

EVALUATING AND BRIDGING THE AfCFTA KNOWLEDGE GAP

Addressing SVAI's goal of increasing
Shared Values awareness
Through the AfCFTA

5 August, 2021



**SHARED
VALUE**
AFRICA INITIATIVE

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BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Shared Value Africa Initiative (SVAI) is a pan-African organisation and is a member of the global Shared Value Initiative business network. SVAI's goal as an organisation is to assist and collaborate with African organisations, such as SMEs and entrepreneurs, to build successful and sustainable economies through Shared Value that emphasises creating Profit with Purpose.¹ SVAI claims that by adopting a Shared Value business model, innovative African organisations will be able to find growth opportunities in addressing environmental and social challenges that ultimately lead to Africans creating the Africa they want.

SVAI was founded in 2018 with the intent to become Africa's most impactful Shared Value business network. Since then, SVAI has connected with 1200 organisations in eleven countries. Through partnerships with a variety of stakeholder groups and a series of webinars and forums, SVAI has begun to break down some of the barriers holding Africans back and inspire wide-spread collaboration in order for Africa to reach its full potential.

SVAI has recognised that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of the avenues through which the African continent may be able to unify in the future. The AfCFTA will reduce tariffs and standardise trading regulations within the African continent, making it easier to trade across borders. SVAI believes that they can motivate more businesses to adopt the Shared Value principles through the lens of AfCFTA. Therefore, SVAI is currently spreading awareness on AfCFTA, targeting SMEs and entrepreneurs who are ready and willing to engage in cross-border trade. SVAI is partnering with the University of Johannesburg to develop an application that will contain relevant information for SMEs and entrepreneurs on cross border trade as well. SVAI will be holding a virtual forum on AfCFTA and cross-border trade for SMEs and entrepreneurs in August 2021.

At the beginning of July 2021, the diiVe team, AffreeTrade, was asked to conduct research in the form of interviews and surveys on SMEs and entrepreneurial networks in southern Africa to better understand the gap in knowledge around the AfCFTA. Once the knowledge gap and the challenges these businesses are currently having were better understood, the AffreeTrade team was to then provide recommendations for education, connecting and sharing information with these businesses for them to better understand and participate in the AfCFTA.

SVAI and AffreeTrade stayed in regular contact throughout the completion of the project, adopting an agile approach to any adaptations that occurred to make sure that the desired outcomes were achieved in an efficient and effective manner.

¹ Shared Value Africa Initiative. "Who Is Shared Value Africa Initiative." Accessed August 4, 2021. <https://svai.africa/about/>.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the start of official trading under the AfCFTA on the 1st of January, 2021 was a huge milestone towards creating the largest free trade area in the world, many challenges to continent-wide ratification and education on its policies and potential benefits still remain. AffreeTrade has been tasked with focusing on the knowledge-gap and challenges that SMEs in southern Africa face when it comes to understanding and participating in the AfCFTA, and to then make recommendations on the best practices to bridge this gap. Project work for the client began on the 6th of July, 2021 and will conclude on the 5th of August, 2021.

1.1 Findings and Recommendations Summary

In order to gauge AfCFTA awareness, AffreeTrade conducted a survey and series of interviews with several stakeholders. The findings suggested entrepreneurs had a basic understanding about AfCFTA, but unfortunately, entrepreneurs did not know how AfCFTA could impact them individually and their businesses. However, entrepreneurs reported that they were willing to learn more about the AfCFTA if it could benefit their business during its implementation. Moreover, these entrepreneurs continued to emphasise the lack of accessibility to AfCFTA information, claiming that it is not easily accessible.

After the initial research phase, AffreeTrade completed a brainstorming session to find possible solutions that may bridge the AfCFTA knowledge gap. In doing so, the AffreeTrade team came up with various graphic prototypes for social media posts and a website prototype since the initial survey responses highlighted that the entrepreneurs are already engaged on social media sites and have fair enough knowledge on navigating the internet. AffreeTrade then sent out a second survey and held a second round of interviews in order to receive feedback from stakeholders on the various prototypes. The feedback from the prototype testing assisted the AffreeTrade team in finalising their recommendations to bridge the AfCFTA knowledge gap.

The AffreeTrade ended up coming with a few attainable recommendations to have SVAI achieve their goal of increasing accessibility to AfCFTA information by having a larger online presence and creating and designing content tailored for each target region and audience. AffreeTrade believes spreading AfCFTA awareness can be done easily on platforms that the entrepreneurs are already familiar with, like Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Facebook. It is also recommended that there should be a webpage that only has AfCFTA content to provide more detailed data. AffreeTrade also developed two future directions that SVAI may want to take as they continue to spread awareness about Shared Value. The AffreeTrade team hopes that these recommendations will spread knowledge of AfCFTA in theory and practice to ensure that entrepreneurs leverage the opportunities brought by this agreement.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A strong project framework can be the key to success in any setting. In this section of the report AffreeTrade will outline its project methodology and research tactics in order for the client to gain a full understanding of the process for collecting data. The data collection process puts a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement in order to find out as much as possible about entrepreneurs' thoughts and concerns regarding the AfCFTA.

2.1 Theory U

AffreeTrade's project structure is based on a design created by professor Otto Sharmer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) known as Theory U. It is a change management methodology that is structured around a process of ideation intended to dissociate users from their biases and habitual ways of thinking in order to design solutions that are geared toward meeting the needs of a larger group. This process involves five key phases which are:

- Co-Initiating: Build a common purpose by listening to others in order to view the challenge at hand beyond your personal lens
- Co-Sensing: Limit your own personal beliefs and deeply listen to the whole system to locate the areas with the most potential
- Co-Presencing: Connect with each individual's sense of purpose to construct an ideal vision for the future
- Co-Creating: Once a vision has been formed and you know where you're headed, come up with tangible solutions on how to instill change and prosperity to meet these newly realised needs
- Co-Evolving: Embody the new change that you have envisioned and engage with stakeholders to commit to collective actions

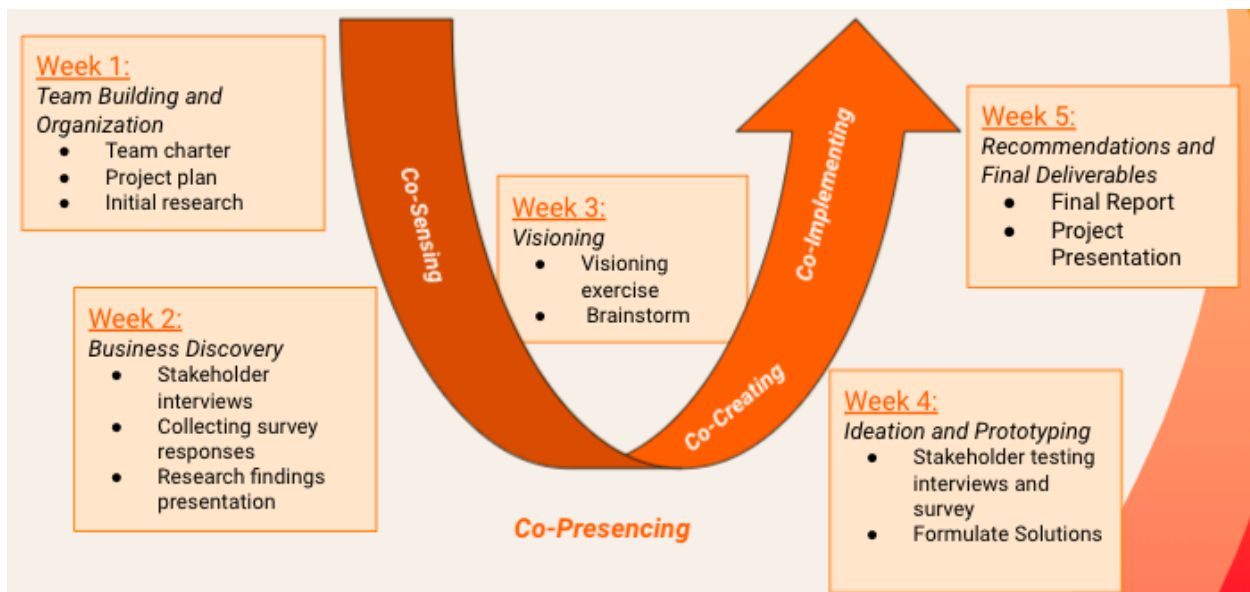


Figure 1: U-Theory Flowchart

2.2 Conduct current state assessment

Before the AffreeTrade team could begin engaging with key stakeholders, it was important to do desk-based research on the client, entrepreneurship in Africa, and the AfCFTA to gain a full understanding of the current challenges and potential obstacles these parties are facing. Each team member was tasked with a different area of discovery, and, once finished, the AffreeTrade team came together to conduct a SWOT analysis of the AfCFTA. An overview of the current state assessment and the SWOT analysis can be found in this section. Contextualising the project that AffreeTrade would be working on would greatly help in surveying and interviewing stakeholders by identifying the crucial questions to ask.

2.2.1 Contextual information and fundamental statistics

Africa is the youngest and fastest urbanising continent in the world at the moment with the largest increasing population, averaging at 24 million new people living in its cities between the years of 2015 to 2045, as well as a potential GDP of over \$3 trillion.² Therefore, it is no surprise that the scale and potential of African economies pose an enormous opportunity which can be further maximised. For example, only approximately 16% of merchandising in the continent is currently through Intra-African trade.³ Therefore, if communities and agreements like SADC and AfCFTA can sustain and accelerate structural reform successfully in the coming years, the market will consist of over a billion consumers, and potentially emulate and rival current leading economies like those of China and India. Moreover, proper implementation can only come with proper education throughout all levels of the economy. Therefore, AffreeTrade created two rounds of surveys and interviews with entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial accelerators and subject matter experts, to better gauge the extent of the knowledge gap that exists among SMEs, as well as to test potential solutions.

2.2.2 AfCFTA SWOT Analysis

The AffreeTrade team decided to do a SWOT analysis of AfCFTA to better understand the internal and external factors of the agreement and what potential impact it will have on SMEs (Figure 2). The team mainly focused on the opportunities that SMEs can leverage, and the threats that are likely to affect them. The SWOT chart, which can be found below, assisted in providing insights for the recommendations presented later in this report.

² Coleman, Colin. "This Region Will Be Worth \$5.6 Trillion within 5 Years - but Only If It Accelerates Its Policy Reforms." World Economic Forum, February 11, 2020.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/02/africa-global-growth-economics-worldwide-gdp/>.

³ Subban, Baker McKenzie-Virussha. "Africa: An Overview and Update of Trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement." Lexology, July 4, 2021.

<https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=dfd0456b-41fc-4a8c-9592-0d7c46e0bb86>.

AfCFTA SWOT ANALYSIS	
<p><u>STRENGTHS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Most entrepreneurs seem to have a positive view of free trade in Africa and few concerns about it · 54/55 African countries have signed the agreement and plan on rolling back trade barriers 	<p><u>WEAKNESSES</u></p> <p>Non-tariff barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Language Barriers · Transportation costs · Different currencies · Different regulations and quality standards · Lack of support <p>Tariff barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Taxes · Tariffs, including import duty
<p><u>OPPORTUNITIES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Adoption of new (appropriate) technology · The development of new, efficient infrastructure without the drag of inefficient legacy systems · Entrepreneurs seem ready to engage in cross-border trade · Increase employment · Increase investment opportunities 	<p><u>THREATS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Choice of technology <p>Big knowledge gap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · People don't know what AfCFTA is · People don't know how/whether the AfCFTA applies to them (SMEs) · Countries that have weak infrastructure · Conflicts in/between countries

Figure 2: AfCFTA SWOT Analysis Chart

2.3 Design and conduct an AfCFTA awareness survey

The next step in the research discovery process was to gauge SME awareness and perceptions of the AfCFTA. To do this, AffreeTrade determined that creating a survey via google form would be a valuable way of collecting information. A mass email was sent to the list of contacts the client provided the team with in order to accumulate as many responses and insights as possible. This section of the report takes an in depth look at how the survey was constructed and what the results displayed.

2.3.1 Discovery Findings survey design

In its initial assessment of the situation, AffreeTrade determined that it would be necessary to conduct needfinding to better understand the knowledge gap that was experienced by small-business entrepreneurs in Africa about the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

To this end, the team designed a survey, distributed as a google form, that was intended to be short, easy, and able to extract crucial data from our stakeholders. This data would then be used to arrive at critical insights that would then inform the development of solutions and recommendations going forward.

Below is a copy of the questions from the Google Form used to gather information from the respondents:

Survey Questions

1. Email
2. Name of business
3. What service/product do you provide?
4. Where is your business located?
5. How much do you know about the African Continental Free Trade Agreement?
(on a scale of 1 to 5)
6. What do you know about the AfCFTA?
7. How easy is it for you to find information about AfCFTA? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
8. If it's easy, where do you find this information?
9. How much do you think the AfCFTA could benefit your business? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
10. How do you think it can benefit your business?
11. How worried are you that the AfCFTA could negatively impact your business? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
12. What worries you?
13. How prepared (in terms of skills and knowledge) are you to engage in trade with other African countries? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
14. Please elaborate on your answer?
15. If all existing trade barriers were abolished, how likely would you be to engage in trade with other African countries? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
16. Please elaborate on your answer?
17. How supported do you feel by your current network of businesses? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
18. Why do you feel this way?
19. Have you used the existing AfCFTA online application
20. If yes, how useful did you find it?
21. How likely would your organisation use an application that provides information about free trade in Africa? (on a scale of 1 to 5)
22. How do you think this application can be helpful to you?
23. Is there anything else you would like to let us know?

Figure 3: Discovery Findings Survey Questions

After ascertaining the location and industry of the survey respondent, the form had short-answer questions that included a scale from one to five, to gauge the degree of specificity of the answer. These scales made it easier to present the data graphically. In addition to this, most questions also included free space for respondents to express their ideas to whatever extent they felt comfortable.

2.3.2 Discovery Findings survey results

The Discovery Findings survey results ultimately show that, while many respondents know little to none about the African Continental Free Trade Area, there is great optimism and willingness to engage in cross-border trade through the initiative. The first question asked the respondents how much they knew about AfCFTA on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being nothing and 5 being a lot. More than 70% of respondents or a total of 62 out of 85 gave their knowledge of AfCFTA a 3 or

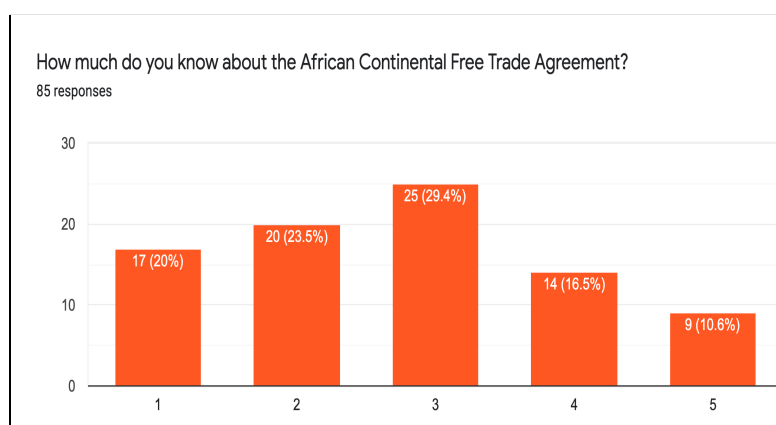


Figure 4: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 1

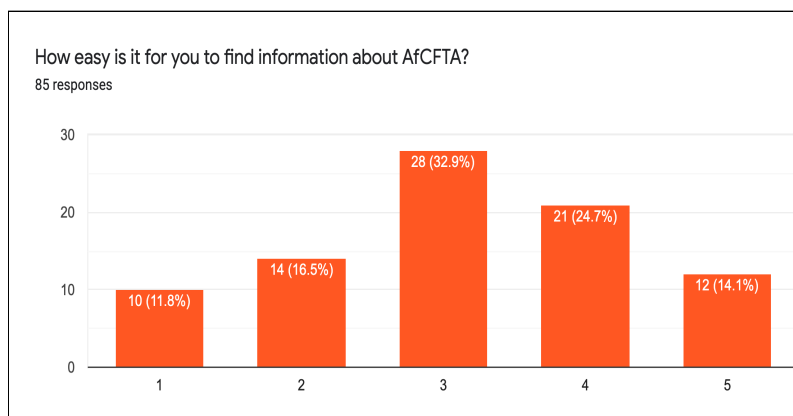


Figure 5: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 2

lower (Figure 4). This shows that only a small number of respondents could confidently say that they had a substantial amount of knowledge on the AfCFTA. In addition to this, the survey revealed that those 62 respondents knew nothing about the AfCFTA and, for those who did possess knowledge on it, most only knew about the goals and basic foundations of the free trade area but knew little about how exactly it would impact them.

The second question asked about the accessibility and ease of accessing information about the AfCFTA on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being easy and 5 being difficult. Approximately 72% of respondents said that AfCFTA is a 3 or higher when it comes to how difficult or easy it is to access information on the initiative (Figure 5). This indicates that more than two-thirds of the respondents find it hard to access information about the AfCFTA, whether

that be through online or physical platforms. The results of the first survey question may be correlated with the results of the second question as it shows that respondents both know very little about the AfCFTA and also find it difficult to access information on the initiative. It can be inferred that this low level of knowledge can be attributed to the inaccessibility and difficulty of finding AfCFTA information.

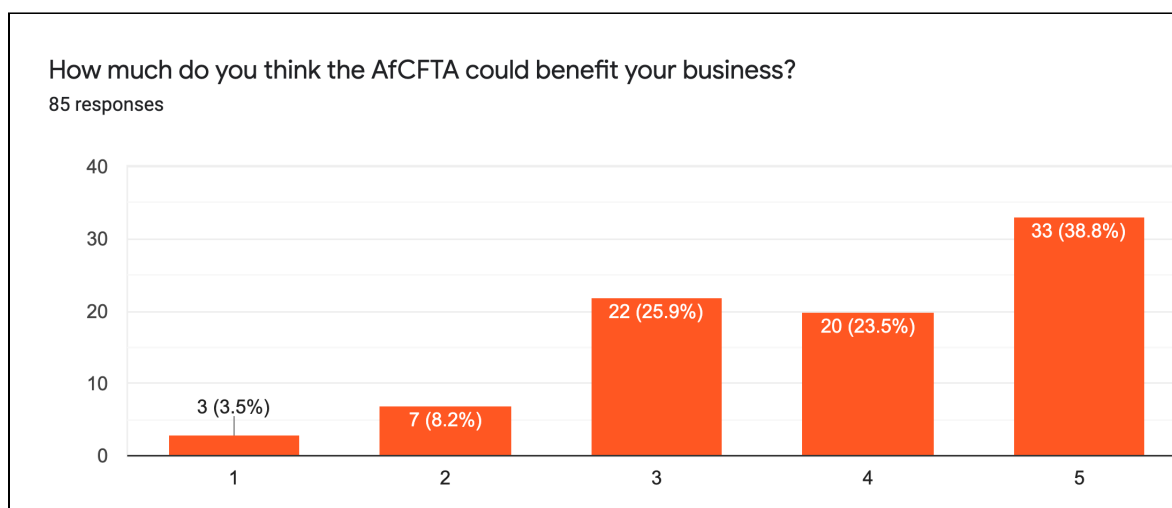


Figure 6: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 3

However, despite this low level of knowledge, the entrepreneurs were generally optimistic on the impacts of the initiatives on their businesses. The next two questions on the survey attempt to gauge how entrepreneurs perceive the AfCFTA. In asking about the perceived benefits of AfCFTA on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 as having no benefit at all and 5 as incredibly beneficial, 60% of respondents gave the question a 4 or 5 which indicates that they believe the trade area will serve to benefit them for the most part (Figure 6). On the other hand, the survey question gauging how worried respondents are about the initiative shows that more than 55% of respondents were not worried in the least about AfCFTA negatively impacting their businesses (Figure 7).

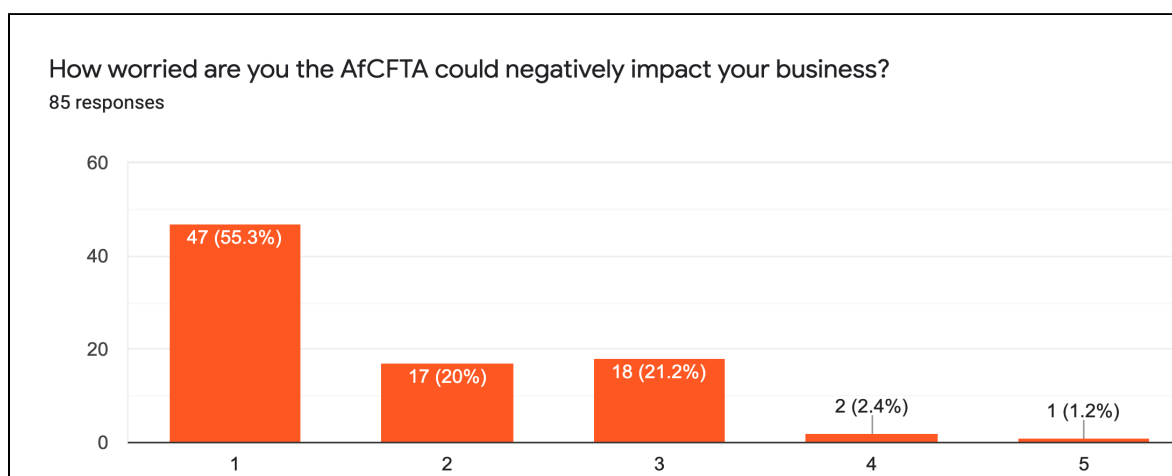
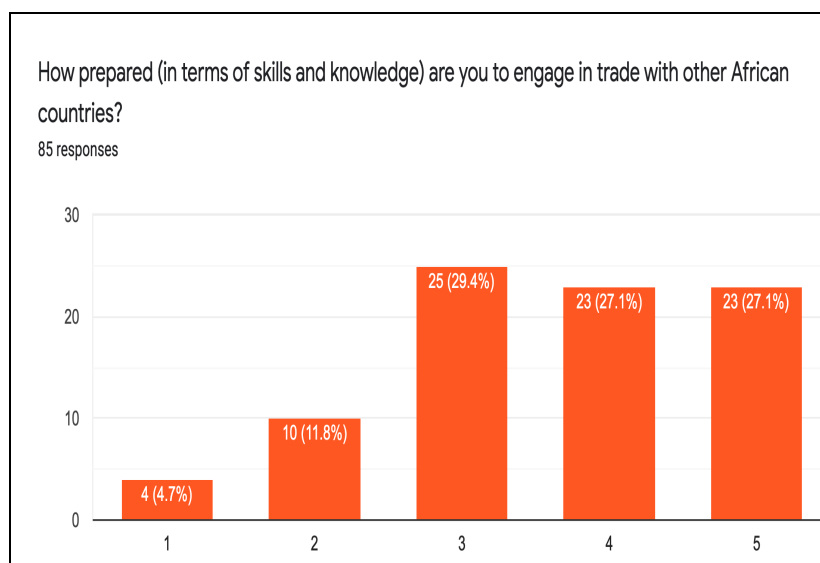


Figure 7: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 4



The survey also shows that respondents feel like they are ready and willing to engage in cross-border trade through the AfCFTA should trade barriers be eliminated. The fifth question asked respondents to rate their preparedness to engage in trade with other African countries and over 80% of respondents gave their preparedness a rating of 3 and more on a scale with 5 indicating a level of well-preparedness (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 5

Moreover more than two-thirds of respondents (73%) answered a 4 and above when asked about their willingness to trade across borders, on a scale of 1 to 5 (Figure 9). These two graphs reveal that entrepreneurs see the potential benefit of trading across borders and are willing to engage in it, if trade barriers are alleviated.

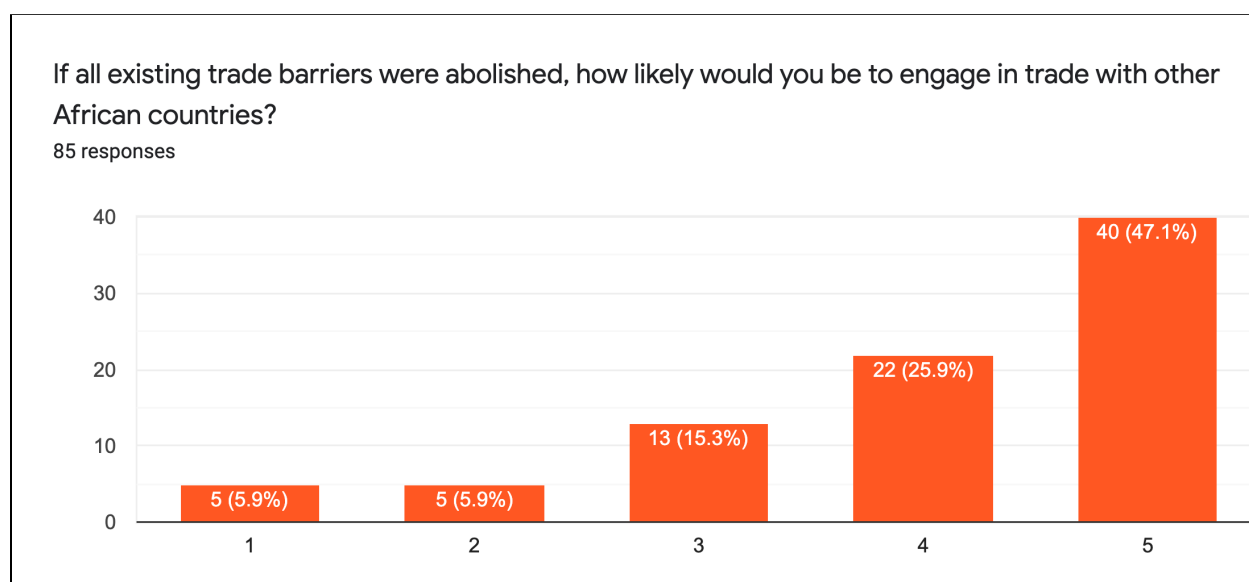


Figure 9: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 6

The final two survey questions aimed at finding out more about entrepreneurs' existing networks and interests on a potential platform that can be used to engage them on the AfCFTA. The 7th survey question asked respondents to rate how supported they felt by their current

network of businesses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The responses varied greatly across the scale with most respondents (31.8%) falling in the middle of the scale, ranking the support they receive a 3 (Figure 10). Respondents then shared that they did have an existing network that supported them, but felt they could still use more support.

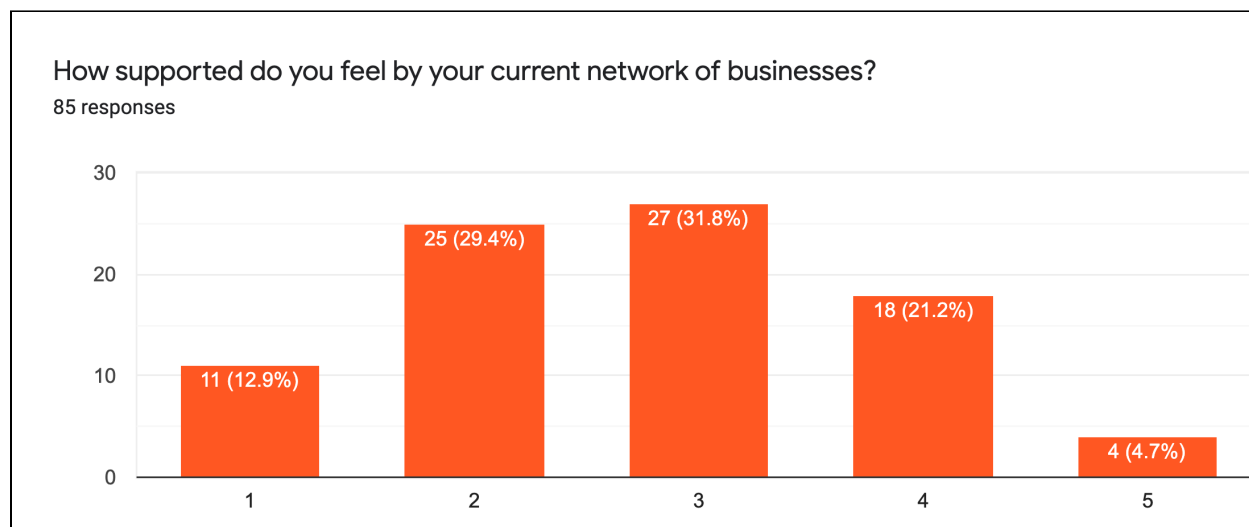


Figure 10: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 7

On the other hand, the last question asked about the respondents' likelihood of using an online application that provides information on the AfCFTA. An overwhelming majority (87%) said that they would be somewhat likely or very likely to use an app that provides that information (Figure 11).

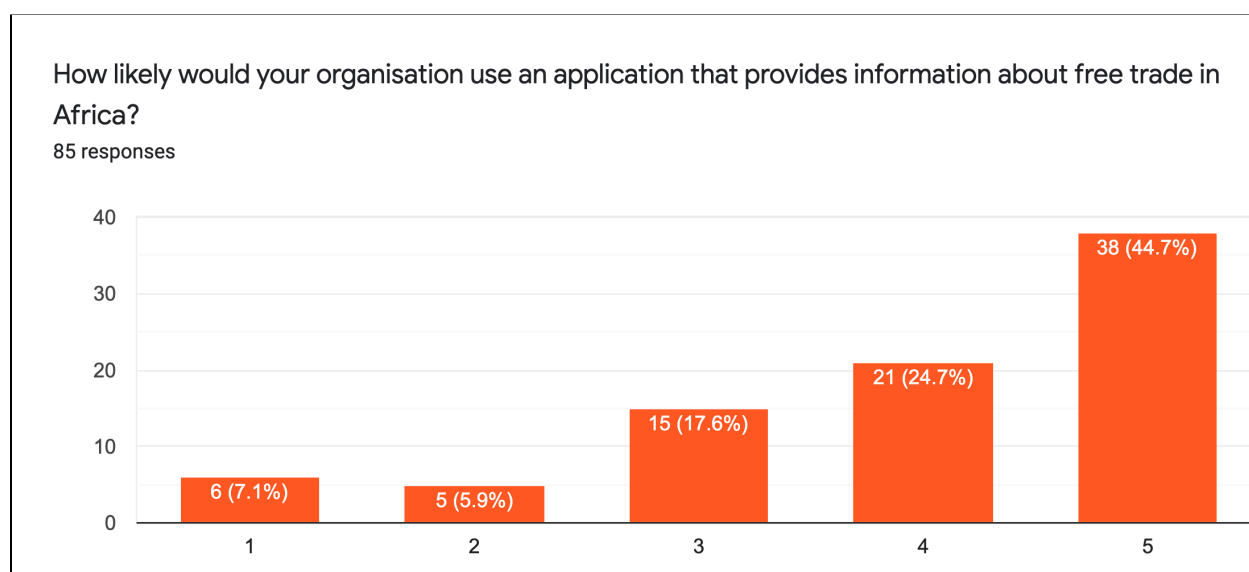


Figure 11: Results to Discovery Findings Survey Question 8

2.4 Schedule and contact interviews regarding AfCFTA awareness

In tandem with the survey, a series of interviews were conducted in order to collect qualitative data on the AfCFTA knowledge gap. A series of emails gauging participation interest were sent out and nine interviews were scheduled for the week of July 12th. A number of accelerators, a legal expert, and an academic scholar writing their PhD on the AfCFTA were all interviewed. Interviewees were also encouraged to fill out the survey themselves as well as send it to their networks and peers.

2.4.1 AfCFTA awareness Interview structure

In addition to the survey that was distributed to small-business entrepreneurs, AffreeTrade determined that it would be beneficial to gain insights from entrepreneurship accelerators by interviewing them about their current knowledge about AfCFTA. Each was conducted by three AffreeTrade members: a deep listener, a scribe, and an interviewer. The scribe took interview notes that would later be saved and analysed by the team.

A template of general questions to pose to each entrepreneurship accelerator was developed, then modified for each interviewee based on their field of operation and area of expertise, with customised questions added to gain the most critical insights from each interviewee.

Below is a copy of the general questions that were posed to the entrepreneurship accelerators during the Discovery-Finding interviews:

General Interview Questions

1. Could you tell us more about the work you do with/as xxxx?
2. How do you engage with your network of entrepreneurs? What platforms do you use? How often do you engage with them?
3. What is the biggest challenge you face regarding engagement with your network of entrepreneurs?
4. Do you have any initiatives in place regarding the AfCFTA? Have you held any workshops/information sessions for your partner entrepreneurs? If so, how did you find the reception of these initiatives? Are there high levels of engagement?
5. To your knowledge, do the SMEs in your network already engage in cross-border trade? If so, how do you think the AfCFTA will change/impact already existing cross-border trade?
6. Does your network have any relationships with existing regional economic communities like the SADC? If yes, what does this relationship consist of? What are the benefits of these RECs to the SMEs in your network?
7. Potential network & survey questions

Figure 12: Discovery Findings Interview Questions

2.4.2 Interview findings

From the interviews AffreeTrade conducted during the Discovery Findings phase, the team has observed three main themes that are apparent in most of the interviews:

1. There exists a knowledge gap in entrepreneurs' awareness of AfCFTA.
2. The choice of which digital platforms business accelerators use to engage with their networks is incredibly integral to the reception of information.
3. While taxes present a big cost barrier, entrepreneurs face other significant barriers, otherwise known as non-tariff barriers (NTBs) in their ventures into intra-African trade.

I. Knowledge gap

The team has found through synthesising the data collected from the Discovery Findings interviews that there is a substantial knowledge gap on the AfCFTA. While most of the interviewees said they have a surface-level understanding of the free trade area, they do not know how it affects their small and medium-sized enterprises.

Four of the eight interviewees said they have general knowledge of the trade area—they are aware of its goals and basic premise—but they are unaware of the mechanics and logistics as it applies to their businesses. Three out of the eight interviewees said that they have only heard about the trade area in passing and know close to nothing about it. And only one of the interviewees said that they were confident about their knowledge on the AfCFTA.

The team's findings highlight that, even though most know about the AfCFTA's main idea and objectives, they are not aware of how it affects their businesses specifically. A common anecdote the team heard during the research findings interviews was the perception that the AfCFTA only applied to governments and big companies. Some of the interviewees also talked about how the agreement sounds great on paper but they are finding it difficult to see how it will be implemented to the extent that its impacts will be felt by small businesses like theirs.

The one interviewee who shared that they felt confident about their knowledge on the trade area also revealed that they held information sessions and workshops with those on the AfCFTA board. This goes to show that the knowledge gap can be remedied by exploring different ways of disseminating information and educating entrepreneurs. From the interviews conducted during the Discovery Findings phase of the project, it is clear that much can still be done to raise entrepreneurs' awareness of the AfCFTA, especially as it pertains to their small and medium-sized enterprises.

II. Choice to digitise

The second important takeaway from the research findings interviews the Affretrade team conducted was that the choice of where and how to engage these entrepreneurs greatly shapes how effectively information is passed on to them. The team thought it best to discover more about the different platforms of engagement business accelerators use to build a relationship with their network of entrepreneurs so the team's recommendations to SVAI can fit the needs and expectations of the entrepreneurs themselves.

In investigating this issue through the Discovery Findings interviews, the team found that pursuing engagement with entrepreneurs through digital platforms is not as simple as it may seem. Interviewees stated that aside from lack of accessibility to internet and digital devices, older generations tend to be more cautious of digital platforms due to privacy issues and general disinterest with said platforms. When asked about how they engage with their entrepreneurs, one interviewee said that they would often disseminate information to community members who have access to a phone and internet and those individuals would pass information to the rest of the community. These two anecdotes reflect the two main challenges facing digital platforms: internet accessibility and mindset.

When asked if they think the use of an online application would be useful in disseminating information about the AfCFTA, all of the interviewees said they do not think that an app would be the best way to engage with SMEs on the African continent due to the two challenges stated above. However, this is in contrast to the data collected from the Discovery Findings survey, which shows that approximately 80% of survey respondents said they are willing to use an app for the AfCFTA. This initially presented the Affretrade Team with a disconnect between the SMEs who answered the Discovery Findings survey and the business accelerators that were also interviewed for the Discovery Findings phase.

III. Non-Tariff Barriers

Another important insight taken from the Discovery Findings interviews was the challenge presented by non-tariff barriers. Non-tariff barriers hike up costs to cross-border trading and dissuade entrepreneurs from engaging in it. The five non-tariff barriers shared by the interview respondents were the following:

1. Language barriers - The Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states have Kiswahili, French, English and Portuguese as their official

languages.⁴ Aside from these four official languages, the region is home to hundreds of local dialects and languages. In South Africa alone, there are 11 recognised spoken languages.⁵ These statistics show the difficulties faced by entrepreneurs in trading with other entrepreneurs who live in a different country and speak a different language. The accelerators interviewed in the Discovery Findings interviews shared that language difference is a barrier they see to trading across borders because this adds further complexity to an already difficult task. Aside from difficulties in engaging with entrepreneurs who speak a different language, there is also the issue of lack of accessibility to information translated into a language that the entrepreneurs use.

2. Transportation costs - A major non-tariff barrier is the high cost of transporting goods across African borders. One of the interviewees shared that it is cheaper to ship goods to Europe than it is to ship goods to other African countries due to the lack of proper infrastructure needed to efficiently transport goods across borders. This largely discourages SMEs from engaging in intra-African trade, even with neighbouring countries at times.
3. Different currencies - Another logistical hurdle that entrepreneurs face is the differences in currencies used by African countries. This drives up the costs and effort needed to trade across borders and dissuade entrepreneurs from trading with other African entrepreneurs.
4. Varying regulations - Countries in Africa also have varying customs regulations and quality standards in place that make it even more difficult for entrepreneurs to trade across borders. One interviewee based in South Africa noted that there is a huge difference in how stringent laws are in South Africa and in Kenya and this difference makes it harder for Kenyans, who are used to less stringent laws, to start or expand their businesses into South Africa. While these differences in regulations already make it hard for entrepreneurs to trade, a lack of centralised access to all this information makes it even more challenging for entrepreneurs to be fully prepared when attempting to enter into a new market as they are unaware of the standards and regulations they have to follow when entering a country.
5. Restriction on movement - Another difficulty facing African entrepreneurs is the restriction of movement of peoples across borders. Once again, varying

⁴ Sarno, Ivano. "SADC Adopts Kiswahili as 4th Working Language." Text. Knowledge Centre on Interpretation - European Commission, August 30, 2019.
https://ec.europa.eu/education/knowledge-centre-interpretation/news/sadc-adopts-kiswahili-4th-working-language_en.

⁵ "Languages of South Africa." Accessed August 4, 2021.
https://www.jyu.fi/viesti/verkkotuotanto/kp/sa/peop_lang.shtml.

immigration and travel laws in different African countries make it difficult for entrepreneurs to know what is and what is not allowed when travelling across borders. This makes the barriers to entry higher for entrepreneurs who do not have access to the information needed to travel to other African countries.

2.5 Insights from survey and interview data

In synthesising the data from the Discovery Findings survey and interviews, the Affretrade team has noticed that findings from both data sources enrich each other and help the team understand the main barriers and challenges surrounding the successful implementation of the AfCFTA for small and medium-sized enterprises. These can be summed up into three main insights:

I. The extent of the knowledge gap on the AfCFTA

From both the Discovery Findings survey and interview data, it can be concluded that accelerators and entrepreneurs only know about the AfCFTA on a surface level and are still unable to see how it affects them and their businesses. The accelerators that were interviewed said they have yet to see how this free trade area's impacts can trickle down to small businesses, and this is also evidenced by the large percentage of survey respondents who said they do not know a lot about the AfCFTA. One of the business accelerators the Affretrade team interviewed shared that some entrepreneurs struggled to see the direct link between better education on the agreement and driving their business profits and growth.

Interestingly, even if entrepreneurs do not know a lot about the AfCFTA, they generally view the free trade area in a positive light and believe that it will benefit their businesses more than it will negatively affect them. This is evidenced by the data collected from the Discovery Findings survey. This shows that entrepreneurs are willing to engage with the free trade area should all knowledge gaps be eliminated. The entrepreneurs only need to have the information at their disposal so they can fully maximise the benefits of the AfCFTA.

II. The choice of technology

Another important insight taken from the two Discovery Findings data sets is that the choice of technology emerged as a crucial factor in increasing engagement with, and awareness of, the AfCFTA. While there seems to be a disconnect between the survey data and interview data on the reception of an online application, this disconnect further proves that information dissemination is more complicated than merely setting up platforms for engagement. While survey respondents are willing to use an AfCFTA-related app, interviewees are more hesitant. It is important to note that

interviewees are business accelerators who are often tasked with being information hubs for their network of entrepreneurs, and so they have a better idea of the realities behind disseminating information to entrepreneurs from different geographic locations and with varying access to information infrastructures like digital devices and the internet.

This highlights the need for business accelerators to be more adaptable and versatile in accommodating the different needs of the entrepreneurs under their networks. Different demographics respond differently to different platforms of information and engagement, due to two things: accessibility and perceptions surrounding the internet. This indicates that the choice of medium would significantly impact how effectively information is received by these entrepreneurs. In disseminating information about the AfCFTA, it is important to keep these different expectations and needs in mind for a more effective roll out of strategies and initiatives.

III. Challenges presented by non-tariff barriers

In addition to existing tariff barriers that the AfCFTA will be resolving, SMEs face even greater impediments to cross-border trade from non-tariff barriers. These NTBs present a more complicated challenge in implementing the AfCFTA because it requires long-term investments into physical infrastructure and political unity across the continent. The most prominent NTBs faced by the SMEs are highlighted in section 2.4.2 of this project report. Scholarship on the AfCFTA attributes the potential success of the trade area to the ability of African governments to resolve these non-tariff barriers by investing in the right infrastructure and systems needed to make cross-border trade more efficient and accessible, especially to small businesses who do not have access to immense capital like large multinational companies.

The Discovery Findings interviewees also stress the immense impact these NTBs have on an entrepreneur's ability to trade across borders. However, the survey data shows that there is a willingness to engage in cross-border trade should these barriers be resolved and eliminated. This highlights the importance of creating better trade infrastructures and standardising regulations across the continent so that entrepreneurs are able to access opportunities for expanding their businesses into new markets abroad.

3. SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGY

Following the completion of the initial research and data collection phase, which evaluated the extent of the AfCFTA knowledge gap, the AffreeTrade team began to ideate strategies to lessen and hopefully close said knowledge gap in the future. In this next section of the report, AffreeTrade will outline its solution development methodology in order for the client to gain a full understanding of how the AffreeTrade team created and tested prototypes from a

preliminary set of recommendations. The solution development phase also marked the beginning of the co-presencing phase from U-Theory, which highlighted the use of a Visioning Workshop and Brainstorming sessions, as well as the beginning of the co-creating phase from U-Theory, which placed strong emphasis on a secondary round of research and data collection.

3.1 Designing and conducting the Visioning Workshop

Following the conclusion of the Discovery Findings presentation the AffreeTrade team completed a Visioning Workshop with SVAI, which marked the beginning of the co-presencing phase of the project. The goal of the Visioning Workshop was for the clients to create a shared mental picture of their desired future for SVAI as a whole. A clear vision is defined as something within an organisation that can unify, inspire, motivate, and provide a sense of direction for the individuals working for the organisation. The Visioning Workshop with SVAI clarified what the clients wanted out of their work with AfCFTA and assisted in the creation of the final recommendations for the present project.

3.1.1 Visioning Workshop design

The AffreeTrade team chose to design the Visioning Workshop based off of a visual picturing exercise. The purpose of a visual picturing exercise is for the client to reflect on and determine what the ideal future looks like for their organisation. Another set of supporting questions help to define what features make up the previously described ideal future and what specific actions will need to be taken to reach that ideal.

The AffreeTrade team chose to use the concept mapping software Miro to visually layout a timeline of questions which can illuminate where SVAI may be heading in the future in terms of AfCFTA and as an organisation for the Visioning Workshop. An image of the general Miro vision board layout can be seen below (Figure 13). The questions in the blue and yellow boxes are about the present, the questions in the orange boxes are about the next ten years as a span, and the questions in the red box are about exactly ten years in the future. The questions about the present in the blue and yellow boxes were asked first in order to ground the clients before continuing to the more theoretical questions. The clients were then asked to answer the questions in the red box about their overall ideal future for SVAI. The clients finished the Visioning Workshop by answering the questions in the orange boxes about the steps that would need to be taken to reach the ideal in the next ten years. The clients answered the red questions prior to the orange questions because the visual picturing exercise is constructed from the concept of working backwards from the ideal, rather than forward from the challenges an organisation is currently facing.

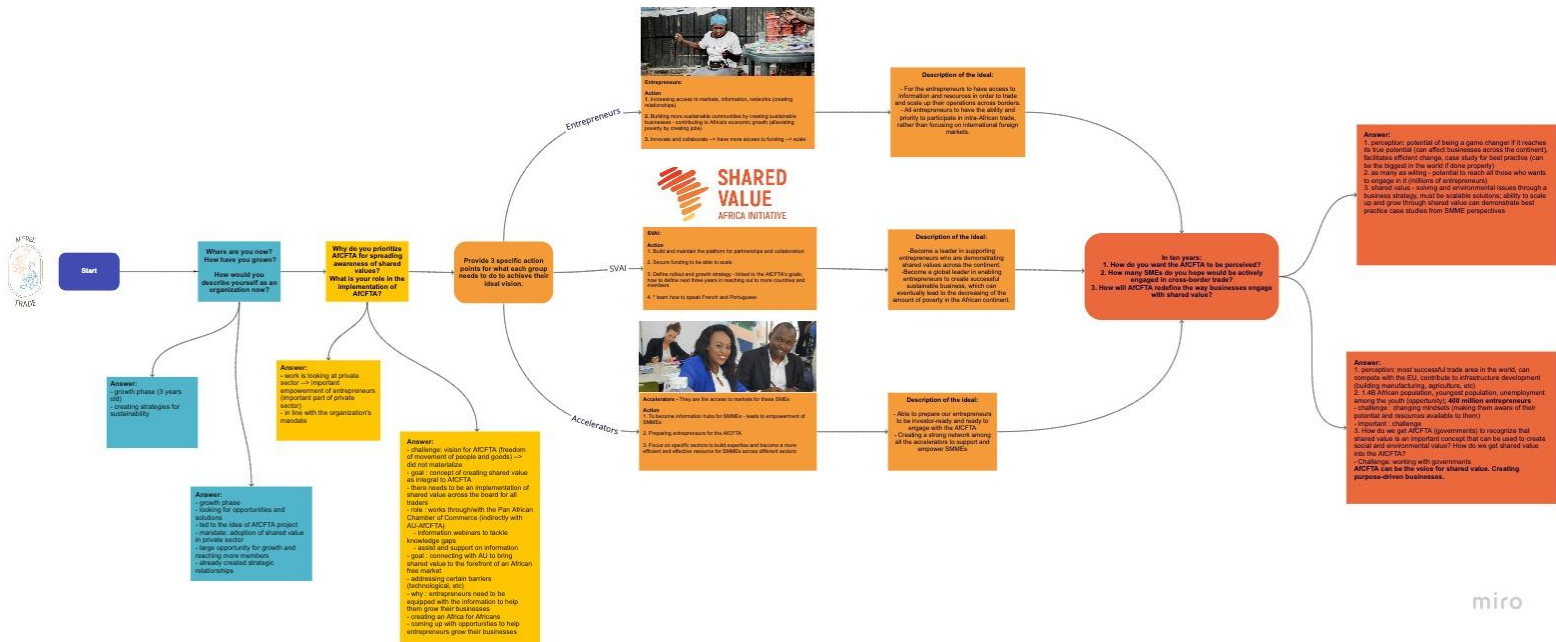


Figure 13: Visioning Exercise Mind Map

3.1.2 Visioning Workshop summary

The questions in the blue box asked the clients where SVAI is now, how they've grown, and how would they describe SVAI as an organisation now. The clients answered the question by stating that the SVAI is still in the growth phase since the company is only three years old, and because of this, SVAI is currently creating strategies for sustainability and trying to gain more members. Moreover, SVAI is continuously striving to create strategic relationships with different organisations while looking for opportunities and solutions to spread awareness regarding Shared Values, which led to the AfCFTA project. The clients also wanted to reiterate that SVAI's original mandate was to educate for the adoption of Shared Values business management concept in the private sector in the Africa continent.

The questions in the yellow box asked the clients why SVAI prioritises AfCFTA for spreading awareness of the Shared Value principles and what is SVAI's role in the implementation of AfCFTA. The clients explained that from a Shared Value perspective, the concept of creating Shared Value is something that should sit within the AfCFTA (i.e., people should trade with other people who have embraced Shared Values because they should be ethically sound and purposeful). Although Shared Value principles are not outlined in any official part of the AfCFTA as of right now, SVAI would love for it to become a piece of the AfCFTA in the future. Furthermore, the clients noted that while SVAI does not have a specific role within the implementation of the AfCFTA, the organisation has chosen to take on a supporting role. The clients also believe that everything SVAI is working towards, including within the AfCFTA

framework, is centered around Africans making the Africa they want. An image of the completed blue and yellow boxes on the Miro vision board can be seen below (Figure 14).

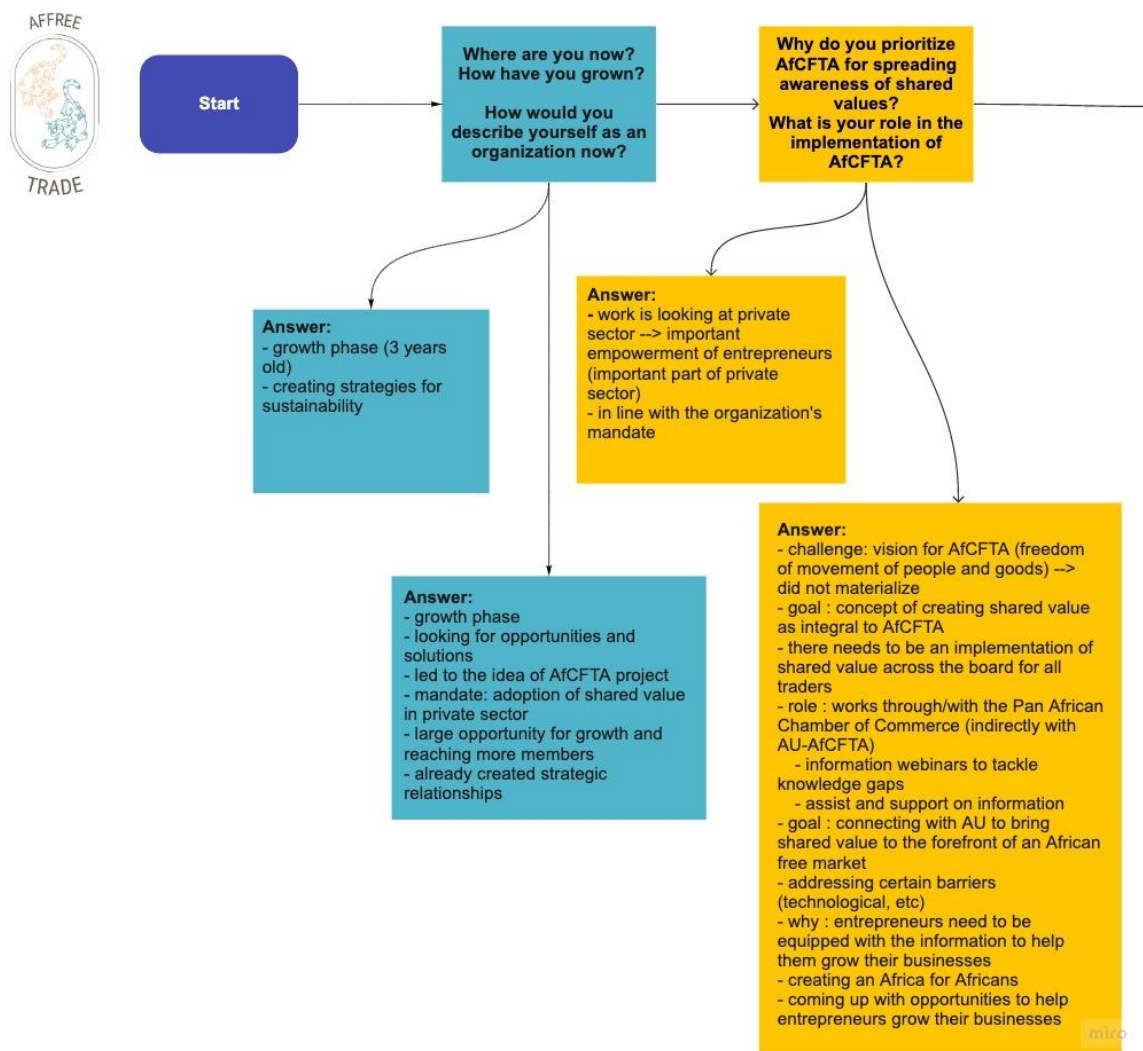


Figure 14: Beginning of Mind Map

The questions in the red box asked the clients how they want the AfCFTA to be perceived, how many SMEs they hope would be actively engaged in cross-border trade, and how AfCFTA will redefine the way businesses engage with Shared Value in ten years time. The clients answered that they would like the AfCFTA to be able to compete amongst other successful trade areas and impact businesses across the continent, including SMEs and entrepreneurs, by facilitating efficient change. The clients also explained that they would like for as many SMEs as are willing to engage in cross-border trade (millions of entrepreneurs). Finally, the clients responded that they want the AfCFTA to act as a voice for Shared Value and that as an organisation, SVAI should be asking themselves how they can convey to governments that Shared Value principles

can change the business world by promoting ethical and corruption free businesses. An image of the red boxes on the Miro vision board can be seen below (Figure 15).

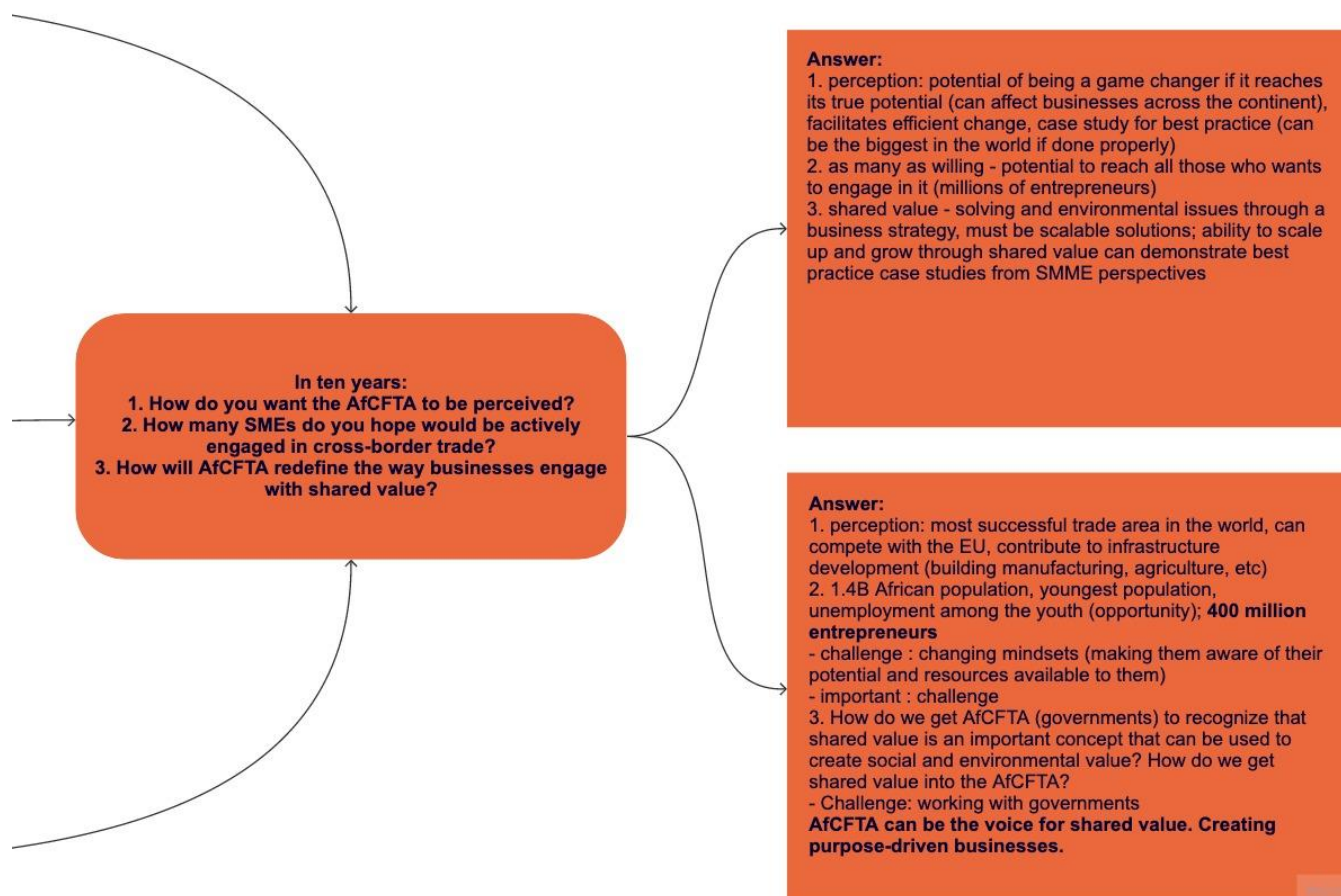


Figure 15: End of Visioning Mind Map

The questions in the orange boxes asked the clients to provide three specific action points for what entrepreneurs, SVAI as an organisation, and accelerators would need to do in order to achieve their ideal vision and what the ideal vision for each of these groups would look like specifically. In terms of entrepreneurs, the clients answered that entrepreneurs need increasing access to information, funding, markets, and networks, to contribute to Africa's economy and work to alleviate poverty by building more sustainable businesses and communities, and to acquire better opportunities to innovate and collaborate with others. The description of the ideal future for entrepreneurs that the clients gave focused on entrepreneurs having access to information and resources in order to be able to trade and scale up their operations across borders. In terms of SVAI as an organisation, the clients believe that SVAI needs to continue building and maintaining its platform, which also includes obtaining regular funding, as well as define their roll out and growth strategy. According to the clients, the ideal future for SVAI includes the organisation becoming a leader in empowering African entrepreneurs who are demonstrating Shared Value principles across the continent. In terms of accelerators, the clients

explained that accelerators have to become a more effective resource for a variety of SMEs and prepare entrepreneurs for AfCFTA by becoming general information hubs for SMEs and help them break the barrier of entry into a variety of markets. The ideal for accelerators as detailed by the clients, included the accelerators supporting and preparing entrepreneurs to be investor ready, as well as creating a strong network and series of connections that would assist entrepreneurs in their participation in the AfCFTA. An image of the orange boxes on the Miro vision board can be seen below (Figure 16).

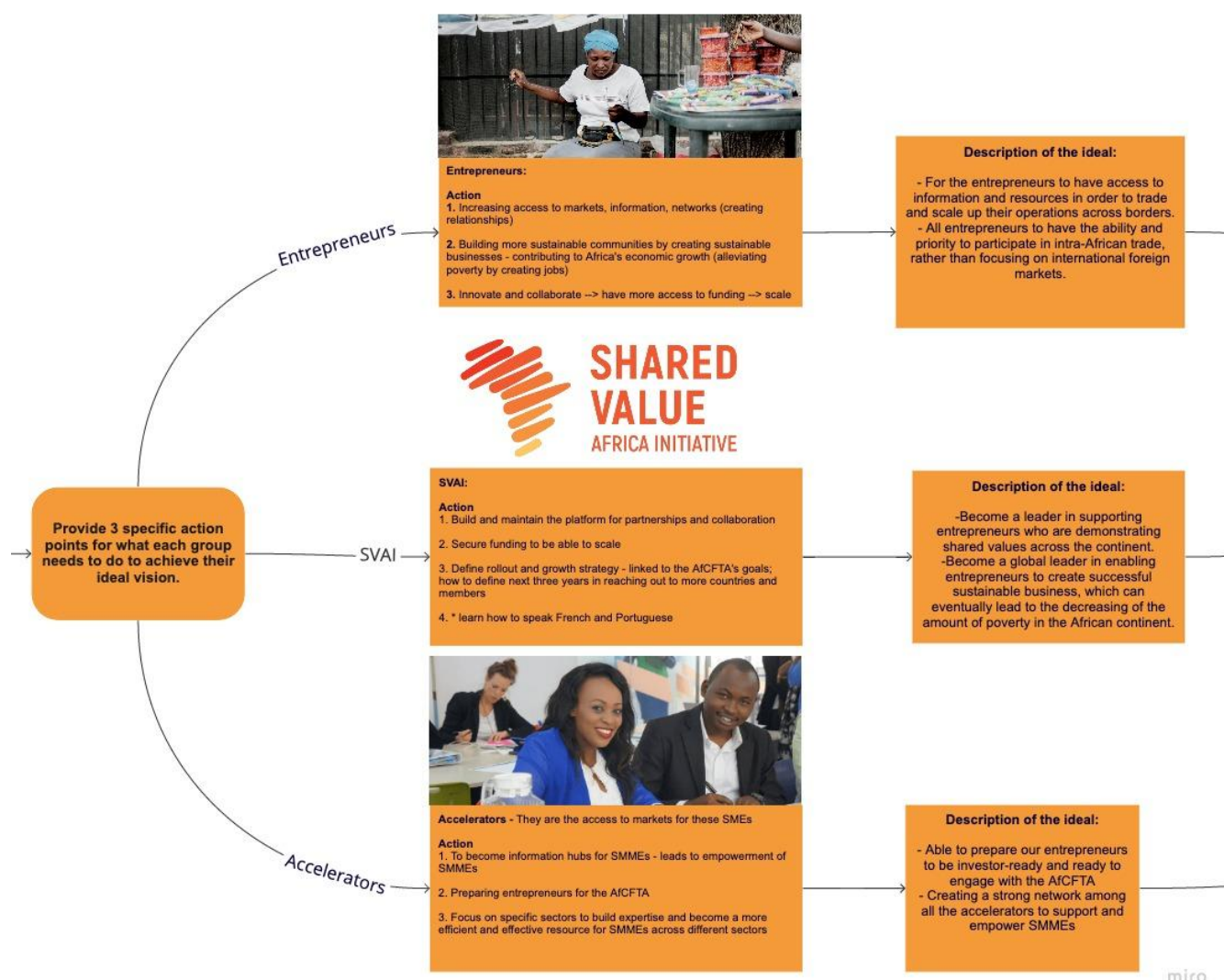


Figure 16: Middle of Visioning Mind Map

3.2 Prototype creation

After holding the Visioning Workshop, the AffreeTrade team met to Brainstorm possible solutions that would assist in the spreading of information on AfCFTA and bringing awareness to Shared Value, which would ultimately result in a high level of engagement from SMEs and entrepreneurs.

The Brainstorming or Ideation process was done in three phases and each phase was intended to slowly narrow ideas into solutions that can be tested, prototyped and evaluated. The first phase's scope was the most extensive as the team brainstormed on all solutions before applying restraints on what is feasible and not feasible. All the ideas bounced around were taken note of and none were taken out yet. The first phase is intended to flesh out all possible solutions before thinking of the logistics and mechanics behind them. In the first phase, the team came up with seventeen possible solutions. From there, the team moved on to the second phase of Ideation which entailed applying realistic parameters and restraints to the solutions to gauge which are the best ones to be tested. This involved taking out solutions that are unrealistic and unfeasible due to time and resource constraints. For the final phase, the team selected a final idea to be prototyped and figured out what the Testing phase is going to look like so that the prototype can be evaluated and revised.

Ultimately, the AffreeTrade team decided to take on a two-pronged approach, proposing both short-term and long-term recommendations to SVAI. Initially, the long-term recommendations included proposing educational and marketing strategies to raise awareness on the AfCFTA. However, these were not pursued further and, rather, were replaced with further steps the team recommends SVAI can take if they feel the need to. These steps will be further elaborated in later sections.

Due to time constraints, the team thought it best to create tangible short-term products that can be tested with a sample audience to better understand how entrepreneurs feel about different mediums of information. The team decided to make three graphics that are often used in digital platforms to spread information: infographic, instagram post and a mock website. The team presented very similar information across all three graphics to gauge which design is effective for communicating knowledge about the AfCFTA.

In making all three graphics, the online application Canva was used. In designing the graphics, the team also decided to stick to the orange-blue colour scheme that has been used for all of the team deliverables throughout the project. The infographic (Figure 17) focused on the benefits of the free trade area. The two social media posts broke down information on the AfCFTA in two ways—the first one (Figure 18) is a text-heavy post that focuses on the facts of the trade area, while the second post (Figure 19) makes use of visuals and broader, more abstract concepts to communicate the benefits and impacts of the AfCFTA. Meanwhile, the webpage (Figure 20) shows a mockup of what a potential webpage which includes AfCFTA resources would look like as part of the SVAI website.

HOW CAN AfCFTA BENEFIT YOU?

Creating the world's largest free trade area

AN AFRICA FOR YOU

The AfCFTA aims to create a single market for 55 African countries, connecting 1.3 billion people, creating 3.3 million jobs annually and producing a combined GDP of approximately \$3.4 trillion USD.



UNIFORMITY IN TRADE STANDARDS

The AfCFTA aims to standardize custom regulations, procedures, and processes across the continent making it easier for SMEs to access new markets without worrying about varying laws from country to country.

INCREASED COLLABORATION

The informal sector accounts for 66% of total employment in sub-Saharan Africa. It is predicted that increased collaboration between governments and the private sector under AfCFTA can help the informal sector transition into a formal one, increasing their chances of success in a larger market.



REDUCTION IN INPUT COSTS

SME's will be able to set up their own firms in other African countries to access cheaper means of production and labour.

"AFRICA NEEDS TO UNITE AND CREATE ITS OWN NARRATIVE INDEPENDENT OF COLONIAALLY IMPOSED LANGUAGES AND BORDERS."
TIEKIE BARNARD

Read more at www.svai.com/afcfta

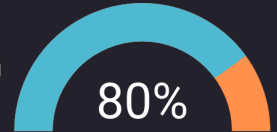
Figure 17: AfCFTA Infographic

What is the AfCFTA?

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to create a single market for all 55 countries across the African continent to facilitate the free movement of goods, services and people. AfCFTA is projected to be the largest free trade area in the world, connecting 1.3 billion people, creating 3.3 million jobs annually and producing a combined GDP of approximately \$3.4 trillion USD.

Creation of the AfCFTA's vast regional network provides African countries the opportunity to **diversify** exports, **accelerate** growth and **attract** foreign investments. It will also provide SMEs with an **enormous opportunity** to access new markets across the continent.



80% of the region's businesses are tied to small and medium-sized enterprises; these SMEs are the key to the success of an African free market

Reference:

Briggs, Iee. "Analysis of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA): The Pros and Cons." *Journal of International Relations Security and Economic Studies (JIRSES)*, vol. 1, no. 1, Apr. 2021. journals.rcmes.com/index.php/jirses.
Mughe Awah, Nj Mbitawunu. *AfCFTA and Its Impact Beyond Borders*. Shared Value Africa Initiative, 2020.
World Bank. "The African Continental Free Trade Area." World Bank, 27 July 2020. www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area.

Figure 18: AfCFTA Social Media Post 1

ANATOMY OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

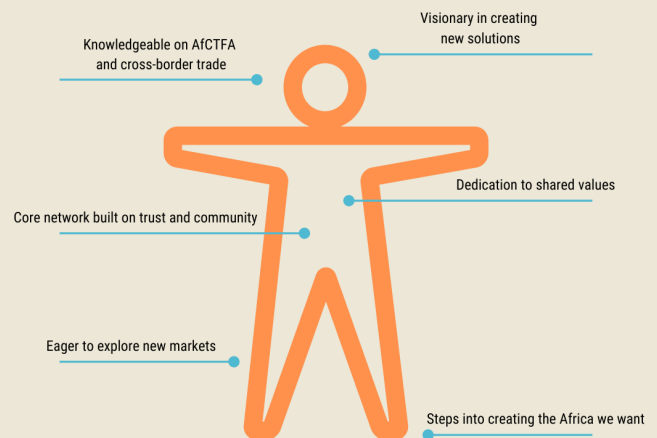


Figure 19: AfCFTA Social Media Post 2

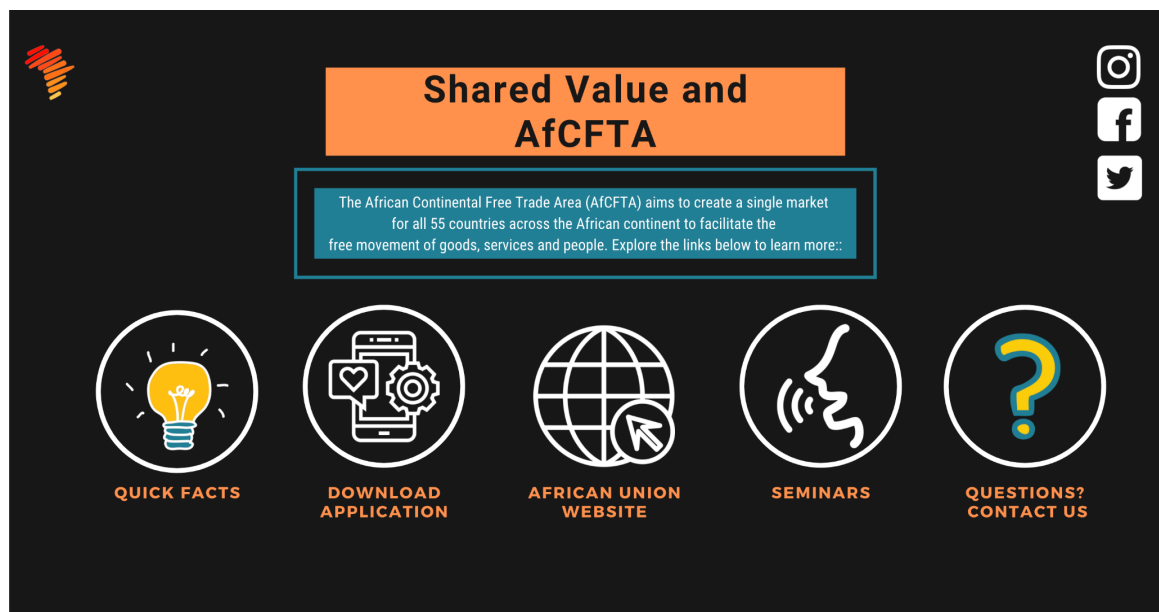


Figure 20: AfCFTA Webpage

3.3 Design and conduct Prototyping survey

Once the AffreeTrade team finalised their prototype graphics, they sought feedback in the form of another survey. It was decided that the survey would be sent to those contacts that the AffreeTrade team had conducted interviews with during the Discovery Findings phase of the project. On top of this, the survey was sent to a handful of contacts who had responded to the

previous survey and were enthusiastic about helping further. This section outlines the design of the Prototyping survey and provides an analysis of the results.

3.3.1 Prototype testing survey design

AffreeTrade's method for collecting survey responses for recommendation testing was very similar to that of the Discovery Findings survey. The Prototype Testing survey --distributed as a Google Form-- included images of all four prototype graphics created by the AffreeTrade team and consisted of a series of questions about preferences regarding the graphics and mediums for communicating information. Responses from this Google Form would be synthesised into overall recommendations for how SVAI could go about spreading AfCFTA awareness to SMEs.

Below is a copy of the Google Form survey used to gather information from our respondents:

Prototype Survey Questions

*Sample Infographic provided
1. On a scale of 1 to 5, do you find this infographic useful?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely would you be to read this infographic if you came across it?
3. What do you like most about this sample infographic? Why?
4. What do you dislike about this sample infographic? Why?

*Social media posts 1 & 2 provided
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely are you to read through this on social media platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp?
6. What do you like best about the sample posts? Why
7. What do you dislike about the sample posts? Why

* Website prototype provided
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely would you be to browse through a finalised version of this web page including all the links?
9. Do you have any recommendations on what types of resources you'd like to find in a possible AfCFTA webpage?

*Summary questions
10. Which visual(s) did you like the best?
11. Which did you find most engaging?
12. Which was most accessible?
13. Which are you most likely to actually read through?

Figure 21: Prototype Interview Questions

3.3.2. Prototype testing survey results

AffreeTrade's Prototype Testing survey was sent to a much smaller number of entrepreneurs than the first Discovery Findings survey, in the hopes that polling a more refined group would yield superior feedback and would limit expectations of having the graphics used in the survey be turned into official products. The survey received a total of 18 complete responses, with an additional response with half the questions answered. This discrepancy accounts for the differences in the number of data points on some of the graphs.

The results ultimately show that entrepreneurs use a wide variety of media platforms and differ on preferences when it comes to viewing and reading information on the AfCFTA. The graphics displayed in section 3.2 of the report were included in the survey with a short series of questions following each. Questions were once again based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating dislike and 5 indicating a strong liking. Each graphic was then followed by a free response question on what respondents specifically liked and disliked about each visual.

The first set of questions was on the infographic and asked respondents how useful they found the graphic and how likely they would be to read through it if they came across something like it (Figure 22 & 23). The respondents found the infographic very useful and many indicated that they would be interested in reading through informational content like this if they came across it on the internet or some form of social media.

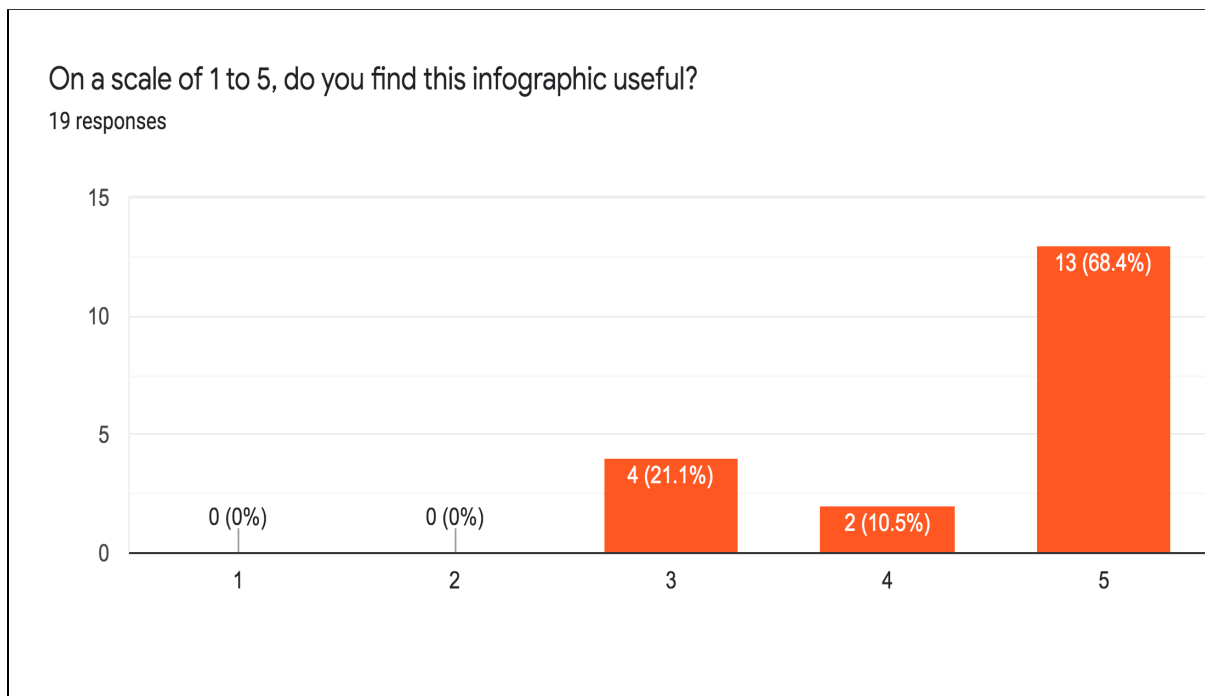


Figure 22: Solutions Survey Question 1 Results

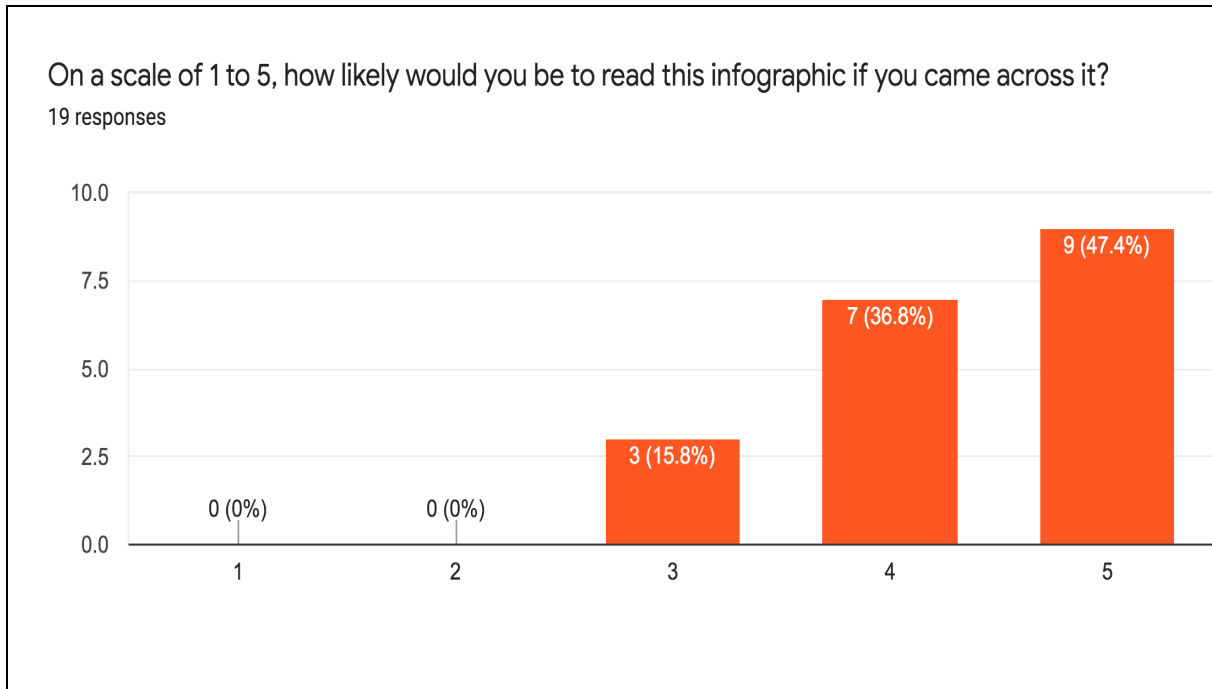


Figure 23: Solutions Survey Question 2 Results

On both questions regarding the infographic no respondents selected a 1 or a 2, with a majority selecting a 4 or 5. When asked what they liked about the infographic, simplicity was by far the most common answer and that it provides useful information that isn't time consuming. In terms of how it could be improved, respondents suggested that it could be beneficial to include links on the infographic to further informational resources on the AfCFTA and also stated that they weren't in favour of the colour pattern. Colour choice had a significant impact across the survey and interview results.

The next set of questions focused on the social media posts and webpage design and were similar to those asked about the infographic (Figure 24 & 25). Those surveyed showed an overall positive response towards both our social media posts, with an even stronger response to the webpage design. In terms of social media posts, survey respondents said they like the colour schemes, and found that the message of promoting entrepreneurs and their strength made it feel both inclusive and empowering. All but one individual said they would be somewhat likely or very likely to read through social media posts like these on Instagram or WhatsApp, with 13 of 18 (72%) individuals rating them at a 4 or a 5.

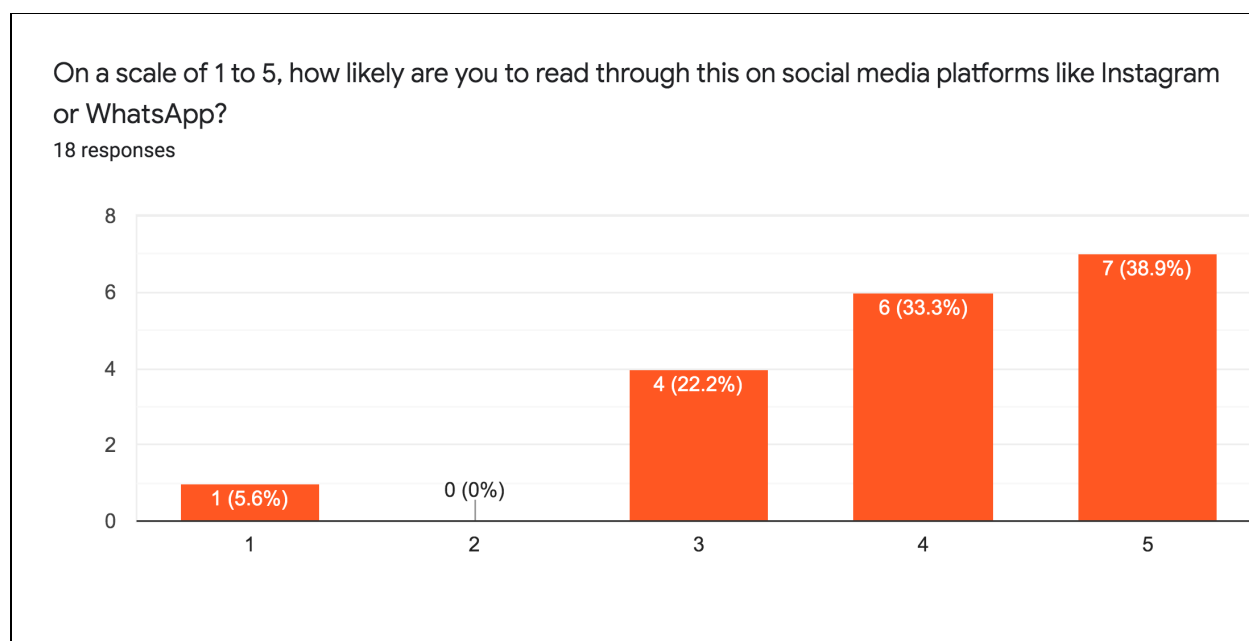


Figure 24: Solutions Survey Question 3 Results

Those with some concerns stated that the sample posts were too crowded, and that they preferred to look at pictures rather than text on social media. Another entrepreneur noted that perhaps the posts were too deceptively simple. Rather than just seeing information on the AfCFTA on social media they would also like to see posts with practical advice on how an entrepreneur can benefit from and get more involved with the AfCFTA.

In terms of the sample webpage, respondents were very enthusiastic and optimistic. There were once again no 1s or 2s present, with 67% of responders giving it a 5 out of 5 indicating that they would be very likely to browse through a finalised version of a webpage that had various links to AfCFTA information. When asked what links and resources they would find useful on a page like this, respondents wanted information on AfCFTA regulations and business requirements, information on how to contact relevant institutions, and links on how the AfCFTA can help SMEs expand or get in touch with new business partners or investors.

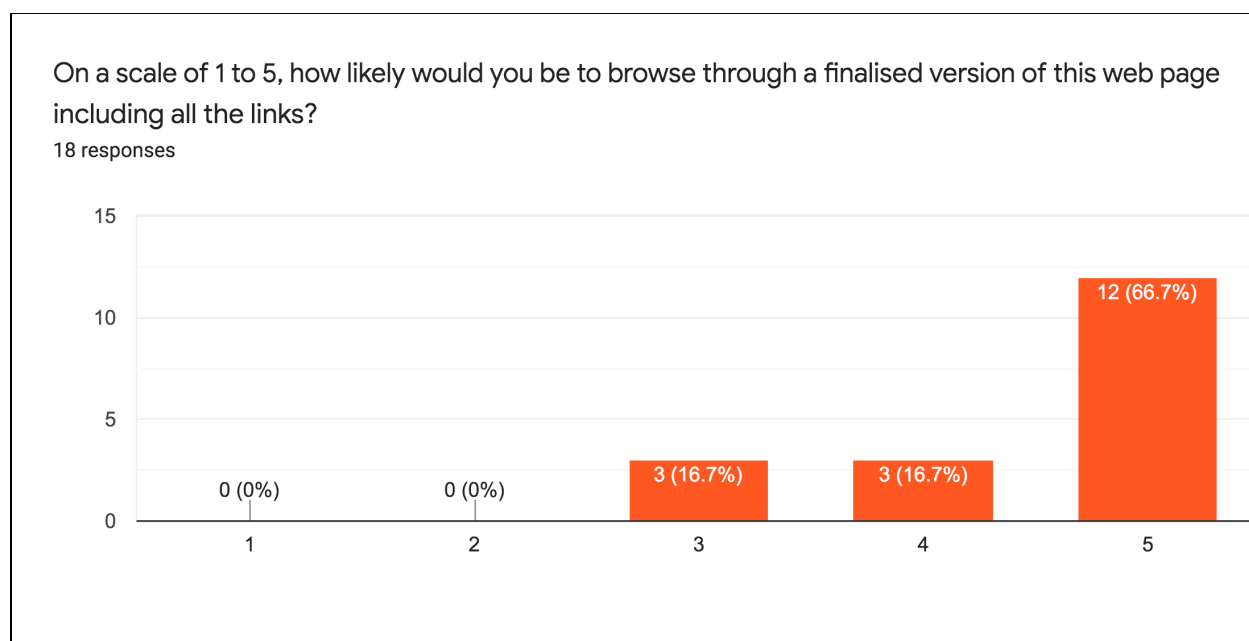


Figure 25: Solutions Survey Question 4 Results

The key takeaway from the opinions on the prototype webpage is that while entrepreneurs would search for many different types of resources, they all believed that having a webpage with various informational links in one place would be very useful.

After asking questions on each individual graphic, the AffreeTrade team also included some summary questions that gauged stakeholder preferences across all three mediums of information dissemination. As the pie charts show (Figure 26-29) preferences among survey respondents were very split. AffreeTrade asked a series of four questions which were: 1. Which visual do you like the best? 2. Which was most engaging? 3. Which was most accessible? And 4. Which would you be most likely to read through? On all four of these questions the responses were scattered (Figure 26-29). The largest number of responders at roughly 39% thought the webpage was overall the best graphic, and the webpage and infographic were tied for the most engaging at 37% of the total poll each. On the other hand, the results show that responders found the social media posts most accessible at 42%. Additionally, each of the three mediums received exactly a third of the votes for which graphic they would be most likely to read through. This illustrates that entrepreneurs have varying preferences on where and how to find information, which was taken into careful consideration when creating recommendations.

Additional graphics on survey results can be found in the Appendix.

Which visual(s) did you like the best?

18 responses

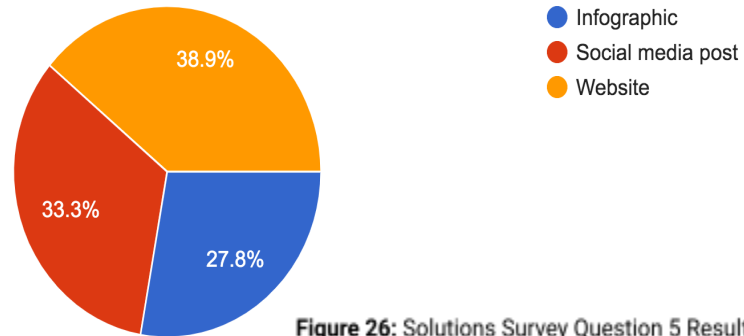


Figure 26: Solutions Survey Question 5 Results

Which did you find most engaging?

19 responses

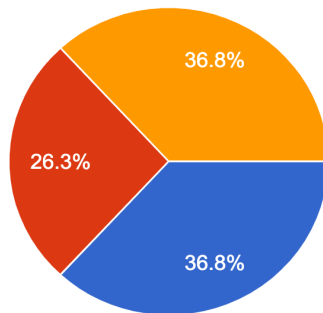


Figure 27: Solutions Survey Question 6 Results

Which was most accessible?

19 responses

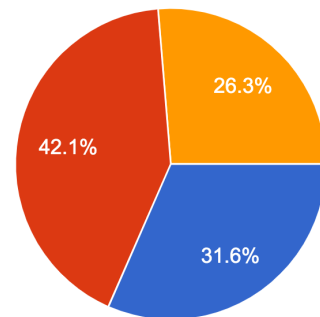


Figure 28: Solutions Survey Question 7 Results

Which are you most likely to actually read through?

18 responses

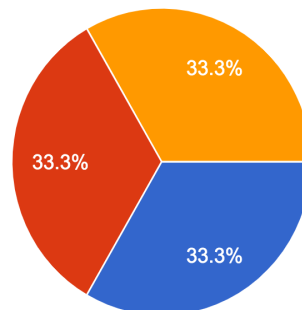


Figure 29: Solutions Survey Question 8 Results

The survey closed with two yes or no questions on whether or not respondents would want to attend workshops and information sessions on the AfCFTA and whether or not it would be useful if the Shared Value Africa Initiative had links to AfCFTA resources on their website. 18 of 19 individuals said yes to both of these, with the same single responder saying no to both. There was then a final free response question that asked how information on the AfCFTA could be more accessible. There were three very common responses to this question which were, via email or newsletter, through more online articles, and by having information widely available across all possible platforms. Going along with this trend, AffreeTrade polled survey respondents on what forms of media they consume and found that 100% of respondents use WhatsApp, 85% read online articles, 70% use Facebook and 70% use Youtube, and just under 50% use Twitter and Instagram. There were also many other platforms such as TV, radio, newspaper, podcast, email, and LinkedIn that stakeholders still engaged with, just less frequently. The data from these survey responses have greatly helped to shape AffreeTrade's recommendations and next steps as they show the various preferences in media consumption that entrepreneurs have.

3.4 Schedule and conduct prototype testing interviews

Several emails were sent out asking past survey respondents and eager engagers of our project for their availability for a 30 minute Zoom call to share their thoughts on our developed solutions prototypes. We were able to set up and engage with five entrepreneurs in a 24 hour span from Friday July 30th to Saturday to 31st of 2021.

3.4.1 Prototype testing interview structure

Similar to the process in the Discovery Findings section, we found once again that, in addition to creating a survey, holding in person zoom interviews is another valuable resource and opportunity to draw on different perspectives among entrepreneurs, accelerators, and other stakeholders to inform our research.

However, in this round of interviews, the AffreeTrade team selected a smaller more select group of interviewees including accelerators, entrepreneurs and common seminar participants of the SVAI. We chose those who we found to be more engaged and eager to share and learn more about AfCFTA and our project in general based on their past survey responses or communications with us. The main goal of this was to gauge a more personal group's thoughts on our prototypes as potential benefits to the knowledge gap.

Like the structure of the previous round of interviews, three AffreeTrade team members were on each call acting as a facilitator, deep listener and scribe and a list of general questions was developed. Below is a copy of the questions that were posed to the entrepreneurship accelerators during the Prototyping interviews:

Prototyping Interview Questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself and tell us more about the work you do?

Infographic:

1. Do you find this infographic useful and engaging and if so, how likely would you be to read this infographic if you came across it?
2. Can you describe the things you like and dislike about the infographic? Why?

Social media posts:

1. Did you find these posts useful and engaging? Why?
2. How likely are you to read through this on social media platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp? Why?
3. Can you describe the things you like and dislike about the social media posts? Why?

Website:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEIZJ4blfc/LsZjl_lbRfNzEkDgStMbww/view?website#2:african-continental-free-trade-area

1. Did you find this website useful and engaging?
2. How likely would you be to browse through a finalised version of this web page?
3. What kind of information would you like to find in an information web page about AfCFTA?

Summary questions:

1. Which visual(s) did you like the best? Why? Did you find it engaging, useful, accessible?
2. Which are you most likely to actually read through? Why?
3. What forms of media do you consume (e.g., radio, TV, podcast, internet articles, social media platforms)? Which of these do you consume the most?
4. Do you prefer online interactions or in-person interactions? Why?
5. Have you come across information on AfCFTA? If yes, where did you find it (online, in-person seminars, conversations, etc)? Did you learn a lot about the initiative from that interaction?
6. Would you be interested in attending information sessions/workshops on the AfCFTA? Why or why not?
7. How do you think information on AfCFTA could be more accessible and useful to you?

Figure 30: Solutions Interview Questions

3.4.2 Prototype testing interview findings

From the interviews AffreeTrade conducted during the Prototyping phase, three more themes came to light:

1. Appeal to Diverse Entrepreneurial Attitudes
2. Influences of Colours and Design
3. Components of Action Website

I. *Diversifying Content*

Among interviewees, there existed a fairly even split in preferences for each of our posts and materials. Three of our interviewees for example preferred more content driven and

factual graphics whilst the other two enjoyed the more visually pleasing and eye-catching posts and found those more engaging. Some entrepreneurs preferred the visuals because they felt the content in fact-driven graphics was too wordy, contained too much information, and it was unlikely that they would actually read through it in full. At the same time, those that preferred the content driven and factual graphics did find the statistics very interesting, engaging, and important especially for an entrepreneur, whereas they failed to grasp the point of the more visual content as they felt it was not doing enough to persuade.

Moreover, the individuals that preferred facts over visuals seemed to care more about how AfCFTA affects their personal monetary gains and how this applies to them and their business whilst those who preferred visuals appreciated the bigger picture, theory of the agreement, and overarching goals to creating a unified Africa. Based on this, it was clear to the team that both types of content are very necessary in appealing to the multiple attitudes of stakeholders towards the AfCFTA. In future content creation, it is also possible to incorporate a bit of both forms of persuasion and appeal in one graphic, so the viewer has no choice but to recognise the importance of AfCFTA no matter their preferences.

II. Colours and Design

In addition to content, all of our interviewees were asked to provide feedback on the design, layout and colour of our materials which proved to substantially affect their thoughts towards each graphic. Some noted that they felt the colour scheme of the infographic and webpage could be altered to better reflect African values. More to this point, including cultural images and elements such as cuisine, language, and sites of Africa, could also boost the effectiveness of graphics with a fun and laid back appeal. These suggestions would make the materials more specific and personal to *African* entrepreneurs across regions.

Interviewees also commented on elements of the existing images that did catch their attention and enhance their interest. These components included the bolding or highlighting of certain words and statistics within the text, contrast in colours, simplicity of designs, and effective organisation of information.

III. Potential of the Website

Many ideas were provided in this section of discussion as entrepreneurs felt that the infographics and posts were great tools for spreading awareness, but that the webpage is an even larger opportunity to create action and direct engagement in AfCFTA. Below are several components that entrepreneurs would want to see in a webpage either in addition to, or supplementing or current ideas of content on the site.

Firstly, entrepreneurs want to have easy access to getting involved with the AfCFTA in

their specific regions. Therefore, one such element of the webpage that came up could be a list of country and region-specific requirements for engagement with the AfCFTA. A list where entrepreneurs can search for their country/region and find resources and links to information on how to trade within and across that country to other countries. Secondly, in addition to a list of the rules of trading through AfCFTA, next steps would be to provide opportunities to network with other credible and like-minded SMEs and entrepreneurs. Interviewees showed a strong interest in more emphasis on networking opportunities directly on the webpage in the form of prompts and links to join helpful LinkedIn and Facebook groups for example.

Lastly, multiple interviewees mentioned and cautioned about the skepticism that exists surrounding the agreement. Also seen in feedback from some of the infographic and social media posts, entrepreneurs are concerned if the AfCFTA's politician-promoted aspirations will actually be implemented on the ground level and if more and more false promises will continue to be made.

For example, as one interviewee reported: she recently connected with an NGO in Ghana whose work is actually centered around the AfCFTA, and she already has joined them on Facebook and learned more about AfCFTA. However, she still feels like everything is just talk and no action with many materials being thrown around but lacking implementation.

Therefore, many of the entrepreneurs are very interested in hearing testimonials from those who have engaged with the AfCFTA, how their experience was with the trade area, and how they were able to engage in it successfully. Testimonials of real life entrepreneurs and SMEs were expressed as another high priority for the webpage and a key feature as they can help alleviate the high levels of skepticism which currently negatively influence entrepreneurial buy-in to the agreement. Hearing real world stories is also a refreshing and personal component for African entrepreneurs to connect and resonate with.

3.5 Insights from Prototyping survey and interview data

From the culmination of the quantitative data collected from the Prototyping survey and the qualitative conversations held in interviews, our findings from each source prove to connect, complement and supplement each other ultimately allowing the team to draw connections across mediums and perspectives. Based on feedback from our solution-driven prototypes, these connections can be summed up into three main insights which will be useful in closing the AfCFTA knowledge gap as well as jumpstarting better implementation techniques of the agreement for SMEs at the ground level:

I. Diversifying Content

Entrepreneurs across countries and regions in Africa share similar and diversified

opinions and perspectives on AfCFTA. After engaging with so many of them, the team gathered that factually-driven and visually-driven content, which includes quantitative statistics as well as qualitative data and facts, are the two most important ways of engaging and persuading stakeholders.

II. Colours and Design

The team found that of equal importance to actual content was the colors, layout and design of the graphics themselves. Making the experience personal to African entrepreneurs with colors and images they would relate to is key, as well as providing the information that draws the eye easily along the material and using contrast to draw readers' attention to important elements.

III. Potential of the Website

Despite the even split of preferences among infographics, posts and the webpage, additional excitement did arise surrounding the opportunity for concrete action and implementation of AfCFTA on the webpage. Entrepreneurs were eager to share their needs and even provided great direct recommendations for answers to those which can be directly added to the webpage. Including a list of country/region specific resources, LinkedIn/Facebook networking groups, and testimonials from SMEs to a single webpage will directly help in answering and alleviating many concerns of a large body of stakeholders as well as instilling trust that their voices are being heard.

4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the completion of the solution development and prototype testing phase, which evaluated feedback on preliminary recommendations, the AffreeTrade began to finalise its recommendations. In this next section of the report, AffreeTrade will explain its series of final recommendations for SVAI, which include three short-term recommendations and two possible long-term next steps that SVAI may want to take in the future. The final findings and recommendations phase also marked the ending of the co-creation phase and the beginning of the co-implementation phase from U-Theory, which emphasised presenting the final deliverables to the clients.

4.1 Our final findings and recommendations

Going back to our task of gauging the awareness of AfCFTA, the AffreeTrade team researched how much entrepreneurs know about AfCFTA and, interestingly, they did have a basic knowledge of it. Unfortunately, they did not know how AfCFTA could impact them individually and their businesses. Following this, they also showed an interest in gaining more knowledge on the agreement and how it could be implemented. The surveys conducted noted that the entrepreneurs are already engaged on social media sites and have fair enough knowledge on

how to navigate the internet, given that the survey was shared online. The AffreeTrade team provides their recommendations below.

Creating a webpage

It came to the team's attention from the survey sent out that respondents claimed to have limited access to AfCFTA information; what stood out was that there was no AfCFTA website. With that information, it is recommended that SVAI creates a webpage that fully focuses on providing quick facts about AfCFTA, accessible links to the African Union website, link to download the AfCFTA app, access to webinars and seminars, and contact details to allow entrepreneurs communication with the SVAI for any concerns or questions regarding the AfCFTA. Understanding that, in these times, not many people want to spend more time on the internet due to screen fatigue, this website intends to contain general information on the AfCFTA. The team suggests that the website developers tailor the website to include information on specific regions in the continent so entrepreneurs are able to access information that is relevant to their work.

Instagram

Creating a SVAI Instagram account increases online presence not only for SVAI but also for the spread of AfCFTA awareness. Instagram is one of the most widely used apps globally, and there's a lot of potential to spread knowledge of AfCFTA through many interesting ways. The application has various ways to help organisations increase followers and post content strategically targeting specific audiences. It provides relevant audience insights like an access to the demographic and geographical makeup of your follower base, as well as data on what types of content they engage and when. Another way is to create content posted on specific days like 'Meet an Entrepreneur Monday' or 'FAfCFTA Fridays' to spark viewers' interest to follow the page and create a community of entrepreneurs that spread awareness on the AfCFTA and Shared Value.

Group Network

One of SVAI's goals for this research is to create a community of entrepreneurs involved in cross border trade and the team found that the best way to do that is through creating WhatsApp, Facebook or LinkedIn groups that entrepreneurs can use to network. To ensure that SVAI gets the desired number of entrepreneurs in the specific groups, they can send invitations to join the different groups after their seminars, on their weekly updates like the FAfCFTA Fridays. Through this recommendation, entrepreneurs can join networking platforms that are tailored to the geographical region and industries they are working in. This is so that entrepreneurs can gain access to networks and information that are relevant to their business.

4.2 Long-term next steps and future directions

AffreeTrade has also set aside long-term recommendations that SVAI can try to implement in the future. These recommendations fall under the high-impact and high-effort sector, which means that they will potentially have significant benefits for the entrepreneurs, but will also require a lot of effort and resources to implement.

Marketing strategies

SVAI can opt to market the AfCFTA in various ways. For example, it can partner with reputable public figures who show a great deal of interest in trading across borders, and in doing so, they will help spread awareness on AfCFTA and Shared Value. Another option is for SVAI to explore more traditional marketing strategies. These are radio, television, newspaper, billboards, truck, and internet advertisements. Traditional marketing plays an important role in reaching local audiences and helps them interact with customers on a personal level. This also allows SVAI to reach portions of the population who are not so well-versed in more modern forms of media like the internet. Tackling marketing with a two-fold approach (modern and traditional forms of media) allows SVAI to reach a wider swath of audience across a broad age range. These will help spread the information faster and target all entrepreneurs interested in AfCFTA. Additionally, it will also help eliminate the language barriers as these traditional marketing media are mostly spread in local languages.

Future education

SVAI can initiate region-specific information seminars or webinars, wherein a local expert can be called in to share information and data on AfCFTA. Factors like work culture, availability of skills, the work regulations of the entrepreneurs, and local incentives are critical to understanding your entrepreneurs' potentials and risks when engaging in cross border trade. The local experts have the ability to know what is truly important to the entrepreneurs as they have exceptional local knowledge and expertise.

Next Steps

This is how the Affreetrade team tied their short-term recommendations to SVAI's long-term goals. From the visioning exercise, the team noted that SVAI mentioned that business accelerators need to 'focus on specific sectors to build expertise and become a more efficient and effective resource for SMMEs across different sectors' in doing so, they will be educating their entrepreneurs on AfCFTA and how they can leverage such an opportunity. Hence, it will ignite the individual accelerators to share information that is focused only on that region.

5. CONCLUSION

The AffreeTrade team was tasked with conducting research on SMEs in Southern Africa to better understand the knowledge gap around the AfCFTA. After gaining a better comprehension of the AfCFTA knowledge gap and its challenges, AffreeTrade was to provide recommendations

for educating, connecting, and sharing information on the AfCFTA with SMEs so that they could have the choice of participating in cross-border trade. Following the completion of the initial research phase, which noted a lack of deeper understanding of the AfCFTA, AffreeTrade developed a set of preliminary recommendations and tested them in a prototyping phase. AffreeTrade decided upon a final three short-term recommendations using the data from the prototyping phase. These recommendations included:

- 1) The addition of an AfCFTA webpage on SVAI's website
- 2) Using Instagram in targeted social media strategy
- 3) Connecting SMEs who are dedicated to Share Value with each other via a WhatsApp group or similar group messaging service.

AffreeTrade also theorised a series of next steps that SVAI may want to take in the future, which centered on educating individuals about Shared Value through industry-specific and region-specific seminars and adopting more traditional marketing strategies. The AffreeTrade team hopes that SVAI finds our research and recommendations useful in their mission to spread awareness on Shared Values through AfCFTA, as well as achieving their future ideal and goal of making the Africa that Africans want for themselves.

6. APPENDIX

What forms of media do you consume?

19 responses

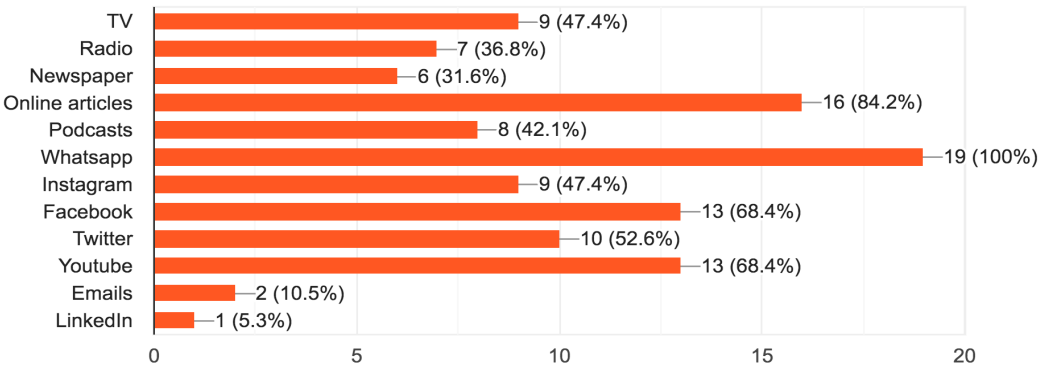


Figure 31: Solutions Survey Forms of Media Consumption Results

Would you be interested in attending information sessions/workshops on the AfCFTA?

19 responses

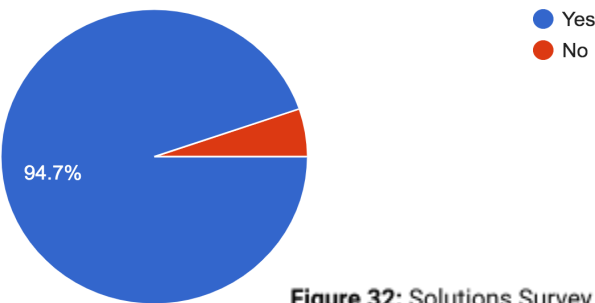


Figure 32: Solutions Survey AfCFTA Workshop Results

Would it be useful to you if SVAI had links to existing AfCFTA resources on their website/Facebook page?

19 responses

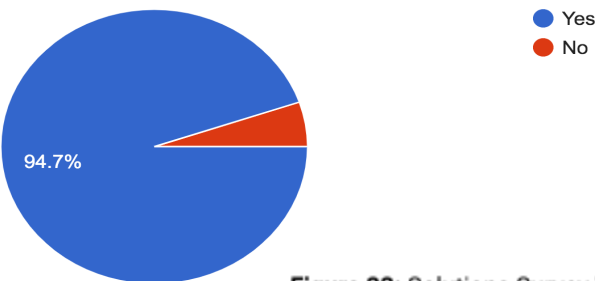


Figure 33: Solutions Survey Webpage Links Results