

Gender And Development Discourses in Regional and Supranational Free Trade Agreements in Africa: A Window into the Social Construction of Development

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In January 2021, the African Free Trade Continental Area (AfCFTA) was established and became the largest trade agreement worldwide with 54 countries. The building blocks of the AfCFTA are the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

This paper aims to examine how the feminist development discourse is incorporated in regional trade agreements. We were particularly interested in how gender in development was linguistically constructed in the RECs and if they influenced the AfCFTA. The analysis is done through an interdisciplinary approach bringing forward ideas of regional integration, neo-functionalism, development theories and feminist development theories to understand the language of development. Furthermore, drawing on poststructuralism and Hajer's methodology regarding metaphors and storylines, we define, locate, and understand the language of discourse. The discourse analysis uses codes created from Hajer's methodology of feminist development theories to understand the language of development discourse of two specific RECs and the AfCFTA. In addition, the paper explores these development discourses that have been incorporated into the AfCFTA from the RECs and if gender in development moves away from the liberal theories of trade. The study shows that there is little link between the trade agreements. However, it shows that different theories of development can be found in a structured liberalistic world

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