



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Integration in Southern Africa:

**The role, prospects and progress of
the Tripartite Free Trade Area**

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations	v
Executive summary	vi
1. Introduction and context	1
1.1 Background and purpose of the study.....	1
1.2 Objectives of the study	2
1.3 Methodology.....	2
2. Background to the Tripartite Free Trade Area of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community	4
2.1 The Tripartite Free Trade Area of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community .	5
2.2 Negotiation principles and processes under the Tripartite Free Trade Area.....	7
2.2.1 Negotiation principles and modalities	8
2.2.2 Institutional framework for the Tripartite negotiations.....	9
2.3 Status and progress of the Tripartite negotiations.....	9
2.3.1 Scope of the Tripartite negotiations.....	9
2.3.2 Progress on market integration negotiations.....	10
2.3.3 Progress on industrial development negotiations.....	11
2.3.4 Progress on infrastructure development negotiations	12
2.3.5 Movement of business persons.....	13
2.4 Southern Africa's commitments under the Tripartite Free Trade Area	14
2.5 Challenges in the negotiations.....	17
2.6 Southern Africa's trade flows with Tripartite Free Trade Area countries.....	20
2.6.1 Intra-Southern African Development Community trade dynamics	20
2.6.2 Southern African Development Community trade with other regional economic communities	21

2.6.3 Southern African Development Community trade with the rest of the world	24
2.7 Composition of Southern Africa's intra-trade with Tripartite Free Trade Area countries	25
3. Empirical underpinnings for the prospects of the Tripartite Free Trade Area	26
3.1 Profile of intra-African trade dynamics	27
3.1.1 Gauging the integration potential of the Tripartite Free Trade Area: The Trade Integration Index	29
3.1.2 Quantitative results - the Decision Support Model to measure market potential and supply capacity in the Tripartite Free Trade Area	30
3.1.3 Assessment of the Tripartite Free Trade Area from a global multi-region multi-sector Computable General Equilibrium model	36
3.2 Overall commentary on prospects for the Tripartite Free Trade Area	42
4. Lessons for the Continental Free Trade Area from the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement	43
4.1 Continental Free Trade Area	43
5. Challenges to the Tripartite implementation process	46
6. Conclusions and recommendations	48
6.1 Emerging issues	48
6.2 Recommendations	48
6.2.1 Tripartite Task Force level	48
6.2.2 Member State level	49
6.2.3 Leveraging the roles of other players to enhance inclusivity and broad ownership	51
Annex I: Top 20 Tripartite Free Trade Area importer-product-exporter matches with an increase in trade: 2010–2014	52
Annex II: Impacts of scenarios T1–T4 on growth in trade across the Tripartite Free Trade Area	53
Annex III: Changes in aggregate welfare	54
References	55

Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EAC	East African Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
GDP	gross domestic product
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community

Executive summary

The present study focuses on the development and conclusion of negotiations for the Tripartite Free Trade Area, which brings together the member states of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The launch of the Tripartite Free Trade Area, which took place on 10 June 2015 in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt, lent credence to a long process of negotiations that had begun in June 2011, and whose major outcome would be the creation of a grand free trade regime for 27 countries across Eastern and Southern Africa, brightening prospects for enhanced intraregional trade in sub-Saharan Africa.

The present study provides an extensive review and evaluation of the impact of the Tripartite Area and the role that it plays in deepening regional integration, to better inform and advise its member States. It takes stock of the progress made towards fulfilling Tripartite agreements by member States (with specific reference to the countries of the Southern African region) and identifies key milestones, challenges and opportunities.

The study reviews the implementation of the Tripartite Area and draws lessons for the realization of the grand pan-African dream of a Continental Free Trade Area, leading to an African Economic Community by 2028.

been following a road map for the negotiation process that envisaged the completion of phase I, covering the liberalization of trade in goods, rules of origin and movement of business persons, by June 2014. Phase II of the negotiations, covering trade in services and other trade-related issues, will only commence after the conclusion of phase I negotiations. Negotiations on the three pillars of Tripartite Area are running concurrently, with discussions on infrastructure development even taking place prior to the Summit decision to move towards the creation of the Tripartite Area.

Progress on the negotiations under phase I has been slow. Outstanding work remains with regard to rules of origin and the tariff concessions that Tripartite member States should grant to one another. Member States have missed the deadline to finalize their bilateral negotiations, which should have been completed by the end of March 2017. Negotiations towards Tripartite rules of origin have also been significantly complicated because of the fundamental differences between the list rules or product-specific rules of SADC and the generic rules of COMESA and EAC.

Some critical negotiations that have not made progress encompass the movement of business persons, which is covered under a separate track of phase I. Although not yet prioritized, this remains key to the free movement of production factors. Thus, more remains to be done in this area. Major controversies surrounding visa issues

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