of insecurity which translates to high poverty levels, political instability, and poor governance (Hailu 2014: 308) which derive largely from high levels of population growth and low levels of economic growth (Cilliers 2021: 148). Most African citizens live well below the poverty line (Hailu 2014: 308). African countries that implement AfCFTA must be cognisant of these concerns, particularly since African nations also have low productivity and weak structures of production (Hailu 2014: 308; Khosa 2021: 20). This was further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which dramatically slowed down economic growth on the

continent (Cilliers 2021: 148). Further, African economies differ with regards to their level of development raising the question “how will the benefits of integration be distributed?” (Nshimbi 2019: 191).

A possibility is that stronger economies reap the benefits of integration more than “weaker ones”, since they are more likely to “attract more trade and investment” (Nshimbi 2019: 191). This is because the trade of manufactured goods comprises two-thirds of intra-African trade, “whereas most of Africa’s trade with the rest of the world consists of raw-material exports and imports of finished goods” (Nshimbi 2019: 192). Furthermore, Africa’s trade with the rest of the world currently sits at 90 per cent of its trade.

The implementation of the trade agreement could further be impacted by an array of factors related to a lack of efficient structure, non-tariff barriers, customs procedures, and a sluggish approach towards the harmonisation of monetary and economic policies as set out by AfCFTA. Not meeting timelines features greatly here—AfCFTA was expected to be established by 2017, however, the agreement was only signed on the 21st of March 2018 (Asiedu 2018: 1), by the African Customs Union in 2019, the African Common Market in 2025, and the African Monetary Union by 2030 (African Union Commission 2014a: 36)(Mukamunana & Moeti (2005: 93). This raises questions about the level of commitment and action demonstrated by African states.

It would also be prudent to touch on the figures of the ARII designed by institutions such as the African Development Bank, The AU, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to assess the integration of RECs. Looking at the score of integration of RECs could provide an idea of how integrated Africa is at present. The ARII obtains data that is compiled and measured according to five dimensions: trade integration; productive integration; macroeconomic integration; infrastructural integration; and free movement of people. All RECs are given a score out of a maximum of one.

These dimensions are used to measure the extent to which each REC member state is integrated according to each dimension. This is then calculated to determine a score which indicates their level of integration. The dimensions of integration were developed from the milestones set out by the Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063 and are

thus, taken directly from the four main objectives outlined in Article 4 of the Abuja Treaty (1991).

Table 4: ARII index

| Regional Executive Committee | Africa Regional Integration Index Score /1 |
|------------------------------|--|
| SADC | 0.337 |
| ECOWAS | 0.425 |
| ECCAS | 0.442 |
| IGAD | 0.438 |
| EAC | 0.537 |
| CEN-SAD | 0.377 |
| COMESA | 0.367 |
| AMU | 0.488 |

Source: African Union (2019b: 9)

As the data in Table 4 suggests, the average score for the integration of all African countries sits at 0.426 out of a maximum one. This suggests that African countries are relatively far from integration. The most integrated African country is South Africa with a score of 0.625 out of one (African Union 2019b: 9). The highest performing REC as per the ARII Index, is the EAC with a fair score of 0.537 out of one. The lowest performing REC is the SADC region which sits at 0.337 out of one. A concern here is that the ARII Index suggests that African countries are not fully integrated. For example, regions such as ECOWAS, ECCAS, IGAD, and the AMU sit at average scores of between 0.4 and 0.5 out of one. If this were to be converted into a percentage, they would sit at roughly 40 – 50 per cent level of integration. There are also regions that are performing poorly, such as the SADC, CEN-SAD, and COMESA with an estimated 30 – 40 per cent level of integration. The data also suggests that African RECs are performing poorly with regards to regional integration (African Union 2019b: 16).

Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. (2014: 1) argue that the process of integration has been “slow and episodic” and has focused on regional integration schemes which focus on monetary cooperation or economic union. The authors argue that there is a neglect of “deep integration” which removes barriers towards free movement of services, goods,

and harmonising economic policies and regulatory regimes (Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. 2014: 1).

Further, Ngwenya (2011: 256) argues that African integration lacks vision and as a result, is hampered by a lack of a historical, cultural, and ideological pinning. Qobo (2007: 5) highlights that African states are reluctant to yield their sovereignty to a supranational body which will monitor and enforce the implementation of regional integration. Qobo (2007: 5) further suggests that this is the most tangible form of political commitment. Ngwenya (2011: 259) concurs, arguing that the “exercise of sovereignty” by member states has meant that many regional decisions have failed to be implemented.

Moreover, the African continent is also relatively unstable and features high incidences of violence which negatively impacts economic activity and has translated to weak implementation of regional integration (Sako 2006: 6). Ford and Versi (2022: 1) corroborate, noting that the coups that have emerged in “Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan”, are attributed to weak democratic institutions “where coups have taken place”.

Moreover, member states have faltered when addressing structural challenges (Mlambo et al. 2022: 60). This has been exacerbated by political differences such as territorial integrity, sovereignty, and a lack of political will (Mlambo & Masuka 2022: 61). Ojo (2021: 1) contends further that Africa lacks infrastructure that is designed to address smuggling and illicit flows across borders of its countries. There are further no national institutions that have yet been established to monitor and enforce the rules made by RECs and the AU in line with the implementation of AfCFTA (Ojo 2021: 1). Most of the African economies are underdeveloped and are vulnerable to their dependence on the production and exports of commodities, they also have weak infrastructure and high security risks (Wapmuk & Ali 2022: 9).

As the ARII index suggests, continental and regional integration policies seem to reflect a desire by African states to integrate and increase trade, however, it seems that this desire falters when it comes to implementation—African states have failed to increase regional trade and did not address the barriers identified by AfCFTA (Mlambo et al. 2022: 78).

Another challenge is the convertibility of currencies as highlighted by the Secretary General of AfCFTA Secretariat (Mene 2023: 18). Africa faces the challenge of facilitating trade between countries that have 42 currencies combined (Mene 2023: 18). For example, countries usually change their currency to a third currency, such as the US Dollar, before trading with another, resulting in a higher trade cost (African Union Directorate of Communication 2023: 31). The receiving country converts this third currency into their own currency, resulting in a combined cost of US\$5 billion to African traders. However, the PAPSS has been designed to address this and is therefore, a positive indicator of political will. What remains to be seen, is whether PAPSS is suitably equipped and used by member states.

5.4.6 Balancing feedback loop representing positive and negative indicators of political will

The balancing feedback loop in Figure 9 below, demonstrates how positive and negative indicators of political will influence the implementation of AfCFTA. The green arrows demonstrate how policies and operational tools are positive indicators of political will. The red arrows demonstrate negative indicators of political will. This is expanded on below.

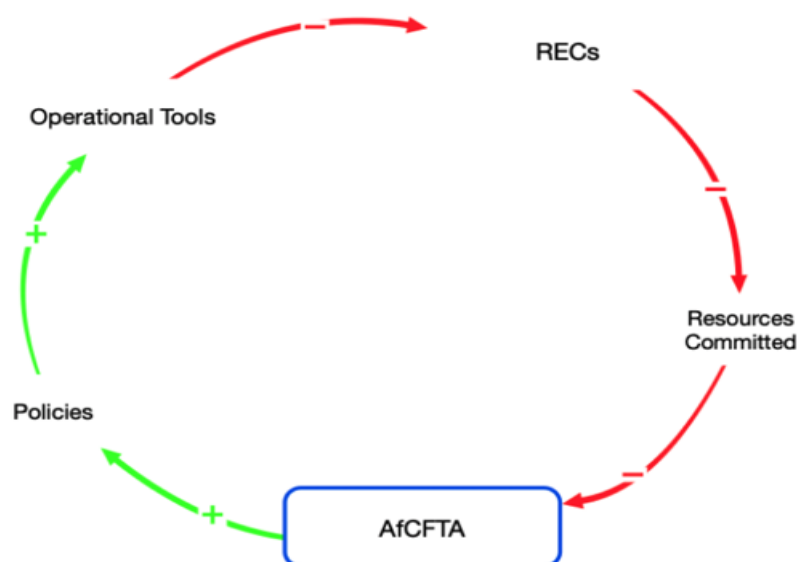


Figure 9: Balancing feedback loop
 Source: Author's own

The two positive arrows in Figure 9 are from AfCFTA to the policies that have been developed to implement the trade agreement and the operational tools that have been identified in both the policies and the description provided in the data capture. However, it can be noted that the remaining factors are listed as negative indicators and as a result, they form reinforcing feedback loops between themselves which eventually has a negative influence on the successful implementation of AfCFTA. As the feedback loop and the data above suggests, the loops that reinforce the implementation of AfCFTA are the policies which have been designed to achieve AfCFTA, and operational tools that have been designed to operationalise its implementation. The efficacy of these operational tools and policies, however, are negatively impacted by the RECs failure to integrate. While RECs have been identified as building blocks of AfCFTA, the extent to which the integration has occurred, as demonstrated by the ARII index, paints a bleak picture of regional integration. As highlighted by Malena (2009: 21), Raile et al. (2014: 659), and Thuynsma (2022: 73), the extent to which resources are allocated to the implementation of a policy reflects significantly of political will. However, the fact that the AfCFTA Secretariat lacks financial autonomy and is dependent on the budget of the AU, demonstrates that there will be financial restrictions in the way AfCFTA can be aggressively implemented. Therefore, there are a few challenges towards integration and the implementation of AfCFTA that must be addressed by African countries for these challenges to materialise. The result is a larger balancing feedback loop that illustrates where political will exists in the AfCFTA system and how this loop reinforces the current failure to implement AfCFTA.

As the above evidence suggests, there is certainly a large degree of political will with regards to the implementation of AfCFTA. There are a range of challenges that need to be addressed which raise questions about how committed African leaders are towards its implementation. These challenges must be addressed more extensively by future studies to generate solutions that can mitigate these stumbling blocks and to ensure a proper implementation of the trade agreement.

5.5 Conclusion

AfCFTA is the product of a specific and interlinked political system that encompasses multiple parts and actors. This necessitated the need to identify the various parts of the system and by extension, the various actors, and to understand the motivating factors that led to the implementation of the trade agreement. This was done by providing diagrams that showed a hierarchy of the actors. A key finding made is that the actors are also tasked with implementing the steps of integration within the main political system in which AfCFTA is being implemented, which is the AU. This system consists of actors which are given specific roles to implement the trade agreement. These actors are represented by the nation states of the AU who are interlinked and interact with different parts of the system. The establishment of AfCFTA institutions are also important since they play the role of providing administrative support. Further, motivating factors of the trade agreement are *inter alia* the means to ensure that economic development on the continent is bolstered. Further, AfCFTA is rooted in the calls made by member states to ensure that trade is boosted and to signify African independence through trade.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the study. The aim of this study was to determine whether there is political will amongst those that are tasked with implementing AfCFTA. This necessitated the need to define free trade and to identify the objectives and aims of AfCFTA. This could not be done without assessing the variables that are inherently linked to AfCFTA. Therefore, the objectives were also extended towards identifying the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented. Further, it was found that regional integration features extensively in the implementation of AfCFTA, highlighting the need to investigate this and the challenges towards integration. This provided a deeper understanding of AfCFTA and the factors that influence its implementation. Most importantly, this also informed the broad question of this study by understanding what influences political will within this system.

Taking the limitations of this study into consideration, this study has broadly uncovered why AfCFTA and its provisions have not yet taken root. The study also reveals that political will, both positive and negative, does indeed exist amongst those tasked with implementing AfCFTA. By developing positive and negative indicators, the study has been able to ascertain the flow of political will within the system and also how this political will influences the implementation of the trade agreement. While there is a degree of political will within the system to implement AfCFTA, the negative indicators discussed in chapter 5 demonstrate why the AfCFTA has not been aggressively implemented. The study also investigated free trade and its links to AfCFTA, has been able to define regional integration and its links to the aims of AfCFTA, and has further identified the system that underpins AfCFTA.

This chapter summarises the findings in the following sections. The first section discusses AfCFTA and its objectives, whilst the second defines free trade and shares its links to AfCFTA. The third section discusses the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented, and the fourth discusses regional integration and the method used to pursue integration in Africa. This is followed by a discussion on political will and AfCFTA. The sixth section discusses the challenges that face the trade agreement.

While these themes were investigated throughout the study, it is important to recap and provide recommendations that can be used for policymakers. This is followed by future studies and methodologies which can enhance the implementation of AfCFTA. This is then followed by the limitations of the study, remarks on AfCFTA operational tools, and the last section which concludes the study.

6.2 The African Continental Free Trade Area and its Objectives

AfCFTA is rooted in the objectives of the Abuja Treaty. The treaty establishing the AEC (OAU General Assembly 1991: 2), was a symbolic move by African leaders towards continental integration. The Abuja Treaty is also considered to be the framework for continental integration on the basis that the Abuja Treaty provided the means for African countries to mobilise their resources towards the integration process (Danso 1995: 31). Further, the treaty sought to integrate African countries and economies to create the AEC. Article 4(1) of the Abuja Treaty (1991) states that the main objective of the treaty is to harmonise domestic policies across Africa, and further provides the steps that must be taken to attain this.

Therefore, AfCFTA is a key initiative geared towards accelerating integration. It is further poised to aid socio-economic development. If AfCFTA is properly implemented, it will result in one single continental market that will allow African citizens and traders to exchange goods and services amongst themselves. This will result in a drastic increase in trade throughout the continent. For example, the fact that the trade agreement will operate in a market with a combined GDP of US\$2.5 trillion, means that large amounts of money will flow throughout the continent. The data in the study also suggests that AfCFTA will contribute to the growth of African economies through its institutions which will encourage African economies to harmonise trade and trade policies on the continental level (Asiedu 2018: 2). One of AfCFTA's aims is to mandate African countries to remove tariffs on 90 per cent of goods. If this can be achieved, trade will drastically increase amongst African economies.

The main objective of AfCFTA is to formalise and create an environment that is conducive for economic integration to occur through the following means (African Union 2021: 3). First, is the creation of one continental market which will incorporate all 55 member states of the AU and will serve as the foundation for continental trade

to occur according to the guidelines created by the AfCFTA institutions and policies. Second, is to address the challenges created by overlapping memberships of African countries in RECs. This will serve a key role in facilitating integration initiatives undertaken by the AU. AfCFTA is a key step in the continental integration project, and is a climax of efforts to accelerate regional integration (Ajibo 2019: 875).

There are many factors that highlight the benefits of AfCFTA. For example, AfCFTA will be the second largest trade agreement in the world, covering an estimated 30 million square kilometres (Nshimbi 2019: 191). This will encourage regional integration and trade, through policies and initiatives geared towards significantly lowering tariffs amongst AU member states. AfCFTA is also an instrument of integration in Africa, and seeks to create procedures, protocols, and standards geared towards facilitating intra-African trade, thereby, serving as an instrument that will implement continental integration.

It is currently projected to increase intra-African trade by some US\$35 billion which will bring African trade to levels shared by regions such as the EU (Asiedu 2018: 2). Further, Article 3 of the AfCFTA Agreement (African Union 2018: 4) highlights the main aim of AfCFTA which is to create one continental market which will facilitate the trade of goods, services, and labour. This will increase economic activity and growth throughout the African continent significantly. Future studies into AfCFTA must assess the efficacy of AfCFTA institutions, and must determine at a deeper level, how trade is performing since the establishment of AfCFTA. The reason why AfCFTA has still not been aggressively implemented remains a question that must be thoroughly investigated.

6.3 Free Trade and AfCFTA

While free trade has been defined throughout the study, it is a constant underlying theme in this investigation. Free trade features throughout this study because it is not only the main objective but is something that AfCFTA desperately seeks to achieve. Free trade is an important variable of integration since it represents deep integration between bordering nations and trading nations and is, therefore, a key activity and indicator of integration. This is because it can only be achieved through harmonised policies and the elimination of tariffs, trade barriers, and non-tariff barriers.

Free trade manifests through free trade agreements that are designed to influence domestic policies that dictate how countries and traders trade amongst themselves (George 2010: 7). In other words, free trade is an activity of integration that demonstrates in the most tangible form, how economically integrated countries interact, and is the most tangible measure that determines how deep economic integration is. Free trade is a key determinant of trade policies that demonstrates the extent to which trade barriers are eliminated.

The key link between AfCFTA and free trade is that free trade is achieved when structural policies that limit all barriers to trade are properly implemented, mainly being tariffs and non-tariff barriers, which are outlined throughout the study (Balaam & Dillman 2016: 32; Plummer et al. 2010: 18). Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 92) and Patterson (2013: 1) argue that integration efforts are also initiatives undertaken to guide how free trade is implemented. This can be seen in the objectives laid out by the AfCFTA agreement. Another example can be seen in the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods, which aims to set a framework that can enable the creation of a market that is conducive for liberalised trade. It does this by creating rules that determine the scope of trade liberalisation (Oladeji 2021: 1).

Therefore, the aim of this protocol is to create a set of rules that provide a scope for the elimination of tariffs, non-tariff barriers, customs efficiency, and the removal of barriers to trade, to enable the use of free trade as a tool that will promote socio-economic development.

Free trade is, therefore, a key activity of AfCFTA, since it features in Article 3 (b) of the AfCFTA Agreement, which outlines its objectives by instructing AU member states to liberalise their markets for the trade of goods and services through the removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers. AfCFTA also seeks to use trade as a mechanism of economic growth through efforts targeted at increasing intra-African trade through free trade. For example, Article 3 of the AfCFTA Agreement tasks African countries to pursue policies that will liberalise trade amongst member states.

Therefore, free trade occurs when barriers to trade are eliminated, through the harmonisation of policies, and is a key feature of AfCFTA. Future studies should investigate the extent to which free trade has occurred since the implementation of

AfCFTA and should design strategies that will further increase it amongst AU member states.

6.4 The African System

AfCFTA is implemented within the African system, of which the AU is the main governance structure. The AU has the power to oversee the integration process across the continent, and consists of 55 member states. It also consists of RECs which act as groupings of member states according to their geographical location. RECs play a significant role in the integration process by coordinating the national economic policies of their member states to align them with the goals outlined by the AU.

The African system is also intricate and consists of many components which interact with one another to implement integration and AfCFTA. The AfCFTA Secretariat is tasked with administering the implementation of AfCFTA and comprises key actors which are given roles and responsibilities in this regard. These components are covered and depicted more extensively in the body of the study. However, future studies need to uncover the functions of these institutions on a deeper level. For example, studies that focus specifically on the role of AfCFTA institutions can provide a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. This can also contribute to studies that can determine whether AfCFTA is being aggressively implemented and why. Understanding the system should be at the centre of strategies designed to strengthen the implementation of AfCFTA and the actualisation of continental integration.

6.5 Political Will and AfCFTA

Political will is a measuring tool which can be used to assess the level of commitment demonstrated by policymakers to achieve policy objectives. This study has shown that the decision-makers within this system have demonstrated some sort of commitment. It has, however, been hampered by the challenges that arise within this system. While it can be concluded that political will exists within this system, there is a need for African leaders to demonstrate political will and commitment that is directed towards eradicating these challenges. As stated by Bradley (1902: 438) and Thuynsma (2022:

69), political will is indeed an inclination to act, complex and volitional, and is usually defined by its absence. However, this study has instead uncovered that this is not the case, and is in fact a tool that can be measured to ascertain the factors around why a policy succeeds or fails and as a means of uncovering the commitment shown by policymakers.

6.6 Regional Integration and AfCFTA

Regional integration is an initiative that seeks to harmonise trade policies within a specific geographical area. The aim of these policies is to jointly remove trade discriminations; hence, it is a process that requires legitimisation from trade agreements between states, that removes trade restriction between them (Madvo 2008: 13; Mukamunana & Moeti 2005: 92).

Regional integration is an inherent feature of the implementation of AfCFTA. This is because the African integration project acknowledges the role of RECs as building blocks of continental integration. Therefore, a key step in the continental integration is the achievement of regional integration. Okafur and Udibe (2020: 9) further highlight that regional integration is a strategy used by the AU to combine African economies towards the establishment of one continental common market. Therefore, AfCFTA and regional integration are inherently linked since they have the same goal which is to accelerate economic growth, development, and integration throughout the continent. As a result, AfCFTA is considered a climatic outcome of regional integration.

The AfCFTA agreement itself considers regional actors as key actors of the implementation process, and are key drivers of the AEC, which is the outcome of the vision espoused throughout the Abuja Treaty. Regional integration is also important because intra-African trade usually happens between bordering countries (Gumede 2021: 5).

Regional integration in the context of Africa is implemented through Africa's eight RECs. These RECs are tasked with mobilising their member states to harmonise policies to align them with integration policies crafted by the AU, and are, therefore,

given the task of coordinating the continental integration activities of their member states.

RECs are defined by the African Union (2022a: 30) as groupings of African states that are mandated to implement regional economic integration. The Abuja Treaty, which creates the foundation and steps to be taken for the establishment of the AEC, identifies RECs as building blocks of the AEC and AfCFTA. For example, Article 88(1) of the Abuja Treaty (1991) pinpoints the harmonisation, coordination, and integration of the activities of RECs as the basis for continental integration. Therefore, RECs are the building blocks of continental integration and are given a key role in its facilitation.

The data suggests that African countries must be organised into eight regional blocs which are tasked with moving towards continental integration through coordinated activities and policies. However, this provides a significant challenge to AfCFTA. For example, this suggests that continental integration can only be achieved through fully integrated RECs. However, as the ARII Index suggests, RECs are still relatively far from full integration. This highlights the need for studies to focus more significantly on finding ways to strengthen and consolidate RECs because if RECs fail to integrate, AfCFTA will be severely compromised due to a lack of proper coordination.

Therefore, this raises the concern that RECs may have stumbling blocks regarding their integration. One can ask the question, how are these stumbling blocks addressed and how do RECs account for low levels of integration when the Abuja Treaty provided a framework for integration in 1991. Future studies must investigate the challenges that RECs face towards their regional integration more extensively, and strategies must be developed as a response to accelerate regional integration.

The ARII Index (African Union 2019b: 16) provides a starting point for such investigations, attributing their low scores to weak regional networks of production and trade, productive limitations, and the prevalence of non-tariff barriers. Mukamunana and Moeti (2005: 96) paint a stark picture of African integration, arguing that RECs have failed to meet their objectives timeously, which include but are not limited to:

- The harmonisation of political and socio-economic policies and plans of member states.
- The development of policies which eliminate barriers related to the free movement of all factors of production and free movement of persons.

- The creation of appropriate institutions, mechanisms and structures that are capacitated with the “mobilisation of requisite resources for the implementation of programmes and operations” (Mukamunana and Moeti 2005: 96).

Another issue is the overlapping membership of RECs. This raises questions about how committed African countries are to regional integration if this issue has still not been resolved. Another issue in this regard is that this creates a lack of uniformity within RECs. In other words, if a member of two different RECs is mandated with different tasks, which mandate or instruction does the member abide by, and which one do they defy? What strategies have been developed to address the challenge of overlapping memberships, that have worked? To actively work towards addressing this issue, which was highlighted by the Abuja Treaty itself, policymakers and member states of the AU must create initiatives that are designed to address this. This process must be accelerated to clarify this challenge.

6.7 Challenges Towards the Implementation of AfCFTA and Recommendations

AfCFTA operates within a unique political system, and thus, faces many unique challenges that have been discussed in greater detail throughout the study. The most important fact to recognise here, is that regional integration still scores low on the ARII index. The occurrence of weak regional networks of production and trade, highlights a problem with regards to how regional integration is currently being implemented. Studies in this regard must investigate whether the current method works, or if there is a need to establish a new method. Another aspect that must be established is whether African countries are willing to integrate, as required by the AU.

This is substantiated by the fact that political, socio-economic, and trade policies are still not harmonised according to the timelines set. Further, policies that are designed to eliminate barriers towards free movement of people, and trade have still not been enacted throughout the African continent. Institutions and structures that should be tasked with overseeing the implementation of AfCFTA on a national level have not been established. The importance of national institutions and structures should not be ignored. The lack of continental laws that bind member states to the decisions taken by continental structures means that states must respond by using institutions that are

tasked to oversee this process with their own law. The question here is, why this has not been done yet, if African countries are truly serious about integration?

The data suggests that the integration project has been slow and has neglected activities designed to deepen integration. An example of this is that African countries have been slow to remove barriers that allow for free movement of goods, services, and people through harmonised policies (Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. 2014: 1). A solution is for African countries to utilise their national legislation as a platform to enable these institutions to be empowered to accelerate integration.

Further, African political leaders must act on the political commitment and will that they have shown through their policy decisions to match their desire to achieve the objectives set out by AfCFTA. This will allow them to actively address many of Africa's issues that pose a threat to integration. The emergence of coups on the continent poses a threat to good governance, which is a requisite towards the implementation of integration. They also provide threats towards economic activities such as trade, which is the core of AfCFTA. There is a need for African countries to improve their infrastructure, to address illicit flows of goods between the national borders of member states. This can also be done through the establishment of national institutions that are tasked with overseeing such incidents.

While the challenge of currencies has been raised, PAPSS has been designed to address this issue. However, the challenge here is that there is no plan as to how this will benefit informal and cross-border traders who may exchange funds in the form of cash as opposed to electronic payments. This means that there must be the establishment of structures situated at borders that can serve the same purpose as PAPSS to address the currency issue for those that trade in cash.

6.8 Future Studies: Alternative Methodologies that can be Applied to Enhance the Success of AfCFTA?

While the current study used systems theory to understand the system of implementation, systems theory could, in future studies, be complemented by supplementary theories of regional integration such as intergovernmentalism which considers power imbalances between nations, cultural and political complexities within

different nations and regions, and the interest pressures of different internal groups towards regional integration and the implementation of AfCFTA. This will provide a deeper understanding of the power dynamics within Africa that could potentially be measured and observed to determine how they influence the implementation of AfCFTA. However, due to time constraints and the nature of desktop research, this proved to be infeasible. The use of systems theory was further feasible for the current study because it aided in uncovering the features of the complex system that AfCFTA is being implemented in. It therefore served as a foundation for future studies which should, perhaps combine systems theory and regional integration theories that focus on the demands, power and regional dynamics within the African continent.

Conversely, Backcasting is one methodology that can be used to improve the implementation of AfCFTA. Backcasting is a theory of future studies that seeks to develop a method for predicting different futures and scenarios (Bibri 2018: 7). Backcasting is specifically rooted in studies that seek to create sustainable development methods and to use these methods to contribute to policy formulation processes (Dreborg 1996: 813). The *raison d'être* for backcasting is to analyse future outcomes and it is concerned with how desirable future outcomes can be attained (Dreborg 1996: 814). It seeks to look towards a desirable future from the present to determine how physically feasible the desired future is, and highlights policy measures that should be taken to attain it (Dreborg 1996: 814).

The backcasting method seeks to help policymakers and scholars develop a better understanding of future possibilities based on how policy decisions are implemented (Bibri 2018: 8). Thus, backcasting looks at preferable futures, which refers to future desired outcomes-based policies that are created (Bibri 2018: 8). A distinguishing feature of backcasting, is that its focus is to identify how the desirable future can be attained, instead of what future outcomes are likely to happen, therefore, resulting the creation of a problem-solving tool to determine how specific outcomes can be attained, including creating a set of steps to be taken, and identifying what steps must be designed to achieve this desirable future (Bibri 2018: 10).

Backcasting focuses on issues that are long-term and complex (Dreborg 1996: 814). These issues may encompass various features of society and focus specifically on societal innovations and change (Dreborg 1996: 815). Further, it is rooted in a desire

to know what adjustments should be made and the thrust of backcasting is ultimately that planning by looking ahead, can greatly influence how development can be attained (Höjer & Mattsson 1999: 2). Therefore, backcasting is a tool that imagines a desirable future to dictate what steps should be taken, and what should happen, instead of a tool that predicts what will most likely happen (Bibri 2018: 10). This can be used extensively for studies that are geared towards policy analysis. Faleg et al. (2021: 2) creates a scenario of an African continent that is prospering in 2030 in which AfCFTA is positioned as the core driver of African prosperity. By backcasting, Faleg et al. (2021: 2) depict a situation where AfCFTA has been properly implemented according to the goals and objectives set out by the trade agreement (Faleg 2021: 2). The assumption is that if these steps are taken and achieved and AfCFTA is properly implemented, and that AfCFTA will adequately solve Africa's developmental challenges (Faleg et al. 2021: 1). This scenario further highlights the challenges facing the successful implementation of trade agreements and provides a framework for the implementation of AfCFTA by alluding to the positives that this agreement could produce.

Faleg et al. (2021: 16) begins by imagining Africa as an “integrated, peaceful and prosperous continent”. The benefits of this, as put forth by Browne (1994: 280) and Cilliers (2008: 111), are that integration is inherently linked to the prosperity and economic growth of the African continent. For example, African countries specialise in the production of mineral and agricultural commodities and are hampered by their smaller economies, necessitating the need for the creation of regional markets through regional integration which can greatly develop their individual sectors (Browne 1994: 280; Cilliers 2008: 113).

At the centre of this, is the successful implementation of AfCFTA which has played a significant role in deepening African economic integration (Faleg et al. 2021: 16). El Ganainy et al. (2023: 1) corroborate this point, noting that AfCFTA is a culmination of economic initiatives designed to integrate African economies with the goal of growing intra-African trade through liberalising trade in goods and services within Africa. At the centre of this are measures taken by the trade agreement to address behind-the-border measures.

Behind-the-border measures refers to a multitude of non-tariff barriers that are enacted within countries instead of at their borders (Wajda-Lichy 2014: 148). These measures can be used as tools of discrimination and restriction towards international trade (Wajda-Lichy 2014: 148). Sadikov (2007: 11) corroborates, noting that behind-the-border measures can constrain international trade and imports from other countries through technical barriers to trade, such as high registration costs for international firms, administrative regulations, sanitary regulations, and any requirements and regulations imposed on international firms (Sadikov 2007: 11; Wajda-Lichy 2014: 148). Further, Sadikov (2007: 11) and Wajda-Lichy (2014: 142) provide insight into why such measures must be addressed. They are considered an indirect way of protectionism, since they are difficult to dispute and assess and are not as direct as tariffs and non-tariff barriers (Wajda-Lichy 2014: 142). Further, Sadikov (2007: 11) notes that addressing behind-the-border measures removes hidden barriers to international trade and enhances international trade between countries. By taking a somewhat scientific approach to this argument, Sadikov (2007:11) argues that addressing behind-the-border measures can improve factor productivity for trading countries by ensuring that Country A is likely to produce more efficiently in Country B, where there are no fixed costs and regulations that can hamper production.

AfCFTA seeks to address behind-the-border measures by harmonising trade policies, which will result in the lowering of tariffs and non-tariff barriers across Africa and making reforms on trade agreements between African countries to increase African trade (El Ganainy et al. 2023: 1). The harmonisation of trade policies will also significantly reduce behind-the-border measures with the establishment of shared economic and trade policies across the African continent. Faleg et al. (2021: 7) further contend that continental, regional, and national initiatives and reforms have significantly increased intra-African trade which involves large African firms and small- and medium-sized enterprises. Faleg et al. (2021: 17) goes further and argues that these initiatives have created economic growth due to a well monitored and administered AfCFTA, which responds formally to challenges and disputes that arise. The appropriate implementation of an online AfCFTA non-tariff barriers mechanism has resulted in traders being able to report the improper application of regulations, as well as any form of corruption undertaken by border and government officials who are tasked with overseeing the implementation of non-tariff barriers (Faleg et al. 2021: 17).

Faleg et al. (2021: 17) points to the prosperity of African integration to strong “political will and leadership”, thanks to a shared mindset amongst African political leaders which prioritised “shared economic gains at the expense of historical rivalries or relative economic gains”. Browne (1994: 282) highlights the importance of political will, arguing that integration can be achieved and the impending obstacles overcome, if African countries have the political will to achieve integration. Browne (1994: 282) further argues that the push for integration is a long-standing desire of African leaders and intellectuals as they view integration as a long-term strategy for joint self-reliance. This methodology can, therefore, generate solutions and knowledge that can create a path towards the successful implementation of AfCFTA and continental integration by extension.

6.9 Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research relies on the interpretation of the data posing the risk of bias and subjectivity into the findings of the study (Ochieng 2009: 13). Desktop research, which relies mainly on existing data, proved to be limiting in the sense that it did not allow access to primary data collection. This was done with consideration of time constraints and the thrust of the study. The analysis of existing documents on AfCFTA could potentially limit and alter the findings, as opposed to directly interviewing and interacting with key actors involved in the implementation of AfCFTA. This made it difficult for the study to uncover for instance, the interests of RECs and nation states from primary sources, therefore influencing how negative and positive indicators of political will were identified. However, desktop research proved to be the most reliable and efficient method, however, vigorous effort had to be applied to ensure that the quality of the data was satisfactory.

The study took the following steps in order to ensure that the data collected was reliable. First, to compensate for a lack of primary data collection through the means of interviews, primary sources such as existing policies were collected through the means of policies in order to directly identify the objectives of the OAU and AU. Second, the development of existing indicators of political will were used, demonstrated and applied to the study to not only demonstrate that a framework exists for indicators of political will exist, but to also test the existing indicators and

frameworks using this study. This greatly influenced the findings made in that regard. A blend of classic and contemporary scholars were also used on all themes within the study and systems theory to provide theoretical root to the study. This ensured that the study was impartial and theoretically rooted in existing literature on the themes that shaped the study. The use of the AU and AfCFTA as a case study further allowed for primary data collection through policies that define AfCFTA and the AU and its functions. This ensured that the data collection was still in tune with the reality of AfCFTA and its implementation in order to maintain the empirical and ethical veracity of the study.

6.10 Remarks on AfCFTA Operational Tools

If properly utilised—these operational tools could play a significant role in driving integration. The AfCFTA RoO can play a significant role in serving as a guideline and set of operational rules that can serve the best interests of the continental integration project by providing a framework that aids in removing barriers to trade for products and services sold by African traders.

The AfCFTA NTBM can be an effective mechanism that can address the removal of non-tariff barriers. The concern, however, is what will the penalties be if the aim for this mechanism is to hold defying states accountable? This might mean that the legal instrument of the AU must be strengthened, however, this can pose a problem, particularly if these mechanisms have no legal authority over African states.

PAPSS has the potential to create a financial infrastructure that can be utilised to address the challenges faced by businesses who are burdened by the implications associated with long payment timeframes and differences of currencies. These operational tools are a statement of intent from the AfCFTA Secretariat and represent a shift towards action to create tools that will enable the implementation of AfCFTA. However, further studies are needed to investigate methods that can strengthen their implementation.

6.11 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the study has identified the actors involved in AfCFTA and their systemic impact on the implementation of the trade agreement. The use of systems theory and the use of indicators of political will demonstrates that AfCFTA exists within a complex system and is influenced by an amount of factors that influence its implementation. Using a thematic literature review, key concepts linked to the implementation of AfCFTA were defined through the analysis of literature to contextualise the root of free trade, and how this is linked to AfCFTA. Therefore, the study has identified and defined key themes such as; regional integration, free trade, AfCFTA, the key actors tasked with implementing the trade agreement, political will and the African political system. The themes are laid out in section 3.8 of the study.

Therefore, the aim of the AfCFTA is to harmonise trade policies through structural initiatives to encourage economic development on the African continent. Further concepts and themes were built upon in the literature review of the study with the aim of developing the key concepts of the dissertation. For instance, regional integration seeks to coordinate the removal of trade barriers amongst countries in a shared geographical block basis and further seeks to coordinate and harmonise economic policies on this basis. Clearly, free trade and regional integration are clearly inherent features of AfCFTA, and a cornerstone of African development. Political will has further been defined and conceptualised within the study; and while it exists within the African system, further studies need to investigate aggressively what influences political will and how it can be perhaps increased.

Further, the system in which AfCFTA is being implemented in has been identified as the AU, in which key components, features and variables were identified in the system. Therefore, AfCFTA is implemented in a complex political system which consists of an array of actors who have now been identified and discussed through the utilisation of diagrams which depict the interactions of these actors who are tasked with implementing AfCFTA.

On paper, AfCFTA will greatly benefit the African continent. The system that has been designed as well as its components reflect a well-thought-out strategy that can enable its implementation. However, the implementation of AfCFTA remains a challenge. This requires the use of innovative methods for scholars, policymakers, and African leaders. One of these, which should be greatly utilised in further studies, is

backcasting. By using backcasting, one can methodologically create a desired and feasible outcome and determine the required actions that can be undertaken to achieve this. This can create a progressive framework for policymakers to follow.

Studies must also be more in-depth to assess more aspects of integration. For example, uncovering what happens within institutions designed to implement AfCFTA can highlight certain failures and successes. This can develop strategies that can accelerate the implementation of AfCFTA and highlight what can be done to strengthen it. AfCFTA is central to the enactment of continental integration. Its implementation must be studied in-depth to ensure that it is successful.

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