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Research Report

Review of the AfCFTA registration and rules of origin certification process: A case study of Ghana

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Report

Review of the AfCFTA registration and rules of origin certification process

A case study of Ghana

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Acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AGI	Association of Ghana Industries
AUC	African Union Commission
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
COCOBOD	Ghana Cocoa Board
CoO	Certificate of Origin
CPSDIT	Centre for Private Sector Development and Inclusive Trade
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETLS	ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme
EU	European Union
FAGE	Federation of Associations of Ghanaian Exporters
FDA	Food and Drugs Authority
GEPA	Ghana Export Promotion Authority
GIFF	Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders
GNCCI	Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
GSA	Ghana Standards Authority
GTI	Guided Trade Initiative
ICUMS	Integrated Customs Management System
Mofaz	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
MoTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NCO	National AfCFTA Coordination Office
PIA	permit-issuing agency
PSRO	product-specific rules of origin
RoO	rules of origin
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

Following the attainment of the required threshold of country ratifications necessary for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to come into force, the 13th Extraordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government agreed to officially commence trade under AfCFTA on 1 January 2021 based on legally implementable and reciprocal schedules of tariffs concessions.

Accordingly, Ghana established its National AfCFTA Coordination Office and announced processes for trading under AfCFTA, with the symbolic export of cosmetics and alcoholic beverages to Guinea and South Africa, respectively, in January 2021.

Almost two years into implementing the AfCFTA, this study seeks to collect empirical data to review Ghana's rules of origin (RoO) certification process. The aim is to learn and improve the processes through a public-private sector dialogue.

Specifically, the study was intended to achieve the following objectives:

Compare the AfCFTA RoO application process in Ghana with the guidelines contained in the RoO Manual by the AfCFTA Secretariat.

Assess businesspersons' experiences with Ghana's current AfCFTA RoO certification process using the Centre for Private Sector Development and Inclusive Trade's Ease of RoO Administration Composite Index.

Explore how gender and climate change issues are considered when the AfCFTA RoO certificate is applied for and issued.

Examine adjustments that can be made to Ghana's present AfCFTA RoO certificate application procedures through a public-private sector dialogue.

Research methodology

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify and interview key informants of crucial institutions implementing Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification process. The outcomes of the discussions were analysed and presented as a description of Ghana's instituted AfCFTA registration and certification process. This was compared with the AfCFTA RoO Manual for a relative

assessment of the process of learning lessons and improving the process in Ghana.

In addition to the above, the study administered questionnaires to notable business and exporter association members to solicit their views on their experience with the AfCFTA registration and certification process.

To obtain first-hand information on businesses' experiences with the AfCFTA registration and certification process, the study also conducted case studies of two firms: one that used the National AfCFTA Approval Committee's registration and certification process and one that conducted certification under the Guided Trade Initiative.

Key findings and conclusions

The key findings and conclusions of the study drawn out from key informants and the survey of businesses are that:

Ghana's implementation of the AfCFTA RoO follows the approach and lessons from its implementation of the Economic Community of West African States Trade Liberalisation Scheme, which involved establishing a National Approvals Committee.

The AfCFTA certification process involves four main stages: registration of exporters, a factory visit and inspection, determination of origin and issuance of the Certificate of Origin (CoO).

Ghana's RoO registration and certification process complies with provisions of the AfCFTA RoO Manual but is much more complex.

Reflections of the private sector on the AfCFTA registration and certification process

Responses to the survey of thirty businesses on the current AfCFTA registration and certification process indicated that:

Though there has been extensive sensitisation on the AfCFTA, most respondents still do not fully understand the AfCFTA RoO criteria, how these affect their businesses and their ability to secure a CoO.

Most respondents did not know how to streamline their production to make their products eligible for trading under the AfCFTA.

Most respondents had limited knowledge of the documents required to complete and submit the AfCFTA Registration Form.

Most respondents, particularly first-time micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (MSMEs) exporters, held the view that the cost associated with the process (obtaining the requisite certification, visiting offices for support and engaging assistance during application and shipment) could constitute a constraint to the market access opportunity presented by the AfCFTA.

Except for the factory visit stage, most respondents were not satisfied with the timeliness of the process and the time taken to issue the CoO.

Most respondents also noted the complexity of clearing export consignments in export destination countries under the AfCFTA.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are recommended for consideration by stakeholders involved in AfCFTA registration and certification in Ghana:

- Simplify the AfCFTA registration and certification process to reduce the time and cost of compliance.
- Adopt and promote AfCFTA RoO self-certification options, such as the Origin Declaration, as an alternative to the current process.
- Provide hands-on training for exporters on AfCFTA registration, CoO application and completion of the Origin Declaration.
- Decentralise the AfCFTA registration and certification process to ease access and costs for MSMEs and women-owned businesses in other regions of Ghana.
- Develop and implement a support programme to enable businesses to meet the AfCFTA RoO criteria.

1 Introduction

Proof of origin is a requisite for businesses to take advantage of market access opportunities presented by any free trade agreement. Its relevance is underscored in the fact that the origin of a product forms the basis for determining applicable duties on an imported product in a free trade area. A *Certificate of Origin* (CoO) can be a *visa* admitting a product for preferential treatment in a free trade area, with the *rules of origin* (RoO) serving as the eligibility criteria for a product to obtain the visa.

The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (also called the Kyoto Convention), in its Revised Convention, defines RoO as the *'specific provisions, developed from principles established by national legislation or international agreements ("origin criteria"), applied by a country to determine the origin of goods'* (WCO, 2006). In the particular context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Annex 2 of the AfCFTA Agreement on Rules of Origin defines the *"Certificate of Origin" as the documentary proof of origin issued by a designated competent authority, confirming that a particular Product complies with the origin criteria applying to preferential trade under the Annex Protocol on Trade in Goods'* (AUC, 2018).

Following the attainment of the required threshold of country ratifications for the AfCFTA to come into force, the 13th Extraordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Johannesburg in December 2020 agreed to officially commence trade under AfCFTA on 1 January 2021, based on legally implementable and reciprocal schedules of tariffs concessions. Accordingly, Ghana established its National AfCFTA Coordination Office (NCO). It announced processes for trading under AfCFTA with the symbolic export of cosmetics and alcoholic beverages to Guinea and South Africa, respectively, in January 2021.

As part of preparations for commercial trade to commence, the Seventh Meeting of the AfCFTA Council of Ministers responsible for trade, held in October 2021, among other things, directed the Application of Provisional Schedules of Tariffs Concessions, thereby providing the legal basis for state parties that had submitted their tariff schedules by the agreed modalities to trade preferentially among themselves. The AfCFTA Secretariat, with technical support from the European Union (EU)–World Customs Organization (WCO) Rules of Origin Africa Programme, developed the AfCFTA Manual on

RoO as a guideline on the operationalisation of the AfCFTA Rules of Origin Protocol.

The Manual spells out the application of the rules used in determining the origin status of goods, procedures for administering the rules and the institutional framework for implementing the AfCFTA RoO. Additionally, the Manual was designed to ensure uniform interpretation and application of the AfCFTA RoO in state parties and enable customs officers and other stakeholders involved in the clearance of goods to understand the mechanisms of the preferential tariff treatment to goods traded in the AfCFTA. It was also intended to aid businesses in understanding the procedures and requirements for goods to qualify under the AfCFTA trade regime.

Almost two years after the implementation of the AfCFTA, this study seeks to collect empirical data to review the RoO certification process in Ghana, with a view to learning and improving the processes through a public-private sector dialogue. Section 2 outlines the precise methodology for conducting surveys with the public and private sectors and information on how the data was analysed. Sections 3 and 4 present the data obtained from interviews with key informants and results from the survey of private sector businesses on Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification processes. The study also presents the experiences of women-owned or women-led enterprises with the AfCFTA registration and certification process and products that are crucial for sustainable growth and to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change. These cross-cutting considerations are addressed in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 summarises the main findings and offers actionable recommendations to streamline the AfCFTA processes in Ghana to make them easier to follow and increase their usage and inclusivity.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research objectives

Table 1 presents the sub-objectives that guided the study.

Table 1 Research objectives

Research objectives	
i.	Compare the AfCFTA RoO application process in Ghana with the guidelines contained in the RoO Manual by the AfCFTA Secretariat
ii.	Assess the experiences of businesspeople with the current AfCFTA RoO certificate application process in Ghana using the Ease of RoO Administration Composite Index of the Centre for Private Sector Development and Inclusive Trade
iii.	Explore how gender and climate change issues are considered when the AfCFTA RoO certificate is applied for and issued
iv.	Examine adjustments that can be made to Ghana's present AfCFTA RoO certificate application procedures through a public-private dialogue

2.2 Research design and methodology

While it is recognised that the effectiveness of a trade agreement's RoO administration system accounts for the agreement's success, there is little in the literature about methods and tools to measure the administration of these RoOs. Most often, the utilisation rate of a preferential trade agreement has been used to assess its overall performance.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) considers utilisation rates to be the proportion of trade eligible for a trade preference and receiving preferential treatment in practice. A study by Crivelli et al. (2021) extends this further to understand the reasons for the asymmetry of utilisation rates and the critical products responsible for such pockets of underutilisation, linking it to product-specific rules of origin (PSRO) and related administrative procedures.

This study used a concurrent/parallel mixed methods design (Creswell, 2012) to describe RoO certification in Ghana and explore the experiences of businesses, including women-owned or women-led companies, with the RoO certification process in Ghana. Using this paradigm, the study gathered quantitative and qualitative data to analyse the survey questions.

Considering this, the study aimed to triangulate, augment, and integrate the results of both the quantitative and the qualitative stages using various data sources (secondary desk research, interviews, and a survey).

2.3 Methods of data collection

The study used a purposive sampling technique to identify and interview key informants in the institutions administering the RoO certification process across Ghana.

In addition to the above, the study administered questionnaires to thirty business groups and exporters to collect data on their experience with the AfCFTA registration and certification process. The targeted respondents were reached electronically and through phone calls as per the research design presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Data collection procedures

Tasks required	Research design	Target participants	Data collection method
Description of the AfCFTA RoO certification process in Ghana	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customs Division of Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) (AfCFTA Competent Authority) Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS) Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GNCCI) Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) NCO 	Interview
Internationally accepted guidelines on the application and certification of RoO	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annex 2, AfCFTA Agreement on RoO AfCFTA RoO Manual 	Review of documents
User experiences and views on the current AfCFTA RoO process in Ghana	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of RoO applicants from GNCCI List of exporters under Market Expansion Programme of NCO Intentional list of respondents selected from a stratum of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and women-owned businesses 	Survey questionnaires administered personally, telephone calls and Survey Monkey

2.4 Method of data analysis and presentation

The interview transcripts were carefully analysed and summarised to describe AfCFTA registration and certification in Ghana. The process was further compared with provisions of the AfCFTA RoO Manual developed by the AfCFTA Secretariat.

In addition, data collected on the experiences of businesses with the RoO certification process was collated and presented in graphs and tables based on the following thematic indicators:

- level of awareness and understanding of RoO
- accessibility of RoO application forms
- capacity of RoO administrators
- predictability and timelines of the process
- acceptability and verification in the destination country

2.5 Ethical considerations

The project carefully followed the ethical guidelines of CPSDIT and ODI. In line with the main ethical principles of mixed methods research, we fully respected the main ethical requirements of data collection and analysis, with close attention to ethical procedures such as protecting respondents' privacy during interviews and the administering of questionnaires, avoiding irrelevant and obtrusive questions, and granting complete anonymity to all respondents.

The two main principles of mixed methods research – confidentiality and rapport (Creswell, 2012) – were central to the research. The collected data was kept digitally on firewall-protected office computers in a password-encrypted form.

3 The AfCFTA registration and certification process in Ghana

The study engaged key informants of the GRA Customs Division, GNCCI and Ghana Link Services Ltd (the manager of the automated AfCFTA registration and CoO application process on ICUMS) in the virtual interview session on the AfCFTA registration and certification mechanism in place to administer the AfCFTA RoO in Ghana.

It also discussed the capacity of their respective institutions and activities they had undertaken to build the capacity of the private sector on the AfCFTA RoO, challenges that confront them and potential measures to mitigate these challenges to ensure a speedy and efficient AfCFTA RoO certification process in Ghana.

In line with the research objective, the results are presented here based on the overarching approach to AfCFTA registration and certification in Ghana, its stages, and the key actors involved in the process. Mindful of the fact that the process commences after a firm complies with the general requirement for export, the section first briefly highlights export procedures before presenting the approach and stages of the AfCFTA RoO registration process.

3.1 General export requirements and procedures

The Export and Import Act 1995 (ACT 503) constitutes the legal framework for export in Ghana. It defines two main types of exports – traditional and non-traditional – and sets out conditions for their export.

Currently, the Customs Division of GRA's list of traditional exports includes cocoa beans, logs, electricity, fresh fish, fresh yams, and mineral ore (unprocessed gold, diamond, bauxite); any exportable items other than those listed above are categorised as non-traditional exports.

The Act requires exporters of non-traditional exports to complete the Ghana Export Forms, and Exchange Control Form A2 in the case of traditional exports. In practice, the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA) stipulates the general procedure for export as below:

- The business must register with the Registrar General's Department.
- Upon successful incorporation, it is also expected to register as an exporting company with GEPA. The completed Exporter Registration Form is submitted to GEPA together with photocopies of the firm's registered business certificates.
- Prior to export, exporters are expected to apply for and obtain relevant certificates or permits from the appropriate permit-issuing agency (PIA), which is also expected to conduct inspections of premises and production facilities where necessary.
- The PIA submits an inspection report and recommendations to GEPA and copies the exporter. GEPA completes the registration process as recommended by the PIA and other agencies and issues the applicant with an export certificate, sending a copy to GRA.
- In addition, the PIA must arrange for a testing of samples and an inspection of the consignment for export and issue an Export Consignment Certificate to cover each shipment.
- The exporter must also obtain additional documents where required (CoO, Phytosanitary Certificate, etc.). Table 3 presents details of consignments requiring export permits.

Table 3 Export items and corresponding permits

Export item/commodity	Permit required
Cocoa	Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) Export Permit
Timber products	Permit from Timber Industry Development Division, Forestry Commission
Mineral ore	Permit from Minerals Commission
Manufactured/processed goods	Permit from Ghana Standards Authority (GSA)
Coffee/shear nuts/cashew nuts	COCOBOD Export Permit
Food and agricultural produce	Phytosanitary Certificate from Plant Protection and Regulatory Service or Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)
Palm oil	Permit from Food and Drugs Authority (FDA)
Rock and soil samples	Permit from Geological Survey Authority
Wildlife	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
Pets	Permit from the Veterinary Service Division of MoFA
Chemicals including plants	Permit from Environmental Protection Authority
Pharmaceuticals	Permits from Ministry of Health and FDA
Antiques	Permit from Museum and Monuments Authority
Non-ferrous scraps	Permit from MoTI
Other scraps including electronic waste	Permit from MoTI
Human remains	Death Certificate from Birth & Death Registry

Source: Customs Division, Ghana Revenue Authority
[\(https://gra.gov.gh/customs/export-procedures/\)](https://gra.gov.gh/customs/export-procedures/)

3.2 AfCFTA registration and certification in Ghana: approach

Ghana's approach to implementing the AfCFTA RoO follows the approach of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS), where the National Approvals Committee is constituted to cover the application of product eligibility based on the RoO criteria. The ETLS is on record as having commenced in 1979 with agricultural products and handmade crafts. The scope of the liberalisation offer was extended to industrial products in 1990, necessitating the development of RoO to ensure only goods emanating from a member state could take advantage of the Scheme.

In accordance with the provisions of Article 38 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty, the following are regarded as originating from the community:

- products wholly obtained in one or several member states
- products obtained in one or several member states and containing non-originating raw materials, provided that these raw materials have undergone sufficient processing or transformation in the Community.

The National Approvals Committee was therefore constituted to consider applications for products to trade preferentially under the ETLS. After consideration and approval of product, GNCCI, which served as the Competent Authority in the ETLS RoO certification process, issued a CoO.

Following from the above, Ghana's MoTI established the AfCFTA RoO Committee with representation from the NCO, the GRA Customs Division, GNCCI and other relevant statutory bodies such as GEPA, and the GSA.

Unlike in the ETLS, the GRA Customs Division, which is primarily responsible for the classification and valuation of goods, is the Designated Competent Authority for the AfCFTA RoO in accordance with the provisions of Annex 2 of the AfCFTA Agreement on RoO and the AfCFTA Manual. As the Designated Competent Authority, the Customs Division is responsible for assisting the Approval Committee to determine the origin of products, after which it will issue the CoO for each product upon approval.

As part of preparation to effectively discharge its new role of determining origin, the Division established the Tariff and Trade Unit, headed by an Assistant Commissioner. It also developed a training module for the determination of origin and included it in the training programme for staff of the Customs Division. The Unit has a team of well-trained personnel dedicated to working closely with relevant agencies in ensuring the private sector can apply for and secure the AfCFTA CoO.

The work of the AfCFTA Approvals Committee is supported by an AfCFTA Inspection Team, comprising officers of the institutions represented on the National AfCFTA RoO Approval Committee. The Inspection Team is responsible for inspecting and verifying the authenticity of the applicant's supporting documents, the source of raw materials, the production method and the final state of the finished product. The role is important in ensuring a high degree of accuracy of information considered by the Approvals Committee in the determination of a product's eligibility.

3.3 Stages of the AfCFTA RoO certification process in Ghana

The AfCFTA certification process involves four main stages: registration of exporter, factory visit and inspection, determination of origin and issuance of the CoO.

3.3.1 Registration to trade under the AfCFTA

The first stage of the AfCFTA certification process is for businesses to complete and submit the AfCFTA Registration Form. The AfCFTA Registration Form requires the provision of relevant business and product information, such as registered business name, location, certificate of incorporation, manufacturing and product certifications from relevant statutory agencies, product composition, source of raw materials and their appropriate HS code, method of production, final form of product and packaging.

The AfCFTA registration and certification process is automated and is accessible on ICUMS but only for authorised users of the platform. This has given rise to situations where applicants without authorisation engage the services of certified custom agents to complete the process on their behalf. Alternatively, applicants can obtain manual copies of the AfCFTA Registration Form from the NCO or GNCCI. Successful completion of this stage qualifies a business to be issued an Exporter Registration Number in accordance with the requirements of the AfCFTA RoO Manual. It also makes it possible to maintain a comprehensive database on each business and its product to facilitate the inspection and issuance of the AfCFTA CoO.

3.3.2 Factory visits for inspection

The second stage of the AfCFTA certification process is a visit by an AfCFTA RoO Inspection Team to the applicant's premises. The purpose of the visit is to inspect and verify the authenticity of business and product information provided in support of the registration.

The visit is scheduled by MoTI or the NCO after engaging the applicant and members of the Inspection Team. The joint team, comprising officers of MoTI, GNCCI, Customs and either GSA or FDA, depending on the product under consideration, is expected to verify the location of the applicant, the authenticity of the business

and product certificates, and the origin of raw materials and also to observe at first hand the production methods and processes involved in arriving at the final product. The outcome of this visit is a comprehensive report on the findings of the visit for consideration by the National AfCFTA Approval Committee.

3.3.3 Determination of origin

The AfCFTA RoO Approval Committee is responsible for considering the reports of the Inspection Team and, with the guidance of the Customs Division, determining the origin of products in accordance with the AfCFTA RoO. The meetings of the Committee are convened by MoTI after it has received an adequate number of inspection reports (no specific number given) from the AfCFTA Inspection Team.

During its meetings, the Committee considers and reviews applications and inspection reports to decide whether a product is eligible to trade under the AfCFTA based on the AfCFTA RoO. The Customs Division assists the Committee with the appropriate classification of a product and its composition, the source of raw materials and the applicable rules in the determination of origin.

Box 1 Article 4, Annex 2 of the AfCFTA Agreement, on Rules of Origin

A Product shall be considered as originating from a State Party if it has:

- a been wholly obtained in that State Party within the meaning of Article 5 of this Annex; or
- b undergone substantial transformation in that State Party within the meaning of Article 6 of this Annex

Source: AUC (2018)

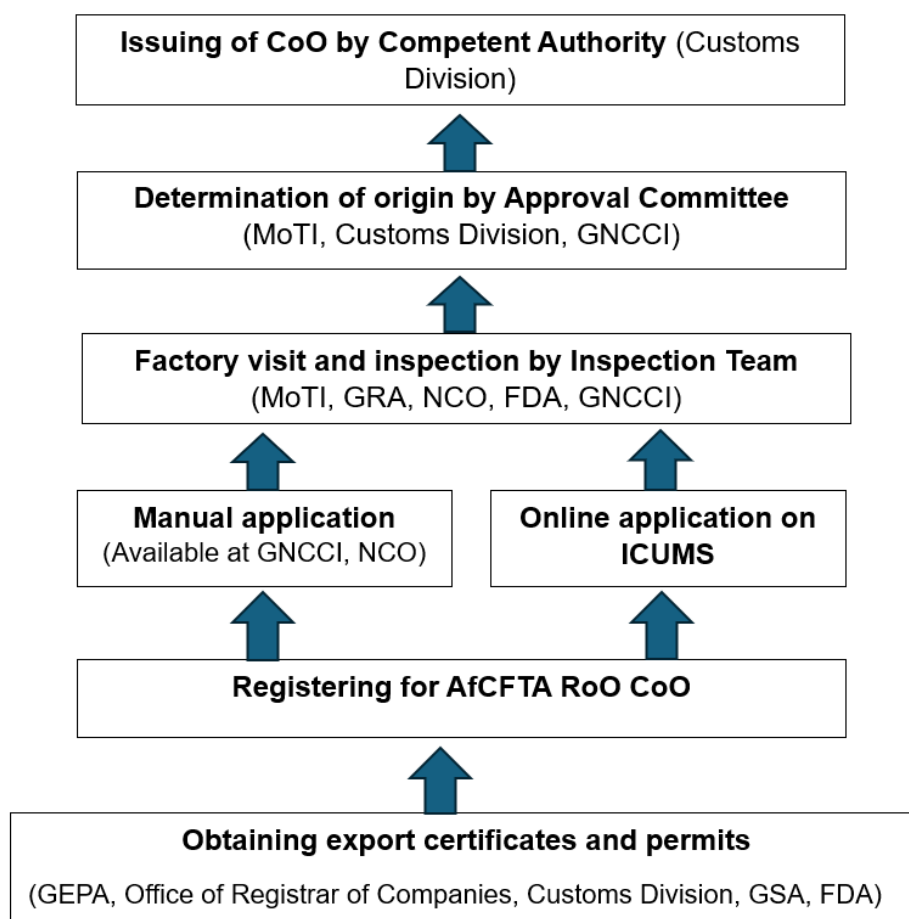
The Committee is also tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the outcome of the consideration is consistent with provisions of the AfCFTA Protocol on RoO and the applicable Product-Specific Rules to make it eligible for trading under the AfCFTA. It is also noted that the Product-Specific Rules now provide guidance on the eligibility of products with Non-Originating Material Content.

3.3.4 Issuance of Certificate of Origin

The AfCFTA CoO is issued to products approved by the AfCFTA Approval Committee as having met the applicable AfCFTA RoO criteria and as eligible to trade preferentially in the continent under the AfCFTA. It is issued in respect of a particular export consignment and can be generated electronically whenever an applicant makes available export details to GNCCI. When the application process is done manually, the CoO is printed by GNCCI for embossment and certification by the Customs Division its capacity as Competent Authority.

The time taken to obtain the CoO is dependent on the accuracy of the information and compliance with the applicable criteria involved in the determination of origin. The certification process is estimated to take five working days where accurate information is provided, and the product is wholly-obtained in the state party. It takes a little longer if the product is considered on the basis of having undergone substantial transformation, as this will involve scheduling a visit and inspection and a meeting of the Approval Committee.

Figure 1 Certificate of Origin acquisition process



Source: Authors based on information from AfCFTA implementing institutions in Ghana

3.4 Comparative assessment of the AfCFTA certification process

Before the development of the WTO Agreement on Rules of Origin, Annex D of the Kyoto Convention (now Specific Annex K of the Revised Kyoto Convention) of the Customs Co-operation Council (now the WCO) was the only existing international convention mentioning RoO.

With the proliferation of free trade agreements, the administration of RoO has become a major source of concern for multinational trading organisations such as the WTO and WCO. While negotiation on the

harmonisation of RoO is bringing uniformity as to how the origin of a specific product is determined and how the rules are applied, there is a general understanding that the RoO are not to be used as instruments to pursue trade objectives directly or indirectly.

It is held that the application of RoO rules should not create *new administrative burdens either for international trade operators or for customs administrations*. Instead, they should be simplified with respect to the spirit of the Kyoto Convention of having it operate in a balance to facilitate trade.

The WCO (2023) therefore, notes the objectives and principles of the WTO Agreement on RoO as follows:

- to develop clear and predictable RoO
- to facilitate the flow of international trade
- not to create unnecessary obstacles to trade
- not to nullify or impair the rights of members under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994
- to provide transparency of laws, regulations, and practices regarding RoO
- to ensure RoO are prepared and applied in an impartial, transparent, predictable, consistent, and neutral manner
- to make available a consultation mechanism and procedures for the speedy, effective, and equitable resolution of disputes arising under the Agreement
- to harmonise and clarify non-preferential RoO.

In addition, the WCO handbook further notes some capabilities for the institution designated as the Competent Authority, as follows:

- legal ability to deliver certificates of origin
- good knowledge of the rules conferring origin to the goods
- powers to inflict sanctions on origin offences.

3.4.1 The AfCFTA RoO Manual

The implementation of the AfCFTA RoO Protocol requires state parties to apply common procedures in determining the eligibility of products for AfCFTA origin as well as the granting of tariff preferences in the AfCFTA Trading Regime.

The AfCFTA RoO Manual shares insight on the AfCFTA Protocol on RoO and provides guidance for operationalising and administering the AfCFTA RoO in state parties to the AfCFTA Agreement. It covers the provisions governing the determination of the origin status of goods under the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA, the administration procedures of the RoO and organisational

requirements for implementing the RoO and constitutes an integral part of Annex 2 of the AfCFTA legal instrument.

Specifically, the Manual is intended to:

- simplify the AfCFTA RoO for practical application by state parties
- explain the basic origin criteria under the AfCFTA preferential trade regime
- provide guidance on the origin certification procedures
- provide guidance on the issuance of proof of origin
- provide guidance on origin verification
- provide guidelines on the registration of exporters
- provide guidance on the organisational requirements for the effective implementation of the AfCFTA RoO.

Among other things, it notes the need for the Designated Competent Authority to be organised so that there is a head office as well as regional or local offices responsible for the administration of the RoO. This would make it accessible to all businesses and ensure a relatively lower compliance cost of doing business in AfCFTA state parties.

Exporters applying for a CoO are expected to submit a request and be able to provide all appropriate documents, thus proving the originating status of the products concerned, as well as fulfilling the other requirements specified in the AfCFTA Agreement. In turn, the Designated Competent Authority shall take the necessary steps to verify the originating status of the products and fulfilment of the other requirements specified in Annex 2 of the AfCFTA Agreement.

3.4.2 Comparative analysis of Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification process with the AfCFTA RoO Manual

Following from the principles, objectives and guidelines of the RoO Manual, this section presents a comparative analysis of the AfCFTA registration and certification process against the provisions of the AfCFTA RoO Manual. The differences are discussed in response to the research question on how Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification process compares with the provisions of the AfCFTA RoO Manual.

Table 4 Ghana's rules of origin acquisition process in the context of the provisions of the AfCFTA manual

Provision of AfCFTA RoO Manual	Ghana's process	Comparison
A CoO shall be issued by the Designated Competent Authority of the exporting state party on application having been made in writing by the exporter or, under the exporter's responsibility, by the authorised representative.	Exporters are required to sign up to the ICUMS platform before applying for the CoO.	The Manual requires a simple written request for a CoO. The process instituted in Ghana requires signing up to the ICUMS platform. It is noted that access to the platform is restricted to persons authorised by the Customs Division, as the platform holds sensitive information. As such, some applicants either must engage the services of a custom clearing agent or complete the forms manually.
For a CoO to be issued, the exporter or the authorised representative shall fill out the CoO as an application form, as set out in Appendix I of the Annex.	Exporters are required to complete registration forms.	While the Manual requires exporters to fill out the CoO, the process in Ghana requires that the AfCFTA RoO Approval Committee consider and approve an exporter's application before referring it to the Designated Competent Authority to print and sign for issue.
The exporter applying for a CoO shall submit at the request of the Designated Competent Authority of the exporting state party where the CoO is issued all appropriate documents proving the originating status of the products concerned as well as the fulfilment of the other requirements specified in the Annex.	The registration and certification process requires the submission of supporting documents such as a certificate of incorporation, a manufacturing certificate, GSA and FDA certificates, commercial invoices on the consignment, etc.	Consistent with the provisions of the Manual, the process in Ghana requires the submission of supporting documents. For big and experienced businesses, this constitutes an increase in the cost of compliance while small and first-time exporters will be constrained by the cost of compliance.
The Designated Competent Authority shall take the necessary steps to verify originating status of and the fulfilment of the other requirements specified in the Annex.	An Inspection Team visits the premises of applicants to verify status where necessary.	The process in place in Ghana is consistent with the provision of the AfCFTA RoO Manual.
To facilitate the issuance and verification of CoOs, the Designated Competent Authority should establish offices in the main regions and towns within the state party. This will ensure that exporters wishing to register or those seeking authentication and verification of a CoO do not have to travel long distances for the service. This will assist in reducing the compliance costs in AfCFTA state parties.	The process is automated to make it accessible across the country. However, though the Competent Authority has a presence in all regions of the country, it does not have units mandated to facilitate the registration, verification, and issuance of CoOs.	Considering that access to the online platform is available only to authorised persons, the absence of dedicated units of the Competent Authority in regions leaves most exporters with no choice but to come to the headquarters, which increases their cost of compliance.

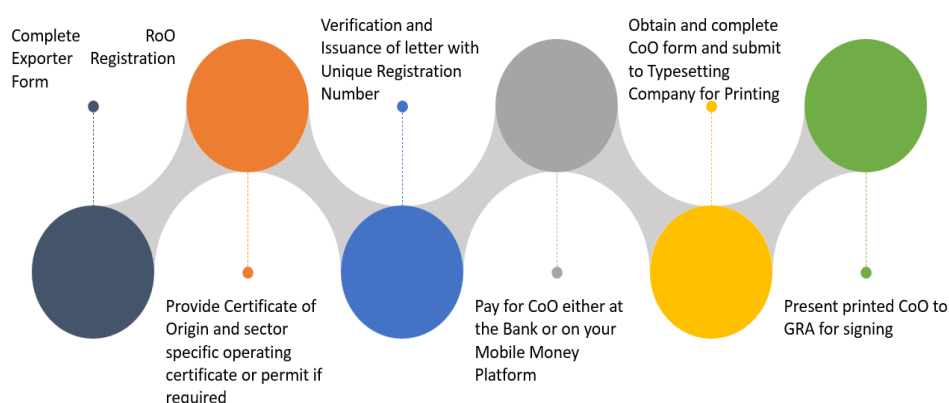
Source: Authors based on information from the AfCFTA RoO Manual and AfCFTA implementing institutions in Ghana

3.4.3 Brief review of Kenya's AfCFTA registration and certification process

Demonstrating its commitment to the implementation of the AfCFTA, Kenya alongside Ghana was the first to ratify and deposit its instruments of ratification of the AfCFTA. Kenya's Ministry of Trade & Industry in collaboration with other government agencies leads implementation of the AfCFTA in the country. The Kenya Revenue Authority is the Designated Competent Authority for AfCFTA CoOs. The RoO Section of the Authority is responsible for registering and issuing CoOs to exporters. Kenya exported its first consignment under the AfCFTA Agreement to Ghana on 5 October 2022 through the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) established by the AfCFTA Secretariat.

Information obtained from the official website of the Kenya Revenue Authority details the registration and certification process as follows:

Figure 2 Kenya's AfCFTA rules of origin acquisition process



Source: Kenya Revenue Authority and <https://infotradekenya.go.ke/>

4 Private sector experience

The study also administered a survey to businesses to solicit their views and experiences with the AfCFTA registration and certification process. Specifically, the survey sought to collect data from users on their level of awareness and understanding of the RoO, the accessibility of the RoO application form, their level of satisfaction with the services of institutions involved in implementation of the AfCFTA and the predictability of the registration and certification process.

The questionnaire was administered through the following private sector associations for onward completion by their respective members: the Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), GNCCI, the Federation of Associations of Ghanaian Exporters (FAGE) and the Ghana Institute of Freight Forwarders (GIFF).

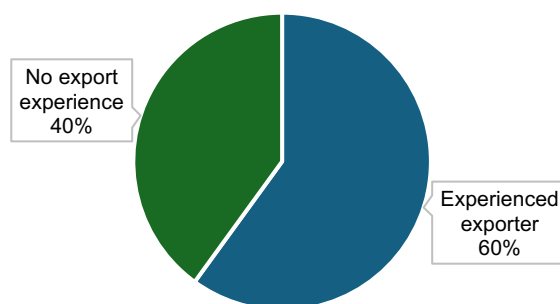
The results of a survey of thirty respondents on their experiences and views on the current AfCFTA Registration and Certification Process is presented below.

4.1 Profile of respondents

We used the Ghana Enterprise Agency's¹ (GEA) classification for MSMEs to select a sample representative of all firm categories, which classifies firms based on the number of permanent full-time employees as micro (1-5), small (6-30), medium (31-100), and large (greater than 100).

Of the 30 respondents interviewed, 6 (20%) indicated they were running medium-sized and large businesses, while 4 (13%) reported operating micro-sized enterprises. The majority, 17 (57%) respondents, fell into the small business category. Of all respondents, 18 (60%) reported having experience in exporting, while 12 (40%) indicated that they had no experience in exporting.

¹ See: <https://www.bcp.gov.gh/acc/consultation/docs/MSME%20Classification%20Regulations%202021.pdf>

Figure 3 Export experience

Source: Authors using information from surveys of private enterprises and AfCFTA implementing institutions in Ghana (as with the following figures, unless otherwise indicated)

4.2 Level of awareness and understanding of RoO in private sector

Information gathered from the interview session with key informants indicated that an extensive outreach programme had been undertaken to sensitise the private sector, particularly MSMEs, to the market access opportunities presented by the AfCFTA. The engagement, spanning all districts and regions of the country, was used to educate businesses on how to register and apply for the AfCFTA CoO to trade under the AfCFTA.

The NCO also noted that it had reached out to an estimated 3,000 stakeholders through its regional outreach on implementation of the AfCFTA. Within the framework of its Market Expansion Programme, it has assisted several businesses to complete the AfCFTA Registration Form as part of the process to enrol them in the programme. The Market Expansion Programme intends, among other things, to assess the export readiness of businesses with a view to providing firm-level facilitation support to take advantage of opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.

It was noted that there is also adequate information on the AfCFTA and the RoO application and certification process on the website of institutions involved in implementation of the AfCFTA.

However, 53% of respondents noted they had not participated in any sensitisation sessions on the AfCFTA RoO certification process (Figure 4). The same proportion indicated that they had little or no knowledge of the RoO certification process (Figure 5).

Figure 4 Participation in AfCFTA RoO sensitisation workshop

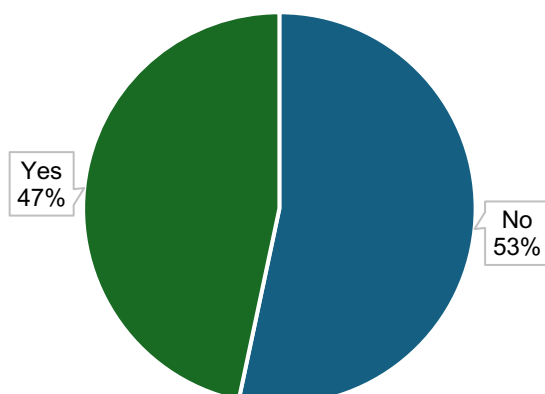
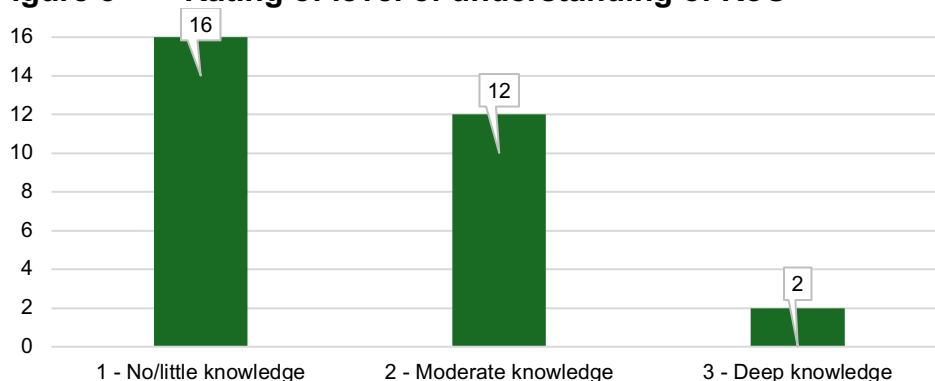


Figure 5 Rating of level of understanding of RoO



4.2.1 Ability to streamline production to be AfCFTA-compliant

The survey also sought to find out the extent to which businesses are able to streamline their production processes based on their knowledge of the AfCFTA RoO criteria to ensure their products are eligible to trade under the AfCFTA.

As Figure 6 shows, of the 30 respondents, 21 (70%) noted they were not in a position to streamline their current production processes to ensure compliance with the AfCFTA RoO criteria.

On their ability to classify their inputs using the appropriate HS code, only 25% noted they had the knowledge and capacity to be able to effectively do so during the registration and certification process (Figure 7).

Figure 6 Understanding of RoO criteria for AfCFTA production compliance

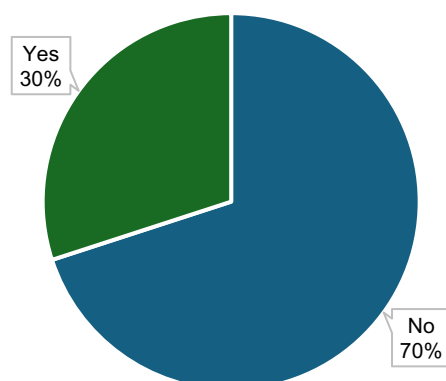
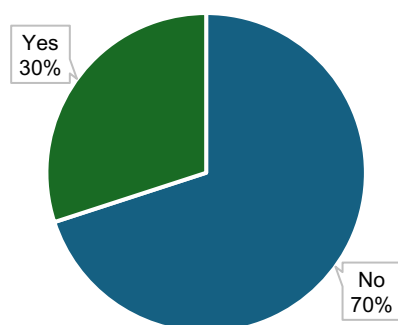
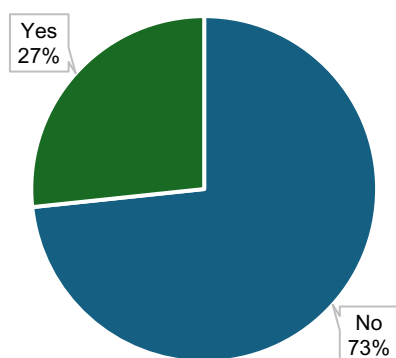


Figure 7 Knowledge on the classification of export under HS code



4.2.2 Requirement for AfCFTA registration

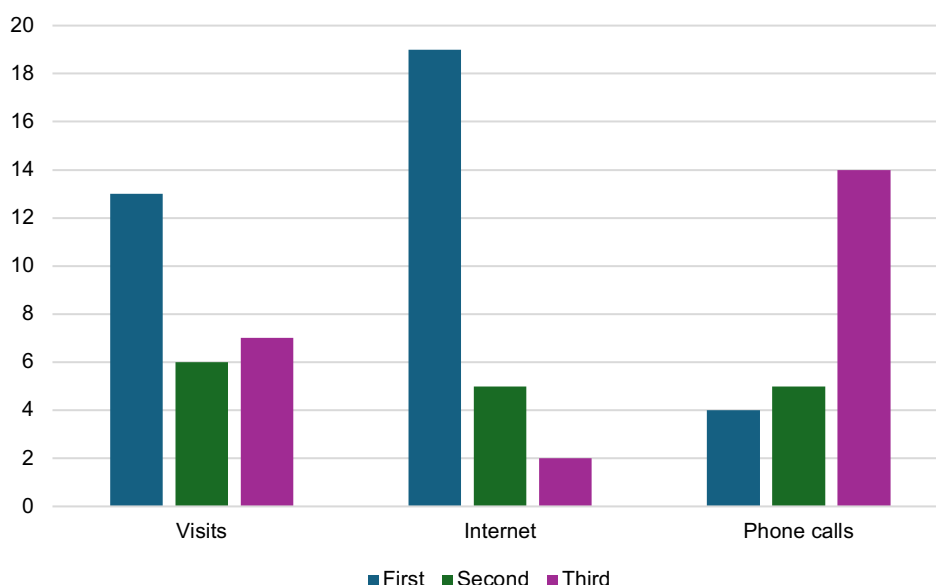
In the survey, 74% of respondents did not know the requirement to be able to register to trade under the AfCFTA. In addition, 22 respondents (73%) indicated that they had no knowledge of the process, while only 8 respondents (27%) noted they had knowledge of the process.

Figure 8 AfCFTA registration knowledge

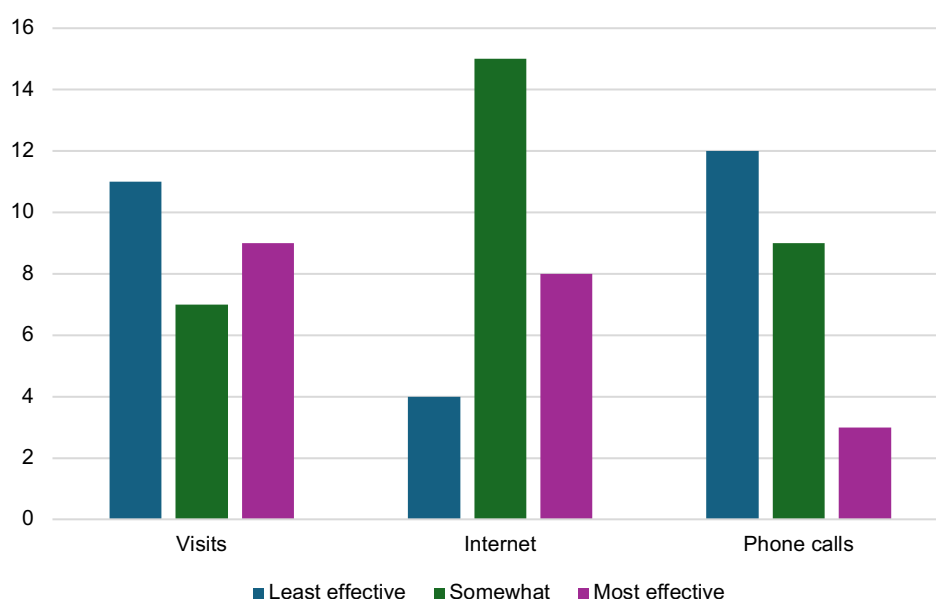
4.3 Accessibility of information on AfCFTA certification process and application forms

Key informants of institutions involved in implementation of the AfCFTA noted that information on the AfCFTA was available on their websites. They also noted that their areas had dedicated AfCFTA desks to answer phone call enquiries and deal with persons who walk into the office for assistance on AfCFTA-related issues.

The study therefore sought to find out from exporters their preferred means of sourcing information on the AfCFTA. The results of the survey showed that internet was the most preferred, with 63.3% of total respondents, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9 AfCFTA information sources

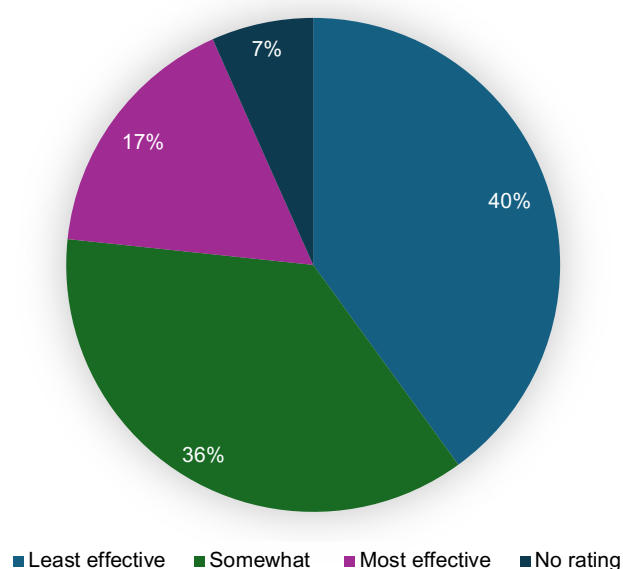
However, Figure 10, on the effectiveness of the means of obtaining information on the AfCFTA, shows office visits as the most effective for accessing information on the AfCFTA.

Figure 10 Effectiveness of AfCFTA sources

4.4 Experience with the online application process for the AfCFTA

The AfCFTA registration and certification process has been automated and made accessible on Ghana's single window platform, ICUMS.

As part of the study, respondents were asked to share their experience with the process. Only 16.6% found it to be highly effective. The rest noted the process as either somewhat effective or of limited effectiveness, as Figure 11 shows.

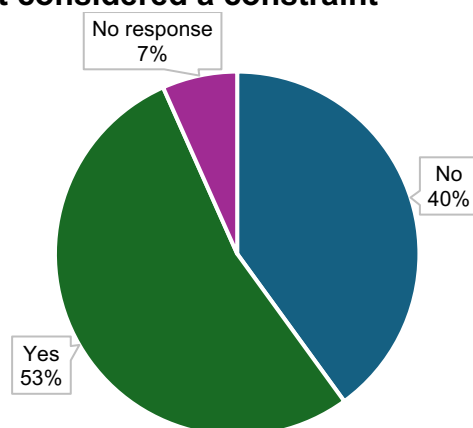
Figure 11 Online AfCFTA application experience

4.5 Cost of registration and certification

The registration and certification attract a fee, which applicants pay, to cover the costs associated with the factory visit to verify business and product information. The amount can be paid electronically using online banking services or a mobile money payment platform, which also attracts some transaction-related costs.

The results of the survey showed that 56% of respondents considered the amount a potential constraint for businesses, particularly micro and small businesses.

Figure 12 Cost considered a constraint

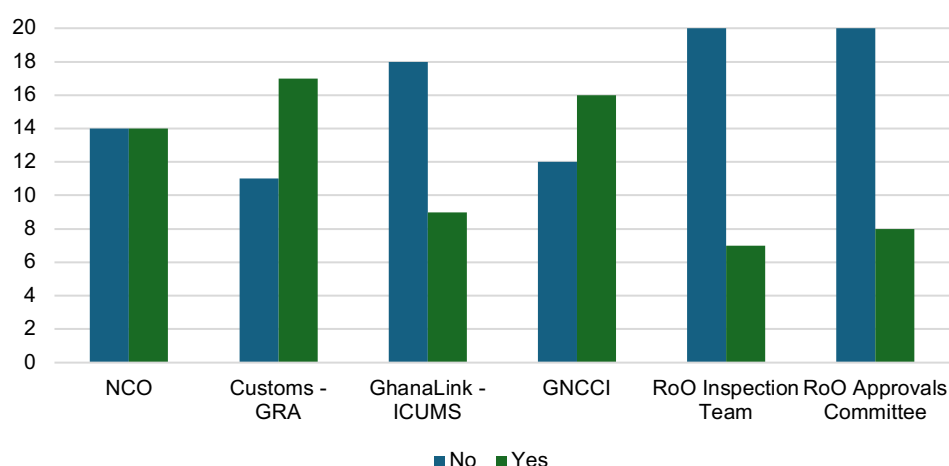
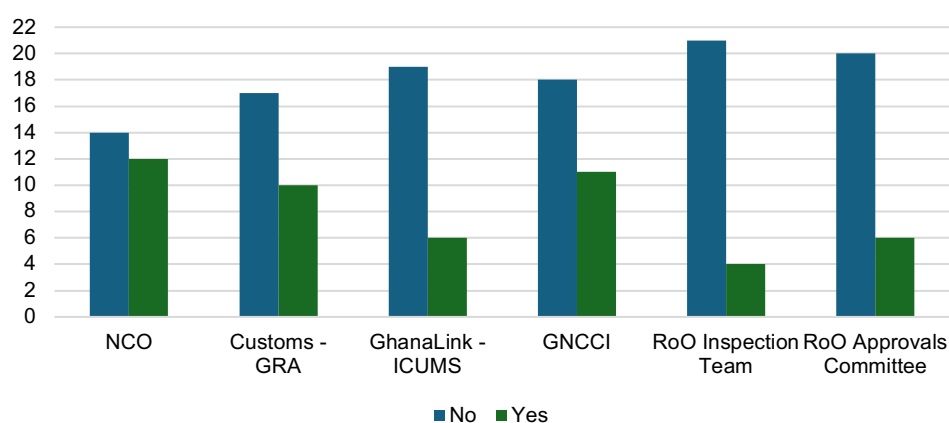


4.6 Capacity of RoO

As seen in Section 2, Ghana has put in place comprehensive structures to oversee the AfCFTA registration and certification process. Notable among these are the RoO Approval Committee, the AfCFTA Inspection Team, and the NCO.

The study sought to find out the level of knowledge of exporters on the role of these institutions and the degree to which they engage them for assistance in the registration and certification process. As Figure 13 shows, the role of customs was well known to most respondents, followed by GNCCI and the NCO. Little was known about the RoO Approvals Committee.

In terms of engagement of these institutions, the NCO was the most engaged institution, followed by GNCCI and the Customs Division (Figure 14).

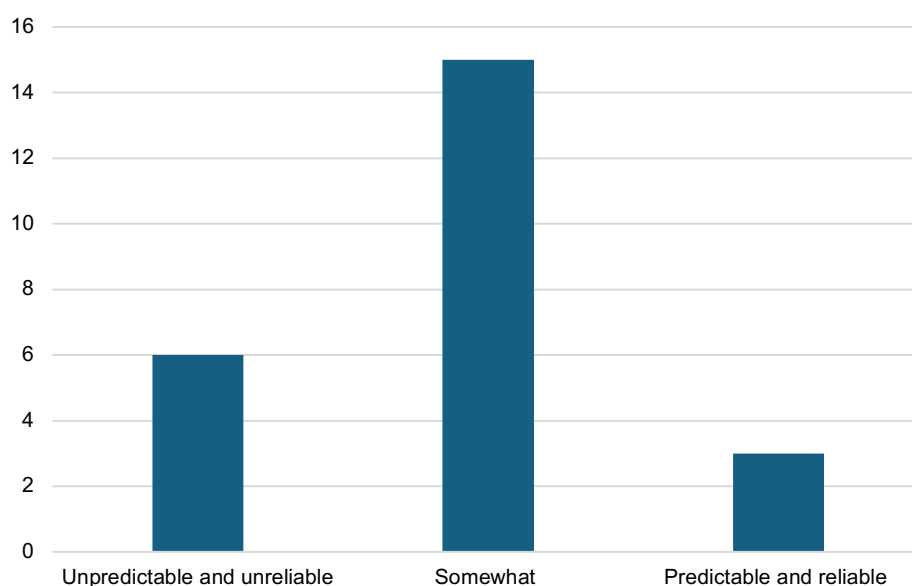
Figure 13 Knowledge of AfCFTA certification institutions**Figure 14 Engagement with institutions in the process of applying for AfCFTA CoO**

4.7 Predictability and timeliness of the process

Like with any other process, it is important for actors and players to be able to rely on the registration and certification process so they can plan their business activities. The survey therefore sought to solicit the views of the private sector on predictability and reliability.

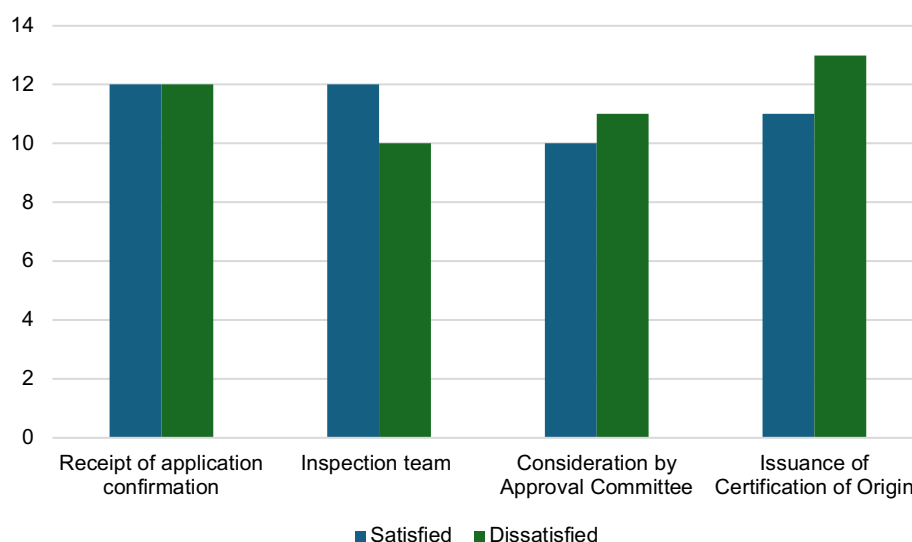
The results of the survey shows that only 12.5% of respondents consider the process to be predictable and reliable, with the remaining respondents describing it as unpredictable or somewhat unpredictable, as Figure 15 shows.

Figure 15 Rating of AfCFTA RoO certification process (predictability and reliability)



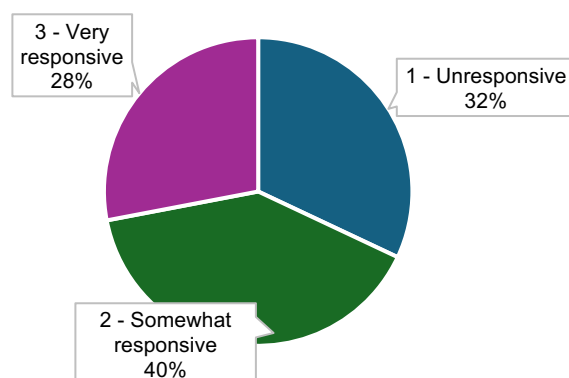
The study further sought to assess the timeliness of the various stages of the registration and certification process. The survey results show that respondents are satisfied with the timeliness of the inspection but not with the consideration and issuance of the CoO, as Figure 16 shows.

Figure 16 Rating of stages of AfCFTA RoO certification process



On respondents' level of satisfaction with updates and feedback on the AfCFTA application process, 28% noted these were very responsive while the remaining respondents shared the view that they were either unresponsive or somewhat responsive, as Figure 17 shows.

Figure 17 Rating of updates and feedback on the AfCFTA application process (satisfaction)

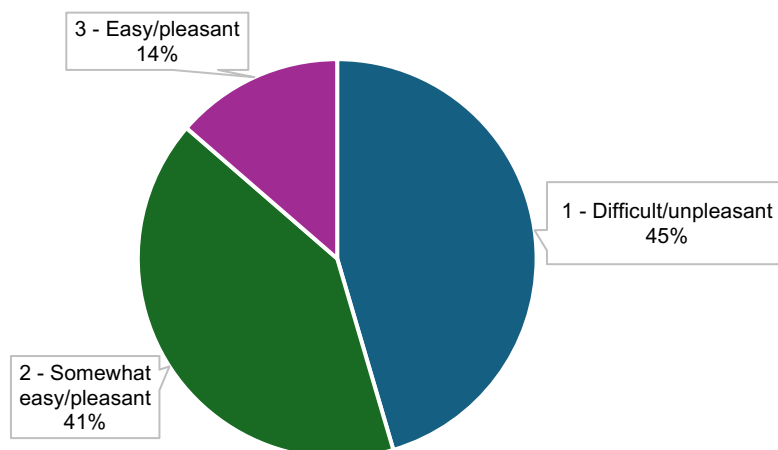


4.8 Acceptance in export destination country

The study also solicited from respondents the feedback they received from their buyers, who were expected to clear their consignment under the AfCFTA.

Only 14% of respondents noted that the feedback was good; the remaining respondents said it was unpleasant or somewhat pleasant, as Figure 18 shows.

Figure 18 Rating by buyers clearing goods under the AfCFTA



4.9 Case study: experience from the Guided Trade Initiative

On the sidelines of the 10th Meeting of the AfCFTA Council of Ministers responsible for trade, the AfCFTA launched the GTI to mark the commencement of trade under the Agreement.

The goal of the Initiative is to facilitate the matching of businesses and products for export and import between interested state parties in coordination with their national AfCFTA Implementation Committees. The stated objectives are as follows:

- to allow commercially meaningful trading under the AfCFTA
- to assess the operational, institutional, legal and trade policy environment under the AfCFTA
- to send an important positive message to African economic operators (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2022b).

As part of this study, a participant of the Initiative was interviewed to solicit their views and experiences with the AfCFTA registration and certification process within the framework of the GTI. Box 2 presents an account of the participant's profile, process, and experience of AfCFTA registration and certification under the GTI.

Box 2 Experience of RoO acquisition process to trade under the GTI

XXX Ltd is a registered agribusiness processing company that produces honey, tea, and dry fruits in Ghana for export. The business is run by a young woman entrepreneur driven by a passion to produce healthy and attractively packaged honey, fruits and tea for consumption, and the business contributes towards reducing the incidence of post-harvest losses of fruits. Following the launch of the GTI, XXX Ltd enrolled in a bid to take advantage of market access opportunities presented by the AfCFTA. It became the first company to partake in the Initiative after it was selected by a trading partner in Cameroon and successfully imported goods to Ghana under the AfCFTA. It also participated in the AfCFTA Market Entry Expedition to Kenya organised by the NCO within the framework of the GTI.

The respondent noted that enrolment in the Initiative came with facilitation support from the NCO along with other agencies, such as GEPA, the Customs Division and other regulatory institutions. Notably, these institutions sensitised and built the capacity of participating businesses on the AfCFTA and export processes and facilitated registration for the AfCFTA CoO and shipment. Recounting the experience, the respondent remarked, 'It was the first time, but we got guidance. We just had to provide the goods and the required information of the goods and allow them to issue the Certificate of Origin and to export the goods.'

She explained that, because the Initiative had been newly rolled out, there were some delays with customs clearance as a result of misinformation. As a result, the goods stayed at the port for about five days before they were cleared. Notwithstanding this, her second

experience, which involved exports from Ghana to Kenya, was better: people are better informed, and customs officers have been trained to provide a good service. XXX Ltd is excited about the opportunity to diversify its export destinations through participation in the Initiative. Among other things, the company has scaled up its production, which has led to the employment of more youth and women in rural communities of Ghana.

5 Social and climate interactions

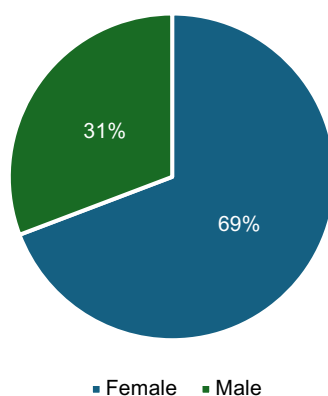
5.1 Gender and youth dimension

The study explored the gender dimension of the RoO certification process with a view to understanding inherent measures by institutions administering the RoO certification process to mainstream gender into the process. Moreover, the analysis on user experiences of the RoO certification process also considered the possible differences between men and women so as to be able to consider particular issues of interest for effective gender mainstreaming in the certification process.

The key informants of AfCFTA implementing institutions said that the involvement of women-led businesses in the sensitisation process constituted an integral part of the AfCFTA implementation process. In addition, most institutions involved in the implementation of the AfCFTA have established gender desks on the AfCFTA and have been sensitised on mainstreaming gender into the implementation of its programmes. A considerable number of women-led businesses also participated in a regional sensitisation workshop on the AfCFTA while the NCO, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, has undertaken an AfCFTA Support Programme targeted primarily at women and youth.

The results of the survey showed that 67% of respondent businesses were owned by women while 30% were headed by men (4% were owned by youth).

Figure 19 Ownership of business



5.2 Climate change

Climate change and its effects have become a significant threat to human security in recent years. It is regarded as a universal issue, and the major security risk of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2009). Considering this, we also interacted with stakeholders to find out if they had capabilities in dealing with processing RoO requirements for relatively climate-friendly products, like honey and crafts. Responses revealed that, as for all other products, they had in place the required capabilities to deal with RoO certification for climate-friendly products. Nonetheless, our analysis of the responses of producers of these products showed they faced similar challenges to other enterprises regarding RoO processes. More specifically, we uncovered that none of them:

- had participated in any AfCFTA RoO sensitisation workshops
- understood how to classify exports under the HS code
- knew the requirements to complete the AfCFTA registration
- had been able to complete and submit AfCFTA registration on the ICUMS platform.

What is more, two-thirds of enterprises did not understand the RoO criteria so well that they could streamline their production processes to be AfCFTA RoO-compliant, and a similar proportion reported that the cost of processing was a constraint to their export prospects or activity.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Following a review of the relevant literature and analysis of the data collected, this section presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The outline is guided primarily by the objectives of the study and also covers other observations that have significant relevance with regard to boosting Ghana's trade with Africa.

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 Assessment of Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification process

Ghana's AfCFTA registration and certification process is consistent with guidelines of the AfCFTA RoO Manual but contains more requirements, making it relatively complex.

Following a review of the WCO's Guidelines on RoO and the AfCFTA RoO Manual, the study compared the AfCFTA registration and certification process in Ghana with the AfCFTA RoO Manual's main provisions: registration of exporters, application for the CoO, provision and verification of application documents and ease of access to reduce the cost of compliance.

Generally, Ghana's process, involving registration of exporters, a factory visits and inspection, determination of origin and issuance of the certificate reflects the steps required by the AfCFTA Agreement, particularly Annex 2 on RoO and its accompanying implementation manual. The process follows a systematic layout under a clearly defined national structure with a coordination office. In addition, Ghana has automated and integrated the registration and certification process into its ICUMS to give meaning to its single window and paperless port system. Notable strengths of the process include:

- existence of a structured and coordinated set-up for AfCFTA implementation
- automation of the registration and certification process
- effective integration of effective verification systems in the determination of origin

- institution and implementation of the flagship Market Expansion Programme to support and facilitate the private sector to register and secure a CoO to trade under the AfCFTA.

However, some notable differences also existed, which led to the study's conclusion that Ghana's process is relatively complex, with a higher cost of compliance and an increased risk of rent-seeking behaviours. Some of these differences are discussed below.

Restriction of online AfCFTA registration and certification portal to authorised persons

Beyond the simple requirement of the AfCFTA Manual for exporters to write to register as AfCFTA exporters, Ghana has automated the process and integrated it into its single window platform, ICUMS. While this is available for all businesses, its presence on the single window platform, which has a component on government revenue, has made it necessary to restrict access to authorised persons only. Applicants on the platform are required to obtain an authorisation code before they are able to continue with the registration process. As a result, according to the leadership of a business association, most of its members engage certified customs agents for the purposes of registering for AfCFTA exports.

In addition, an analysis of the data showed that this issue was more acute for enterprises with no exporting experience. Survey responses revealed that 92% of non-exporting enterprises versus 72% of exporters were unable to complete and submit AfCFTA registration on the ICUMS platform.

A similar dichotomy was found for ability to access online registration on ICUMS across size categories of enterprises. Micro (75%) and small (83%) enterprises compared unfavourably with large (50%) ones in terms of ability to register and submit AfCFTA registration on the ICUMS platform.

Again, a lot more exporters have had to resort to the manual application process under the Market Expansion Programme of the NCO. This flagship programme of MoTI through the NCO has contributed significantly to facilitating businesses registration, certification and exporting to African countries.

The NCO and partners identify businesses and assess their readiness to export under the AfCFTA. The outcome of this firm-level assessment gives rise to the provision of tailor-made capacity-building and facilitation support for businesses, including small and women-led businesses. This is intended to position them to be able to take advantage of market access opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.

Generally long and complex export procedures

On application for a CoO, the Manual requires exporters to complete a section of the CoO as an application form for consideration by the Competent Authority, which is mandated to verify and request additional supporting documents where necessary to prove origin. Though the GRA Customs Division is the designated Competent Authority, Ghana has established a national structure involving the AfCFTA National AfCFTA Approval Committee and Inspection Team in the AfCFTA certification process.

The Approval Committee chaired by MoTI with representation from the GRA Customs Division, and GNCCI is charged with overseeing the AfCFTA registration and certification process in Ghana. Upon successful registration, the Inspection Team schedules a visit to the exporter to validate the composition of the product and the production processes, as well as the supporting documents and presents a report to the Approvals Committee for consideration. The Committee has to approve the product as eligible before Customs can print and issue the CoO.

Compared with the Manual, and with the process in Kenya, where the RoO office basically oversees the registration for first-time exporters and verifies and determines exporters' completed CoOs upon payment then prints and issues them, there are four institutions involved in the process in Ghana. Given that the process must precede compliance with all existing statutory requirements and export procedures, the entire process is relatively long and complex involving four primary institutions excluding permit- and certificate-issuing institutions.

Centralisation of the process

To facilitate the issuance and verification of CoOs, the AfCFTA RoO Manual recommends that the Designated Competent Authority establish offices in the main regions and towns within the state party.

This is expected to ensure that exporters wishing to register with the Designated Competent Authority or those seeking authentication and verification of their CoO do not have to travel long distances for the service, thereby reducing the compliance costs associated with trading under the AfCFTA.

In Ghana, the study found, issuance and verification of the CoO is available only at the headquarters of the Competent Authority. Though there are plans to establish regional points, the realisation of this is dependent on the ability of the Authority to build the capacity of regional personnel and also to provide specialised equipment, such as printers, to ensure conformity with the required standard.

The key informants of the Competent Authority said that it had developed a training curriculum on administration of the AfCFTA RoO for its training school, with a series of training for staff scheduled.

6.1.2 User experiences with the AfCFTA registration and certification process

Results on user experiences with the AfCFTA registration and certification process varied among respondents depending on their size and whether they were first-time exporters or not.

Generally, the study observed the following:

Fairly good knowledge of market access opportunities presented by the AfCFTA but little or no understanding of the RoO and how to ensure product eligibility

In spite of businesses having a good understanding of the AfCFTA and its attendant benefits, most had little or no knowledge of the AfCFTA RoO criteria and how these determined the eligibility or otherwise of their product.

As is evident from the survey, 70% of respondents did not know how to streamline their production process to ensure product eligibility to trade under the AfCFTA.

This was corroborated by focused discussions with key informants, who said that some businesses were unable to meet the RoO criteria to be able to trade their goods under the AfCFTA.

A cumbersome and long registration process is often not completed, particularly by MSMEs and first-time exporters

Most respondents described their experience with the AfCFTA registration and certification process as cumbersome and long. Most MSMEs in particular have not met all the required statutory requirements to export, because they find it difficult to complete the process. First-time exporters face similar challenges.

For most successful online submissions, the next steps are not timely or predictable

For those applicants who are able to complete the process online, the next steps of inspection and issuance of the CoO are currently not timely. This makes the process difficult to predict, according to 89% of respondents of the study.

6.1.3 Different approaches and outcomes for two different firms

Drawing conclusions on the above is difficult, as the views of respondents vary significantly. The study therefore presents the experiences of two different businesses with two different approaches. Firm A followed the stipulated approach for AfCFTA registration and certification while Firm B signed up for the GTI.

More specifically, following widespread sensitisation, Firm A, a medium-scale manufacturing producer and exporter, developed a

strategy to position it to take advantage of the estimated \$1.2 billion market created by the AfCFTA. To do this, it engaged the institutions involved in the AfCFTA registration and certification process and was directed to complete the online forms. It was assisted by these institutions to have its export readiness assessed and to complete its online registration.

Following completion, it took Firm A about eight months to reach the next stage of inspection; other subsidiaries are yet to be inspected. In sharing its experience, Firm A described the AfCFTA registration and certification process as lengthy with little and inconsistent feedback. Firm A concluded by noting that it was still await feedback on the status of the registration.

Firm B is a small-scale business producing products wholly obtained in Ghana for export. With years of experience exporting across the continent, Firm B enjoys the support of partners to expand operations and participate in the market access opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.

Following announcement of the GTI, Firm B enrolled in the Initiative and was introduced to the national AfCFTA implementing institutions to have its registration and certification facilitated. Recounting the experience, Firm B noted that all it took was to submit the required information.

This firm was assisted to complete the forms manually and, in a matter of days, registration was complete, and the CoO was issued. The firm expressed excitement with the process and described it as smooth.

Case study findings

- Firm A followed the institutionalised process, which, compared with the AfCFTA Manual, is complex.
- Firm B followed the process for certification adopted by the GTI.
- Relative to Firm B, registration took Firm A longer and the CoO had still not been issued at the time of the study.
- The experience with the process for Firm A was one of frustration with little and inconsistent feedback on the status of the registration and application. For Firm B, the experience was smooth.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended for consideration by stakeholders involved in AfCFTA registration and certification in Ghana:

Simplify the AfCFTA registration and certification process

Simplification of the current AfCFTA registration and certification process in Ghana is recommended on two fronts: the process and the institutions involved in it.

The entire process of export registration and the stages of AfCFTA registration and RoO certification should be comprehensively reviewed, harmonised, and integrated to reduce the associated costs and time needed for compliance, particularly for small businesses and first-time exporters.

The number of institutions involved in the process should be reviewed and reduced where possible. For instance, the entire process could be automated, with institutions having access to information about a business without having to ask them to produce it all over again.

As part of this simplification, it is recommended that any technological solution implemented should ensure access to data and documents related to a product for any RoO application process. This will enable determination of eligibility for other RoO criteria, reducing the cost and time required for businesses to apply for a CoO under all preferential trade agreements signed by Ghana.

Adopt and promote AfCFTA RoO self-certification options

Section 101 (ii) of the AfCFTA RoO Manual notes that preferential treatment can be granted to goods on provision of Origin Declaration.

According to the Manual, Origin Declaration is an appropriate statement as to the origin of the goods, in connection with their exportation by the manufacturer, producer, supplier, exporter or other competent person, on the commercial invoice or any other document relating to the goods.

In addition, Article 8 of Annex 2 of the AfCFTA Agreement notes that raw materials or semi-finished goods originating in any of the State Parties and undergoing working or processing in another State Party shall be deemed to have originated in the State Party where the final processing or manufacturing takes place. This requires evidence of the working or processing to be given by the supplier or producer's declaration, in the State Party in which the materials are exported.

It is recommended that this method of proving origin be adopted and promoted in Ghana. This can be targeted at approved exporters² and micro and small-scale exporters for any consignment containing originating products whose total value does not exceed \$5,000, in accordance with the provisions of the Manual. Moreover, final products produced in Ghana using raw materials or semi-finished

² Exporters authorised by a Designated Competent Authority for the purpose of Making Out Origin Declarations for the purpose of exporting goods under the AfCFTA.

goods as inputs from AfCFTA state parties can also receive a Ghanaian CoO.

It is also recommended that a targeted training programme be designed and rolled out to enable businesses to fully use the options as an alternative to the CoO process in Ghana.

Decentralise the AfCFTA registration and certification process

In accordance with the provisions of the AfCFTA RoO Manual, it is recommended that units of the Competent Authority dedicated to determining origin and issuance of the CoO be created in all regions of Ghana.

In addition, the institutional capacity of regional offices of key AfCFTA implementing institutions should be strengthened and resourced to be able to complement efforts by the Competent Authority in the regions.

Develop and implement a support programme to enable businesses to meet the AfCFTA RoO criteria

There is a need to design and implement a comprehensive programme that deepens the understanding of businesses on the AfCFTA RoO criteria, and also to provide access to initiatives that address the varied firm-level constraints to product eligibility to trade under the AfCFTA.

It is therefore recommended that stakeholders, particularly private sector business groups and relevant public sector stakeholders, with support from development partners, initiate the process to ensure businesses are supported to be able to meet the AfCFTA RoO criteria and take advantage of the Agreement.

Provide hands-on training for exporters on AfCFTA registration, CoO application and completion of the Origin Declaration and Supplier or Producer Declaration

AfCFTA-related training for exporters needs to be oriented to be practical, with hands-on practice sessions to equip exporters with the skillset they need to be able to effectively engage AfCFTA implementing institutions and complete the registration and certification process.

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Appendix 1 Exporter registration form

Exporter Registration FormDoc No Certificate* AfCFTA Office* **Header Detail**Exporter TIN* Exporter Name* Postal Address Address (Location) Ghana Post Digital Address Current Location and Address ☐ Same as Address (Location)District/Region* Phone/Mobile* Email Address* Website Business Category* Description of Business* **Authorized Company Representative**First Name* Surname* Other Name(s) Designation* **Item List**

No.	HS Code*	Item Description*
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

*If more items please attach list as appendix 1***eDocument List**

No.	Attached Document Name
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>

If more items please attach list as appendix 2

Remarks*