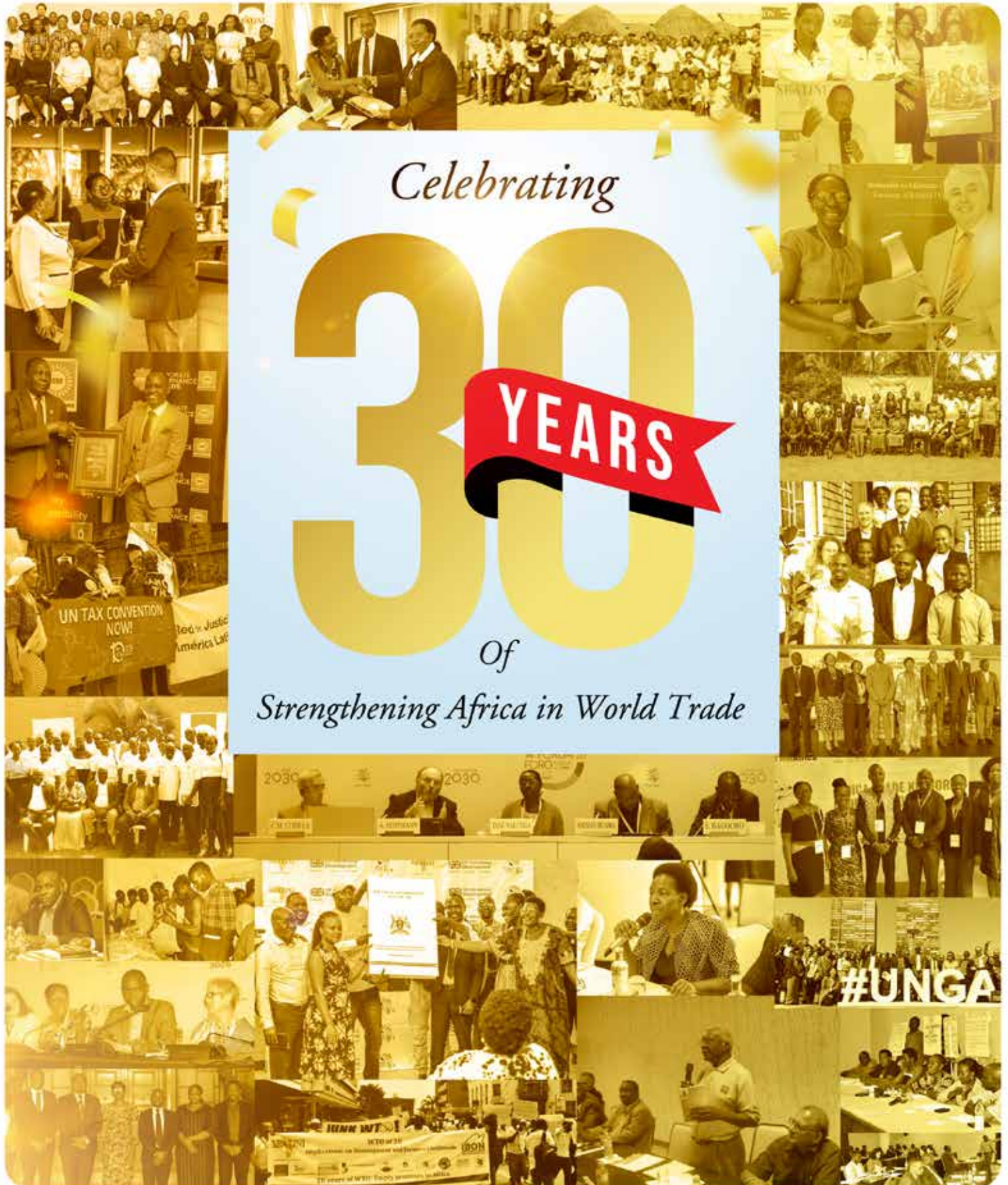




Strengthening Africa in World Trade



Celebrating

30

YEARS

Of

Strengthening Africa in World Trade

Message from the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

It is a privilege to contribute this message to the SEATINI@30 Commemorative Magazine, marking three decades of SEATINI's commitment to advancing Africa's development through evidence-based research, policy analysis, advocacy, and capacity strengthening.

Having been associated with SEATINI since its inception, I have witnessed its remarkable journey from a bold vision conceived at a defining moment in global economic governance to a respected institution that continues to shape policy debates and amplify African voices in regional and international decision-making. This commemorative magazine offers an opportunity to reflect on SEATINI's achievements, the impact of its work and its aspirations for the future.

To appreciate SEATINI's contribution, it is important to recall the circumstances under which the organization was established. Across much of Africa, countries were implementing Structural Adjustment Programmes prescribed by the Bretton Woods Institutions, significantly reducing the developmental role of the State. At the same time, reforms within the United Nations system weakened several institutions that had traditionally supported the economic development of developing countries. As globalization accelerated, many Least Developed Countries (LDCs), particularly in Africa, found themselves increasingly marginalized within the global economy.

Following the collapse of the United Nations Global Negotiations, the Uruguay Round under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) culminated in the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO). While this new framework reshaped global trade, it also expanded multilateral trade rules into areas such as intellectual property, investment-related measures, and services, with significant implications for the policy space available to developing countries.

Many African countries entered these agreements without fully understanding their long-term implications. Recognizing this gap, SEATINI emerged as a trusted source of independent policy analysis

and technical support. Through sustained engagement, the organization convened policy dialogues and capacity-building programmes for African negotiators, ministers, parliamentarians, and civil society organizations, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence needed to engage effectively in increasingly complex trade negotiations.

Among SEATINI's most significant contributions was its work on the implementation of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). SEATINI consistently advised African countries against accepting TRIPS-Plus obligations that would further restrict their de-

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velopment policy options. Its evidence-based advocacy helped strengthen the African Group's position during negotiations that led to the landmark Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health. As a result, African negotiators became more coordinated, more confident, and better prepared to articulate and defend the continent's development priorities.

SEATINI also developed a strong partnership with African Missions in Geneva, providing timely policy research, technical analysis, and strategic advice to support negotiating positions at the WTO and other multilateral forums. This collaboration strengthened the capacity of African delegations to participate more effectively in negotiations and advance Africa's interests on the global stage.

The vision that inspired SEATINI resonates strongly with the thinking of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who, in The South Commission Report, called for independent Southern think tanks capable of generating knowledge, informing policy, and supporting developing countries in international negotiations. For thirty years, SEATINI has fulfilled that vision by producing credible research and serving as a trusted partner to governments, regional institutions, civil society organizations and development partners.

Over the years, SEATINI has also played an important role in analysing Africa's economic partnership arrangements with Europe. While acknowledging the potential opportunities presented by Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), the organization consistently argued that such agreements should reinforce—not undermine—Africa's industrialization agenda, value addition strategies, and regional integration efforts. Its research has consistently highlighted the need for trade agreements that promote sustainable development rather than perpetuate dependence on primary commodity exports.

As reflected throughout this commemorative magazine and in SEATINI's Strategic Plan 2026–2030, the organization remains firmly committed to promoting inclusive and sustainable human development. The global environment continues to evolve, presenting new challeng-

es, including climate change, digital transformation, debt vulnerabilities, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. These changes only reinforce the importance of SEATINI's mission to advance equitable development, economic justice, and policies that improve the lives of ordinary people.

As we celebrate this important milestone, I extend my sincere appreciation to Ms. Jane Nalunga, Executive Director of SEATINI, whose visionary leadership has guided the organization with distinction. I also commend the dedicated staff, past and present members of the Board of Trustees, partners, governments, and all those whose commitment has helped build SEATINI into the respected institution it is today.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I congratulate the entire SEATINI family on this remarkable achievement. As we mark thirty years of impact, may we renew our commitment to strengthening Africa's voice in global governance and ensuring that trade, investment, and development policies serve the interests and aspirations of our people.

Congratulations, SEATINI, on thirty years of excellence, innovation, and unwavering commitment to Africa's development.

As we mark thirty years of impact, may we renew our commitment to strengthening Africa's voice in global governance and ensuring that trade, investment, and development policies serve the interests and aspirations of our people.

Best Regards,

Amb. Nathan Irumba
Chairperson, SEATINI Board of Trustees

Message from the Chairperson of the Board of Directors

It is my great honour and privilege, as Chairperson of the Board of Directors of SEATINI, to welcome you to this special SEATINI@30 Commemorative Magazine, celebrating three decades of strengthening Africa's voice and agency in global trade and development.

Thirty years is a significant milestone for any institution. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the vision that inspired SEATINI's establishment, the journey undertaken, the impact achieved, and the responsibility that comes with shaping the future. As we celebrate this remarkable achievement, we do so with deep gratitude to the many individuals, institutions, partners, and communities whose commitment, ideas, solidarity, and unwavering support have contributed to building SEATINI into the organisation it is today.

My appreciation of SEATINI's work is deeply informed by my own experience as a diplomat and my years of engagement with international relations and multilateral processes. Diplomacy teaches us that the strength of any nation or region is not only determined by its presence at the negotiation tables, but also by its preparedness, knowledge, strategic clarity, and ability to articulate, defend, and advance its interests.

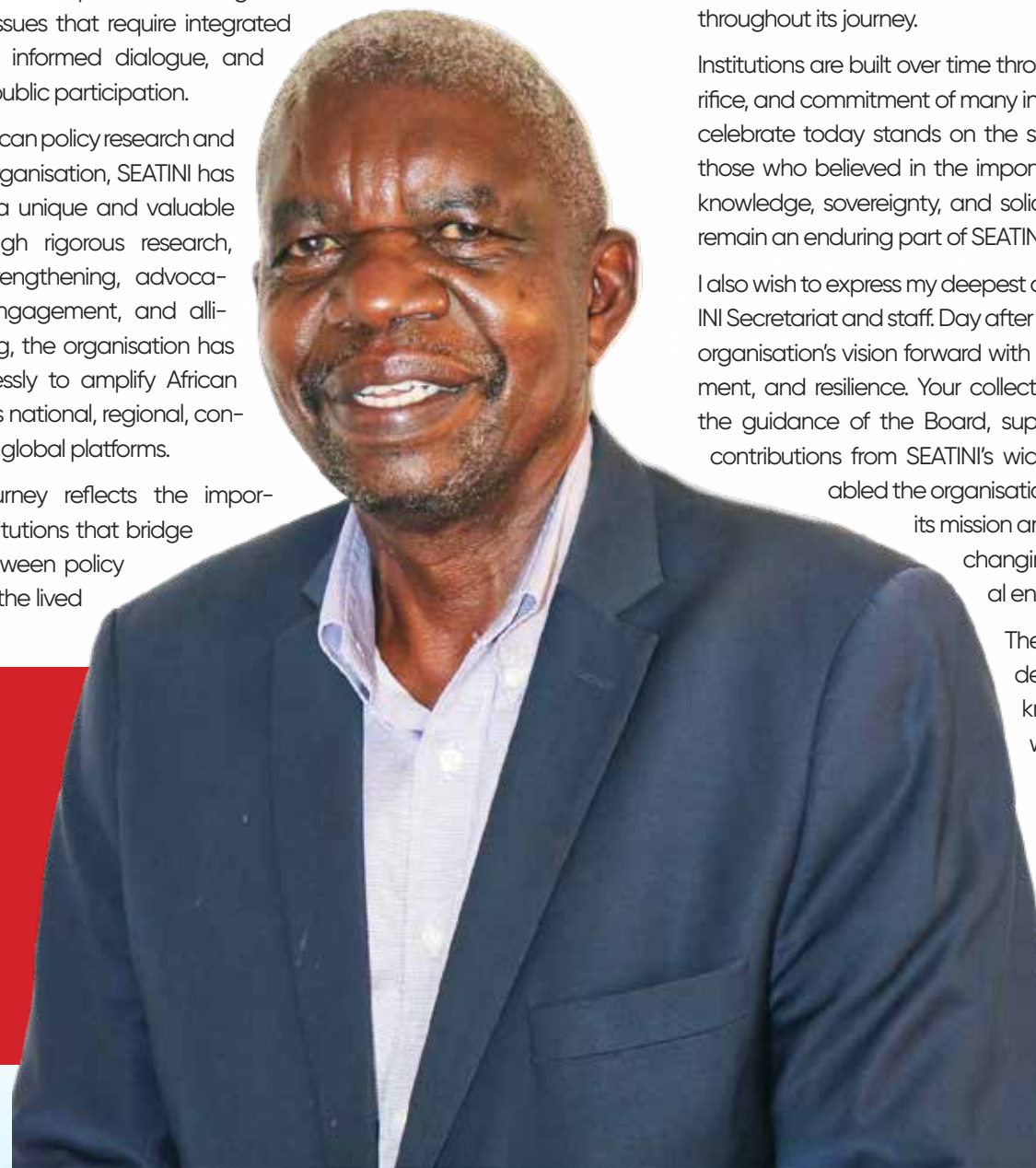
Throughout my diplomatic career, I witnessed firsthand the complexities of global negotiations and the realities of unequal power relations within the international systems. I came to appreciate that meaningful participation in global affairs requires more than formal representation; it requires technical expertise, institutional capacity, credible evidence, strategic partnerships, and the ability to build alliances that advance shared objectives.

It is through this lens that I have come to appreciate the indispensable role SEATINI continues to play in Africa's development journey. For three decades, SEATINI has worked to ensure that African stakeholders are not merely recipients of global economic rules, but active participants in shaping the policies and frameworks that influence their development pathways.

SEATINI's contribution extends far beyond trade negotiations. The organisation has consistently connected broader questions of global economic governance with the realities experienced by African communities. It has demonstrated that trade, investment, taxation, debt, climate change, agriculture, and development financing are interconnected issues that require integrated approaches, informed dialogue, and meaningful public participation.

As a pan-African policy research and advocacy organisation, SEATINI has maintained a unique and valuable niche. Through rigorous research, capacity strengthening, advocacy, policy engagement, and alliance building, the organisation has worked tirelessly to amplify African voices across national, regional, continental, and global platforms.

SEATINI's journey reflects the importance of institutions that bridge the gap between policy spaces and the lived



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The journey of strengthening Africa's voice, influence, and agency in global affairs is far from complete. It requires continued courage, collaboration, solidarity, and collective commitment.

realities of citizens. Over the years, the organisation has created platforms that enable diverse stakeholders, particularly vulnerable communities and marginalised constituencies, to engage in conversations and processes that shape Africa's economic future.

As we commemorate this 30-year milestone, I wish to recognise and pay tribute to the many individuals who have contributed to SEATINI's growth, resilience, and success. I extend my sincere appreciation to current and former Board Chairpersons and Board of Trustees, founding members, current and former staff members, partners and donors, comrades and supporters who have walked with SEATINI throughout its journey.

Institutions are built over time through the dedication, sacrifice, and commitment of many individuals. The SEATINI we celebrate today stands on the strong foundation laid by those who believed in the importance of African agency, knowledge, sovereignty, and solidarity. Their contributions remain an enduring part of SEATINI's history and legacy.

I also wish to express my deepest appreciation to the SEATINI Secretariat and staff. Day after day, you have carried the organisation's vision forward with professionalism, commitment, and resilience. Your collective efforts, together with the guidance of the Board, support from partners, and contributions from SEATINI's wider community have enabled the organisation to continue advancing its mission and remaining relevant in a changing and challenging global environment.

The Board recognises the dedication, institutional knowledge, and teamwork that continue to sustain SEATINI's work. As we move forward, we remain committed to working closely with the Secretariat and all stakeholders to strengthen the or-

ganisation's foundations, nurture its values, and ensure that SEATINI continues to make meaningful contributions to Africa's development agenda.

As the organisation embarks on implementing its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, anchored on the theme "Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Equitable and Sustainable Development," SEATINI is well positioned to respond to emerging challenges facing economies and societies. The strategy reinforces the organisation's commitment to advancing fair trade, sustainable investment, fiscal justice, inclusive development, and stronger African agency in global economic governance.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I reaffirm our solidarity with the SEATINI Secretariat, staff, partners, members, and all stakeholders who continue to champion the organisation's mission. The Board remains committed to providing strategic guidance, oversight, and support to ensure that SEATINI continues to grow as a resilient, innovative, and impactful institution. Together, we will safeguard SEATINI's values, strengthen its institutional sustainability, and deepen its contribution to Africa's transformation agenda.

As we celebrate SEATINI@30, we honour the past, celebrate the present, and look with confidence towards the future. The journey of strengthening Africa's voice, influence, and agency in global affairs is far from complete. It requires continued courage, collaboration, solidarity, and collective commitment.

May SEATINI continue to serve as a beacon of knowledge and African agency for generations to come.

Mr. Vincent Mayiga

Chairperson, Board of Directors
Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI)

Message from the Executive Director

SEATINI@30: Three Decades of Advancing Africa's Voice, Agency and Influence in Global Economic Governance



Dear Comrades,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this special edition of the SEATINI@30 Magazine, commemorating three decades of advancing Africa's voice, agency and influence in global economic governance.

This publication marks more than an institutional milestone. It celebrates a collective journey built on conviction, intellectual leadership, strategic partnerships and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that Africa is not merely a participant in the global economy, but an architect of the rules, institutions and ideas that shape its development trajectory.

For thirty years, SEATINI has remained anchored in a simple but profound conviction: Africa cannot achieve structural transformation while remaining at the margins of global economic decision-making. Sustainable development demands that African countries possess the knowledge, institutional capacity, policy space and strategic agility to define and pursue development pathways rooted in their own realities and aspirations.

Established in 1996 during a period when African countries were grappling with increasingly complex and asymmetrical global trade negotiations, SEATINI emerged from the recognition that evidence-based research, informed public policy and collective action were indispensable for strengthening Africa's negotiating position. The organisation was founded to bridge knowledge gaps, demystify global economic governance and empower African stakeholders to engage meaningfully in shaping policies that affect

their economies, societies and future generations.

Three decades later, that founding vision remains as relevant as ever.

Our work continues to be guided by Pan-African ideals of solidarity, self-determination, economic justice and shared prosperity. We believe Africa's development must be informed by African knowledge systems, African institutions and African priorities. More importantly, we believe sustainable transformation requires not only participating in existing global systems, but also challenging, reforming and where necessary redesigning those systems to serve the interests of developing countries.

The organisation we celebrate today is the product of many hands and minds. We pay tribute to our founders whose foresight recognised the importance of an African voice in global trade debates, successive Boards, management teams, staff, researchers, partners, governments, civil society organisations and communities whose commitment has sustained SEATINI's growth. Our greatest asset has always been our collective intellectual capital and our shared belief that knowledge must ultimately improve people's lives.

Over the past thirty years, SEATINI has evolved into a leading Pan-African policy research and advocacy institution with a distinctive niche of connecting rigorous evidence, policy influence and citizens' lived realities to advance equitable economic

transformation. While our work initially focused on Africa's engagement in the multilateral trading system, our agenda has expanded to address a broader range of interconnected trade and trade-related issues. This includes investment governance, industrialisation, regional integration, fiscal justice, debt, climate and environmental governance, human rights, feminist perspectives, and sustainable development, reflecting the growing linkages shaping Africa's economic transformation.

This evolution reflects an increasingly important reality: economic policy can no longer be understood through isolated sectors or institutions. Trade rules influence industrialisation. Investment agreements shape fiscal sovereignty. Tax systems determine the resources available for development. Debt dynamics constrain future policy choices. Climate policy increasingly defines competitiveness. Technological innovation is reshaping production, labour markets and international commerce.

The boundaries separating these issues have become increasingly blurred.

Today, the global economy is undergoing one of the most profound structural transitions since the end of the Second World War. A weakening multilateral system, rising protectionism and unilateralism, geopolitical fragmentation, shifting supply chains, technological disruption, climate change, and intensifying competition over strategic resources are reshaping

global economic governance.

Africa finds itself at the centre of these contestations.

The continent possesses more than half of the world's critical minerals essential for the global green and digital transition, including cobalt, graphite, manganese, rare earth elements, and lithium. These resources are indispensable for green industrialisation, yet Africa remains trapped in commodity dependence. At the same time, the continent is disproportionately vulnerable to climate shocks despite contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions. These paradoxes present both extraordinary opportunities and significant risks.

The choices African countries make over the coming decade will determine whether the continent becomes merely a supplier of raw materials for the green economy or a competitive producer of value-added goods, clean technologies and digital innovations.

Three broad economic scenarios illustrate the strategic choices before us.

The first scenario is one of continued dependence. Africa continues exporting unprocessed minerals, importing high-value manufactured products and remaining vulnerable to commodity price volatility, debt distress and external policy shocks. In this scenario, the green transition benefits others while Africa captures only a fraction of the value generated from its own natural resources.



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The second, and more desirable, scenario is one of transformative structural change. African countries invest in processing critical minerals, strengthen regional value chains, expand renewable energy infrastructure, and drive agrarian transformation alongside the development of competitive manufacturing capabilities. Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area, digital technologies, green industrialisation, and coordinated regional policies, the continent emerges as an integrated production hub within the global economy. Critical minerals become the foundation for battery manufacturing, electric mobility, renewable energy technologies, and advanced industrial production, while digital innovation, climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable finance, and inclusive industrialisation accelerate structural transformation, generate quality employment, strengthen economic resilience, and deliver broad-based prosperity.

Achieving this future, however, is neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Realising this vision requires complementary and coherent policies that reinforce one another across sectors. It demands deliberate investments in productive capacity, innovation systems, education, research, and technological capability, supported by macroeconomic stability, sustainable fiscal policies, efficient public investment, diversified economies, and resilient financial systems. It also requires strong institutions capable of negotiating complex international agreements, mobilising domestic resources, combating illicit financial flows, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance of natural resources.

For Uganda and the East African Community, these global transitions present a defining strategic moment.

SEATINI has consistently worked across these multiple levels including community, national, regional, continental and global levels recognising that meaningful transformation requires coherence between local realities and international policymaking.



The East African region possesses significant agricultural potential, abundant oil and gas resources, critical minerals, a rapidly growing digital economy, and one of the world's youngest populations. Yet these advantages will only translate into sustainable and inclusive development through the development and adoption of strategic policy choices that strengthen productive capacities, accelerate industrialisation, and enable the region to speak with a coherent voice in continental and global economic negotiations.

Regional integration is therefore no longer simply a political aspiration; it is an economic imperative.

No single African country can effectively navigate today's increasingly fragmented global economy alone. Strong Regional Economic Communities, including the East African Community, COMESA and other regional blocs, remain indispensable building blocks for implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area, expanding regional value chains, harmonising industrial policies and strengthening Africa's collective bargaining power.

Strong and accountable institutions are fundamental to Africa's economic transformation and effective participation in global economic governance. Building these institutions requires sustained investment in technical expertise, research, data systems, policy coordination and transparent governance. It is equally important to foster collaboration among governments, academia, the private sector and civil society to ensure evidence-based policymaking. Well-resourced and capable institutions at national, regional and continental levels will enable African countries to navigate global economic shifts, safeguard their interests and advance inclusive and sustainable development.

At the respective national level, governments must strengthen the institutions responsible for trade policy, industrial development, domestic resource mobilisation, investment promotion, environmental governance and economic planning. Effective policy implementation and monitoring are equally paramount to ensuring results and delivering on development objectives. Effective participation in

regional and global processes begins with capable national institutions supported by evidence, data, skilled professionals, and active citizen engagement.

SEATINI has consistently worked across these multiple levels including community, national, regional, continental and global levels recognising that meaningful transformation requires coherence between local realities and international policymaking. We remain committed to strengthening policy dialogue among governments, Parliaments, Academia, civil society, the private sector, social movements and citizens to ensure that economic governance remains inclusive, transparent and accountable.

These realities reinforce the urgency of advancing an Africa First Agenda—not one of isolation, but of strategic engagement. An Africa First Agenda places African priorities, capabilities and aspirations at the centre of engagement with the global economy. It calls for trade, investment, fiscal and industrial policies that promote structural transformation, preserve policy space, build resilience and improve

the wellbeing of African citizens.

It is within this context that SEATINI enters its next strategic chapter under the theme: "Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Equitable and Sustainable Development."

This theme reflects our conviction that Africa must move beyond responding to global developments towards actively designing and advancing alternative policy frameworks that reflect its own development priorities.

Through our 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, SEATINI will deepen its work by promoting equitable trade related policies, advancing fiscal justice and responsible development financing, supporting green industrialisation, strengthening African knowledge production, promoting digital transformation and investing in the next generation of African policy leaders, researchers and social justice champions.

Our commitment remains unwavering: to transform knowledge into policy influence; policy influence into institutional reform; institutional reform into inclusive development; and collective

action into an Africa that is prosperous, resilient, just and confident in shaping its own future.

As we celebrate SEATINI@30, we honour those who built this institution, reflect on the lessons of the past and embrace the responsibilities of the future. The next thirty years will require courage, innovation and renewed Pan-African solidarity. They will demand institutions that are stronger, economies that are more productive and policies that place people, sustainability and justice at their centre.

Africa's future will not be determined by global trends alone. It will be shaped by the choices we make today, the institutions we strengthen, the partnerships we forge and the vision we collectively pursue.

The journey continues.

Ms Jane Nalunga

**Executive Director
Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI)**

Editor's Note

Celebrating Three Decades of Strengthening Africa in World Trade

It is my honour to present the SEATINI@30 Commemorative Magazine, a special publication marking three decades of advancing Africa's voice, agency and participation in global trade and development debates.

Born from a moment of profound transformation in the global economic landscape, SEATINI's journey reflects a longstanding commitment to ensuring that Africa's voice, knowledge and priorities remain central in shaping trade and development pathways. From its beginnings, SEATINI has carried forward a vision of a *"Strong and Confident Africa in World Trade"*—an Africa equipped with the knowledge, institutions and partnerships needed to influence global economic conversations, advance sustainable development and shape a more equitable future.

Three decades later, that founding vision continues to guide SEATINI's work. What began as an institution focused on strengthening African participation in international trade negotiations has evolved into a leading Pan African NGO and Think Tank advancing equitable trade, fiscal and investment related policies across the EAC and Africa at large.

This commemorative edition captures the milestones, lessons, partnerships, ideas and people that have shaped SEATINI's journey. It reflects on the organisation's contribution to building African capacity, influencing policy debates and transforming knowledge into action from supporting trade negotiators and policymakers to empowering civil society, Policy Makers and Technocrats, researchers, communities and emerging leaders to engage meaningfully in economic governance processes.

At the centre of SEATINI's story is the belief that Africa must not only participate in global economic conversations but must actively shape the policies and institutions that define its future. Through independent research, policy analysis, capacity building and strategic partnerships, SEATINI has worked to ensure that development concerns remain central to discussions on trade, investment, finance and regional integration.

As Editorial Coordinator and Editor of this publication, I have had the privilege of bringing together the experiences, reflections and voices that document SEATINI's three-decade journey. Developing this magazine has been an opportuni-

ty to honour the vision of SEATINI's founders, recognise the leadership and dedication of successive Boards, management, staff and partners, and celebrate the collective efforts that have sustained the organisation's mission.

This publication is also a reflection on the future. As Africa navigates new challenges in global trade, climate change, digital transformation, public finance and economic inequality, the need for African-led knowledge, innovation and policy alternatives remains greater than ever. Building on its legacy, SEATINI continues to invest in the next generation of African thinkers, negotiators and policy leaders through initiatives such as the Yash Tandon Knowledge Hub and the Africentric Policy Academy.

Thirty years of SEATINI represent a legacy of knowledge, influence and action. This magazine celebrates that journey while renewing the commitment to a future where trade and development policies advance justice, sustainability, inclusion and shared prosperity across Africa.

I extend my sincere appreciation to SEATINI's leadership, Board of Trustees and Directors, staff, partners, donors, contributors and all those whose dedication has made this milestone publication possible.

May this commemorative edition inspire reflection on the journey travelled, appreciation of the impact achieved and renewed commitment to strengthening Africa in world trade.

Herbert Kafeero
Deputy Executive Director,
SEATINI
Coordinator and Editor, SEATINI@30 Commemorative Magazine



Members of the SEATINI Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees



SEATINI Staff Members

"When Prof. Yash Tandon founded the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) in the mid-1990s, Africa's voice in global trade negotiations was often fragmented and under-resourced. He believed that countries in the region needed more than technical expertise; they needed confidence, solidarity, and institutions capable of defending their development priorities. Three decades later, that vision continues to shape SEATINI's work across Africa."

Yash Tandon

Prof. Yashpal Tandon is a Ugandan scholar, author, political activist, and economist whose work has influenced debates on international trade, development, economic sovereignty, and South-South cooperation. Over several decades, he has contributed to shaping African perspectives on global economic governance through research, diplomacy, institution-building, and advocacy.

In 1968, six years after independence, Tandon wrote the "Common Man's Charter" that President Milton Obote launched a year later. Ten years later, in 1979 Yash was one of the key organizers of the Moshi Conference which launched the UNLF government. A former professor at Makerere University and the University of Dar-es-Salaam², Tandon combined his systems critique with practical engagement in local, national and international policy spaces. After exile from Uganda in 1971, he was a founding member of the Uganda National Liberation Front and was an underground freedom fighter. His career has included representing developing countries in global trade negotiations, advising governments on trade policy, and strengthening institutions that promote greater participation of the Global South in global economic decision-making.

Among his most enduring contributions is the founding of the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) in 1996. At a time when African countries were facing increasingly complex trade negotiations under the emerging global trade system, Tandon recognised the need for an institution that would build African capacity, provide independent policy analysis, and strengthen the ability of governments and civil society to engage effectively in international trade processes.

¹ The Uganda Common Man's Charter was a 1969 political and socio-economic manifesto introduced by President Milton Obote. It launched the country's "Move-to-the-Left" strategy, advocating for socialism, wealth redistribution, and the nationalization of key industries to empower marginalized African Ugandans and reduce economic inequality.

² At the University of Dar-es-Salaam, Yash built a life-long relationship with Prof. Dan Nabudere and edited regular publications like the Debate on Class, State and Imperialism – see 3 Questions from the Dar es Salaam Debates.

[Zeyad el Nabolsy: Revolutionary Movements in Africa: An Untold Story](#), 2024, pp. 244–261

Early Life, Education and Intellectual Foundations

Born on 21 June 1939 in Kaberamaido, Uganda, Tandon grew up in a trading family of Indian origin during the colonial period. He spent much of his early childhood in Moroto, amongst the Karamoja peoples. His early experiences in rural Uganda exposed him to the complexities of colonial economic structures, social relations, and the challenges of nation-building during the transition to independence.

He completed his secondary education in Mbale before pursuing higher education in the United Kingdom. He studied economics at the London School of Economics (LSE), where he later earned a PhD in International Relations in 1969. His academic formation coincided with a period of global decolonisation and growing debates about political independence, economic sovereignty, and the relationship between newly independent states and global economic institutions.

Upon returning to Uganda, Tandon joined Makerere University, where he taught political science from 1964 to 1971. His time at Makerere placed him at the centre of intellectual debates on African development, post-colonial transformation, and the search for economic models that reflected African realities.

He later served as Professor of Political Economy at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania from 1973 to 1979, contributing to scholarship on development, dependency, and international political economy. These academic experiences shaped his lifelong interest in understanding how global economic systems influence the development choices available to countries of the Global South.

SEATINI@30:

THE JOURNEY

CENTRAL FIGURES IN SEATINI'S HISTORY AND JOURNEY

YASH TANDON: THE VISIONARY BEHIND SEATINI'S FOUNDING AND GLOBAL TRADE ADVOCACY



Prof. Yash Tandon with H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of Uganda

A Scholar, Activist and Advocate for African Economic Sovereignty

Throughout his career, Tandon has examined the ongoing imperial domination of former colonies, which brought him to one of the primary strangleholds of imperial power: international trade. His writings and research have consistently questioned approaches that he believes limit the ability of developing countries to pursue independent development strategies.

His books, including *Ending Aid Dependence* (2008) and *Trade Is War: The West's War Against the World* (2015), reflect his longstanding arguments on self-reliance, more equitable global economic relations, and the importance of strengthening domestic productive capacity in developing countries.

Tandon translated these fundamental critiques into practical policy engagement. He participated in global trade discussions through platforms including the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), advocating for stronger representation and solidarity of and between developing countries and greater attention to their development priorities.

The Founding of SEATINI: Building Africa's Capacity in Global Trade Negotiations

The establishment of SEATINI in 1996 represented a defining moment in Tandon's commitment to strengthening Africa's

voice in global economic governance.

At the time, African countries were increasingly required to negotiate complex agreements involving trade liberalisation, agriculture, intellectual property, and regional integration. However, many governments lacked adequate technical capacity and independent research support to effectively defend their interests.

Tandon envisioned SEATINI as an institution that would bridge this gap by providing research, training, and policy support to African governments, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. Under his leadership, SEATINI worked to strengthen understanding of international trade rules, improve negotiation capacity, and promote African-led approaches to development.

Through SEATINI, Tandon advanced the principle that Africa's participation in global trade should not only focus on market access but also address Africa's quests for structural transformation, industrialisation, food security, improved livelihoods, and sustainable development.

Engagement with the South Centre and Global South Cooperation

Tandon's contribution to South-South cooperation was further demonstrated through his leadership at the South Centre, an intergovernmental policy research institution based in Geneva.

From 2005 to 2009, he served as Executive Director of the

South Centre, where he worked to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to engage in international negotiations on trade, intellectual property, health, and sustainable development.

During his tenure, the South Centre provided research and policy analysis to support developing countries in multilateral forums, including WTO negotiations. His leadership reflected his broader commitment to ensuring that countries of the Global South had access to independent expertise and could articulate shared positions on global economic issues.

His work at the South Centre complemented his earlier efforts through SEATINI: strengthening institutions that enable developing countries to participate more effectively in shaping global rules rather than simply responding to them.

Continued Service to Uganda and Enduring Support for SEATINI

As a true son of Uganda, Yash Tandon remained deeply connected to Uganda's development journey. Over the years, he contributed time and expertise to national policy discussions, served as an advisor to the Government of Uganda through the Office of the Prime Minister, and provided insights on African governance, economic policy, development strategy, and issues affecting Uganda's engagement with the global economy.

His advisory role reflected his longstanding commitment to ensuring that national development priorities are informed by strong research, strategic thinking, and an understanding of global economic dynamics. Drawing from decades of experience in international trade, political economy, and development policy, Prof. Tandon has continued to share knowledge that supports Uganda's efforts to navigate changing global realities while pursuing sustainable and inclusive development.

Yash Tandon's journey represents a lifelong commitment to knowledge, social justice, and African agency. From his early academic work and public service in Uganda to his global advocacy for fairer economic relations, his legacy continues through SEATINI and other institutions he helped build, the generations of policymakers and scholars he has influenced, and the ongoing work of SEATINI across Africa.

His vision continues to guide SEATINI's vision of "Strengthening Africa in World Trade".

SEATINI's Founding Leadership: The Visionaries Who Shaped the Organisation's Early Journey

SEATINI's early Board of Trustees played a foundational role in providing strategic oversight, institutional credibility and governance guidance as the organization established its structures and expanded its engagement within African and global policy spaces.

The founding trustees brought together diverse expertise in diplomacy, academia, governance, public leadership and development policy, reflecting SEATINI's commitment to building an institution grounded in knowledge, policy advocacy and African agency.

Yash Tandon, SEATINI's founding Director and one of the principal architects of the institution, provided the intellectual foundation that shaped SEATINI's vision of strengthening Africa's voice in global trade and economic policy debates. His leadership established the organization's commitment to independent research, policy engagement and capacity building.

Other members of the early Board of Trustees, including Mrs. Helena Bank, Mrs. Hellen Wangusa and Mr. Amedee Darga, and Ms. Nidhi Tandon, contributed to building SEATINI's governance framework and strengthening its public-interest approach to trade, development and economic policy. Their collective experience helped guide the institution during its formative years and supported its emergence as a respected African policy organization.

Leadership Through Three Decades

Over the past three decades, SEATINI has been guided by visionary leaders whose commitment and stewardship have shaped the organization into a leading African voice on trade, development, and economic justice.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has provided strategic oversight and safeguarded SEATINI's long-term vision. The current Chairperson, Ambassador Nathan Irumba, continues to steer the organization with strategic leadership, building on the legacy of Prof. Yash Tandon, whose founding vision and commitment to economic justice laid the foundation for SEATINI's growth and impact.

Board of Directors

Behind every milestone in SEATINI's 30-year journey stands a dedicated Board whose leadership, wisdom, and com-



mitment have shaped the institution's growth and impact. We proudly recognise and celebrate our current and former Board members for their invaluable service, principled governance and steadfast dedication to advancing Africa's trade, development, and economic justice agenda.

SEATINI has been strengthened by the strategic leadership of its Board of Directors. Our current Chairperson, Mr. Vincent Mayiga, continues this legacy, building on the distinguished leadership of Prof. Mwambutsya Ndebesa, Prof. Edward Oyugi, and Philip Thigo, whose stewardship expanded SEATINI's regional influence and institutional excellence.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all past and present Board members. Their enduring legacy continues to guide and inspire SEATINI's future.

Executive Leadership

SEATINI's success has also been driven by dedicated executive leadership. Ambassador Nathan Iumba, as former Chief Executive Director contributed towards SEATINI's institutional growth and strengthened the organization's regional presence across Eastern and Southern Africa.

Today, Ms. Jane Nalunga, Executive Director of SEATINI Uganda, continues to advance the organization's mission. SEATINI also acknowledges the significant contributions of former Executive Directors Mr. Rangarirai Machemedze and Mr. Odour Ongwen whose leadership strengthened regional collaboration and expanded the organization's influence.

As SEATINI celebrates 30 years of impact, it pays tribute to the current and former management and staff whose dedication, professionalism and unwavering commitment have

been the driving force behind the organization's achievements. Their collective efforts have built a resilient institution that continues to champion Africa's interests in regional and global economic governance.

Patrons: Distinguished Supporters of SEATINI's Vision

SEATINI's early patrons represented a network of African and international thinkers, scholars and leaders who supported the organization's vision of economic justice, self-determination and equitable global development.

Among them were Prof. Samuel Bengu, Prof. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Mr. F. Pascual, Dr. M. Tsele, Ms. S. Soto, Dr. A. Bendana and Mrs. P. B. Monyai. Their support reflected a shared commitment to strengthening African knowledge systems, promoting inclusive development and advancing fairer approaches to global economic governance.

A Legacy of Collective Vision

The contributions of SEATINI's founding trustees, leadership and patrons went beyond institutional establishment; they shaped the values and principles that continue to guide the organization. Their collective vision helped define SEATINI as an institution committed to ensuring that trade and economic policies advance the interests of people, communities and sustainable development.

Thirty years later, SEATINI's continued work on trade, fiscal and investment-related issues remains rooted in the foundations laid by those who championed African agency, informed policy dialogue and equitable global engagement.

SEATINI@30: THREE DECADES OF IMPACT AND POLICY LEADERSHIP

"For three decades, SEATINI has worked to ensure that Africa is not merely a participant in global trade discussions, but an active shaper of the policies and institutions that govern international economic relations."

The Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) was founded in 1996 by Professor Yash Tandon, a Ugandan scholar, political economist, and long-standing champion of African economic sovereignty. Its establishment came at a defining moment in global economic governance. Across much of Africa, countries were implementing Structural Adjustment Programmes prescribed by the Bretton Woods Institutions, while the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) had significantly expanded multilateral trade rules into new areas such as intellectual property, investment-related measures and services. Many African countries entered these agreements with limited technical capacity to assess

their long-term implications.

Recognizing this gap, SEATINI was established to strengthen Africa's capacity to engage effectively in international trade and economic governance through independent research, policy analysis, advocacy, and capacity strengthening. What began as a trade information and negotiations institute has, over three decades, evolved into one of Africa's leading independent policy think tanks advancing equitable trade, investment governance, fiscal justice, sustainable agriculture, domestic resource mobilisation, and inclusive development.

Throughout its journey, SEATINI has transformed knowledge into policy influence, empowering policymakers, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, researchers, private sector actors, local governments, and communities to participate meaningfully in national, regional, and global decision-making. Its work has consistently sought to ex-





pand Africa's policy space and ensure that trade and economic policies contribute to sustainable and people-centred development.

1996–2001: Building Africa's Trade Knowledge and Voice

SEATINI's early years were dedicated to demystifying a global trading system that had been fundamentally reshaped by the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the creation of the WTO. The first WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Singapore in December 1996, introduced the so-called "Singapore Issues" including investment, competition policy, government procurement, and trade facilitation onto the multilateral agenda with limited African participation. This development underscored the urgent need for an African institution capable of providing independent analysis and strengthening the continent's negotiating capacity.

One of SEATINI's flagship initiatives during this period was the SEATINI Bulletin, a fortnightly publication that translated complex WTO legal texts and Geneva-based negotiations into accessible analysis for African trade officials, parliamentarians, journalists, academics, and civil society organisations. For many across the continent, the Bulletin became the leading independent Africa-focused source of information on multilateral trade negotiations and a trusted reference for policy debates.

SEATINI also organized training programmes, policy dia-

logues, exchange visits, and technical workshops for government negotiators while broadening participation in trade policymaking beyond ministries of trade. Through research and advocacy, it brought parliamentarians, civil society organisations, farmers' organisations, academia, and the private sector into discussions that had previously been confined to government officials.

During this period, SEATINI established close working relationships with African Missions in Geneva, providing timely policy analysis, technical briefings, and strategic advice that strengthened African negotiating positions at the WTO. These collaborations laid the foundation for enduring partnerships that continue to support Africa's engagement in multilateral trade negotiations.

2001–2006: Advancing Development-Centred Trade Policies

The launch of the Doha Development Round in November 2001 marked a new phase in global trade negotiations. Two years later, the Cancún Ministerial Conference collapsed after developing countries rejected proposals, they believed failed to address their development priorities, particularly on agriculture and the Singapore Issues. SEATINI, working alongside institutions such as the Third World Network and the South Centre, provided research, technical analysis, and policy coordination that supported African negotiators in articulating stronger common positions.

During this period, SEATINI produced influential policy pa-

pers on agricultural subsidies, special and differential treatment, industrial policy, and the preservation of policy space for development. These analyses contributed to the formulation of African negotiating positions and strengthened collaboration among African trade ministries and negotiators.

SEATINI also became a leading African voice on the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The organisation consistently advised African countries against accepting TRIPS-Plus obligations that would further restrict development policy options. Its evidence-based advocacy contributed to strengthening the African Group's position during negotiations that culminated in the landmark Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, reaffirming the right of governments to protect public health and improve access to essential medicines.

This period also saw the beginning of negotiations on the European Union's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. SEATINI emerged as one of Africa's leading independent voices advocating for trade agreements that would support, rather than undermine, industrialization, regional integration, and value addition. Its research consistently highlighted the risks that reciprocal trade liberalization posed to tariff revenue, infant industries, and long-term structural transformation.



2007–2016: Strengthening African Agency in Trade Negotiations

As negotiations on the East African Community-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement intensified, SEATINI worked closely with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), the East African Community Secretariat, regional civil society organisations, and research partners to generate robust evidence on the implications of the agreement for revenue, industrialization, and regional integration.

Its research informed parliamentary debates, national consultations, and technical discussions with trade officials across East Africa. The organisation provided regular technical updates following negotiating rounds and consistently advocated for preserving the policy space needed to support industrial development and regional integration.

This sustained engagement contributed to a significant regional outcome. While Kenya signed and ratified the EU-Kenya EPA to preserve preferential access to the European market, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi did not sign the full EAC-EU EPA, a position broadly consistent with the concerns SEATINI had consistently raised over nearly a decade regarding industrial policy, tariff revenue, and regional integration.

SEATINI also deepened its collaboration with the Government of Uganda by contributing technical analysis that

informed the country's negotiating briefs ahead of successive WTO Ministerial Conferences.

2015–2020: Broadening the Economic Governance Agenda

Recognizing that trade could no longer be addressed in isolation from investment, taxation, and corporate accountability, SEATINI expanded its work to include investment governance and responsible business conduct. It advocated for the domestication of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights within national legal and policy frameworks.

SEATINI was also among the first African organisations to raise concerns about the implications of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) for African countries. Working alongside international partners, including Corporate Europe Observatory, the Transnational Institute, and Both ENDS, it published influential research demonstrating how the Treaty could expose governments to costly investor-state dispute settlement claims while constraining climate and energy policy.

The organisation convened multi-stakeholder dialogues, including youth engagements, on investment treaty reform, helping establish one of Africa's most informed civil society coalitions on international investment governance.

Domestically, SEATINI strengthened the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises by supporting quality standards compliance, certification processes, and access to regional markets. Partnerships with universities and youth organisations also helped nurture a new generation of trade and development researchers.

2020–2026: Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Sustainable Development

The fiscal and economic shocks brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic sharpened SEATINI's focus on fiscal justice, domestic resource mobilisation, and public debt governance. Building on years of policy engagement, the organisation consolidated its position as a pioneer of tax justice advocacy in Uganda. As Secretariat of the Tax Justice Alliance Uganda (TJA-Uganda), a coalition of more than 65 civil society organisations, institutions and individuals working at national and sub-national levels, SEATINI has led evidence-based advocacy for a more equitable, transparent and accountable tax system. SEATINI reviewed the effectiveness of the IMF's Tax Administration Diagnostic Assessment Tool (TADAT), developed civil society alterna-

tive tax proposals ahead of successive national budgets and supported local governments in designing and reviewing Local Revenue Enhancement Plans that strengthened both revenue collection and citizen participation in local public finance.

In recognition of its contribution to strengthening Uganda's tax system, SEATINI received the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) Commissioner General's Strategic Professional Body Award for the Financial Year 2020/2021. The award acknowledged the organisation's outstanding contribution to tax policy formulation, tax education and public awareness, affirming its leadership in promoting fiscal justice and domestic resource mobilisation in Uganda.

SEATINI also championed the Buy Ugandan, Build Uganda (BUBU) agenda, promoting local content policies that support domestic enterprises. At the multilateral level, it joined regional and international civil society organisations in advocating against the expansion of binding e-commerce and digital trade rules at the WTO without adequate safeguards for developing countries.

As negotiations towards the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) commenced, SEATINI engaged from the onset through research, policy analysis, and dialogue platforms to ensure that the Agreement advances Africa's development aspirations. Working alongside Third World Network-Africa and Enda CACID, SEATINI convened regional consultative forums under the "Make AfCFTA Work" campaign to strengthen civil society engagement and advocate for an inclusive AfCFTA that benefits women, youth, MSMEs, and Africa's productive sectors. Beyond its national work, SEATINI continues to serve as the Eastern and Southern Africa Sub-regional Pillar of the Africa Trade Network (ATN), coordinating regional civil society advocacy for trade justice and supporting effective AfCFTA implementation as a pathway for deeper integration and sustainable development.

The organisation also expanded its work on gender-responsive trade and investment governance by developing a facilitator's training manual for gender champions to address gender-based violence in commercial investment schemes across the East African Community. It continued advancing sustainable agriculture and agroecology through research on food sovereignty and the implications of emerging European Union sustainability measures for African agricultural exports.

In June 2026, SEATINI and the East African Legislative As-



sembly (EALA) signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in promoting inclusive trade, regional integration, evidence-based policymaking and legislative engagement across the East African Community. The agreement formalised a strategic partnership that had evolved through nearly two decades of technical collaboration between the two institutions.

Highlights of Three Decades

- Strengthened Africa's capacity to engage effectively in international trade and economic governance through independent research, policy analysis, advocacy and capacity strengthening.
- Produced the SEATINI Bulletin, a flagship publication that became one of Africa's leading independent sources of analysis on WTO negotiations and global trade policy.
- Trained successive generations of African trade negotiators, ministers, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, researchers, journalists and private sector actors to engage effectively in WTO, EPA, AfCFTA and regional trade processes.
- Established enduring technical partnerships with African Missions in Geneva, providing policy analysis and strategic advice that strengthened African participation in WTO and other multilateral negotiations.
- Contributed to strengthening the African Group's negotiating position during the WTO negotiations that culminated in the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, while consistently advocating against TRIPS-Plus obligations.
- Produced influential research that informed African positions on agriculture, industrial policy, special and

differential treatment and the Singapore Issues.

- Built the evidence base that informed Uganda's, Tanzania's, Rwanda's and Burundi's continued non-signature of the full EAC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, safeguarding policy space for industrialisation, domestic revenue mobilisation and regional integration.
- Contributed technical policy analysis to Uganda's negotiating positions at successive WTO Ministerial Conferences.
- Successfully advocated for the reform of international investment agreements, including critical analysis of the Energy Charter Treaty and Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanisms.
- Advanced responsible investment governance through advocacy for the domestication of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Pioneered tax justice advocacy in Uganda and continues to serve as Secretariat of the Tax Justice Alliance Uganda (TJA-Uganda), coordinating a coalition of more than 65 civil society organisations, institutions and individuals advocating for equitable, accountable and transparent tax systems.
- Received the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) Commissioner General's Strategic Professional Body Award for FY 2020/2021 in recognition of its outstanding contribution to tax policy formulation and tax education and awareness.
- Strengthened fiscal justice and domestic resource mobilisation through independent tax policy analysis, alternative national budget proposals, reviews of tax administration reforms and support to Local Revenue



MOMENTS THAT SHAPED OUR JOURNEY



Enhancement Plans.

- Promoted the Buy Uganda, Build Uganda (BUBU) agenda while supporting MSMEs to improve quality standards, certification and regional market access.
- Served as the Eastern and Southern Africa Sub-regional Pillar of the Africa Trade Network (ATN), coordinating regional civil society advocacy for trade justice and equitable trade policies across Africa.
- Co-led continental civil society engagement on the African Continental Free Trade Area through the Make AfCFTA Work platform alongside Third World Network-Africa and Enda CACID.
- Advanced research and advocacy on sustainable agriculture, agroecology, food sovereignty and the implications of emerging sustainability standards for African producers.
- Mainstreamed gender into trade and investment governance through research, advocacy and practical tools addressing gender-based violence in commercial investment schemes.
- Signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) in June 2026 to strengthen collaboration on regional integration, trade policy and legislative engagement across the East African Community.
- Built enduring partnerships with governments, regional institutions, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, academia, youth, development partners and the private sector across Africa.

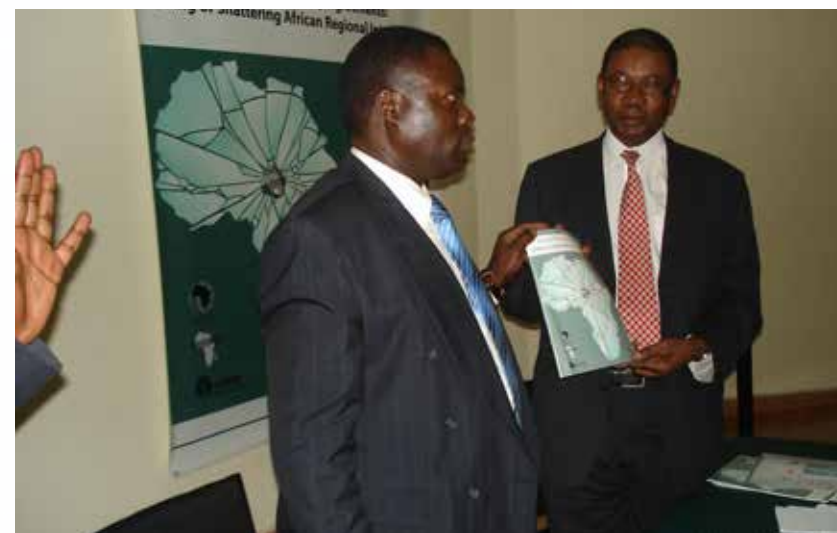
A Legacy of Knowledge, Influence, and Action

Thirty years on, SEATINI stands among Africa's leading independent policy institutions advancing equitable trade, investment governance, fiscal justice and sustainable development. From strengthening Africa's voice in global trade negotiations to pioneering tax justice advocacy in Uganda, championing responsible investment governance, and supporting regional integration, the organisation has consistently transformed knowledge into policy influence and policy influence into tangible development outcomes.

Building on the vision of Professor Yash Tandon and inspired by the ideals of independent Southern policy leadership, SEATINI continues to invest in the next generation of African thinkers, negotiators, and development leaders through initiatives such as the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub and the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy.

As Africa navigates an increasingly complex global economy shaped by climate change, technological transformation, debt vulnerabilities, and shifting geopolitical dynamics, SEATINI remains steadfast in advancing Africentric alternatives that place justice, inclusion, sustainability, and shared prosperity at the centre of economic transformation. Building on three decades of experience, the organisation will continue transforming knowledge into policy influence and policy influence into meaningful change for Africa.

MOMENTS THAT SHAPED OUR JOURNEY



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AFRICA IN A CHANGING WORLD

Promoting Africa's development agenda in the challenging global trading system



By Dr. Martin Luther Munu,
Maastricht University, formerly
with SEATINI Uganda

Africa's development agenda is well articulated in different strategies at the continental, regional, and national levels, all of which prioritize structural transformation. African countries want to transform their economies through inclusive and sustainable means. Trade plays a key role in Africa's structural transformation agenda, especially by facilitating job creation, value chain development, and meaningful integration into the global economy. However, the global trading system is evolving in ways that make it more challenging for Africa to realize its development agenda, which raises the question of what Africa's response should be.

Since 1996, the global trading system has been shaped by World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, which were built on earlier decades of multilateralism. These rules emphasize integrating de-

veloping and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) into the global trading system by enhancing market access, technical support, and capacity building while maintaining Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), as entrenched in WTO law. While multilateralism provided opportunities for cooperation, it failed to address Africa's development needs because it promoted greater liberalization without addressing value chain development constraints and the market entry challenges faced by African exporters. Power dynamics and now geopolitical rivalries at the WTO continue to prevent Members from negotiating rules that promote Africa's development, facilitate market access, and meaningfully increase capacity building to address Africa's supply-side constraints.

Major global economic actors, such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), in response to challenges facing the WTO, are now prioritizing bilateral trade arrangements and, in some cases, less ambitious agreements, also known as "trade deals," to promote their interests. These developments present a new challenge to Africa's development agenda because they undermine the continent's strong and collective negotiating





Trade policy design and implementation at the regional and national levels are crucial to Africa's structural transformation.

major economic powers bilaterally, where they have less leverage. Moreover, the priorities of major countries regarding capacity building are shifting toward geopolitical interests, such as Western efforts to counter China and the Russia–Ukraine war.

Africa's response to the emerging challenges in the global trading system needs to be an African-inspired, Africa-led initiative that promotes people-centered integration at both the regional and continental levels. The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 reflects a collective vision of the Africa we want in terms of promoting inclusive growth, sustainable development, and poverty eradication. African countries should go beyond such pronouncements to ensure that concrete steps are taken at both the policy and implementation levels to realize the ambition of the Africa we want, for Africans and by Africans.

Regional integration has emerged as a crucial initiative that can help Africa navigate the evolving global trade architecture. Through Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Africa needs to strengthen economic, cultural, and social relations to benefit its people. The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) brings together all the RECs to facilitate coherent trade policies that play a crucial role in advancing the ideals of the Africa we want on two fronts. First, it has the potential to integrate production and strengthen regional value chains in a way that facilitates inclusion. Second, it allows the continent to negotiate with third parties as a bloc, especially if a well-structured Common External Tariff (CET) is agreed upon and adhered to.

The aggressive efforts by developed countries to promote their economic interests and leverage have undermined Africa's development agenda. For instance, bilateral trade agreements

such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), as well as other bilateral trade agreements between countries such as the US, China, and Russia and individual African countries, as well as RECs, pose a significant threat to Africa's development interests. These bilateral agreements not only balkanize the continent but also undermine regional integration by diminishing the role of CETs in protecting regional value chain development. Moreover, they promote friction among Africa's regional partners, which may lead to regional trade wars, mirroring the current trade tensions among major global economic actors.

Africa needs to present a united front when engaging with its partners amid the current challenges facing the international trading system. The AfCFTA, together with all its protocols, should guide the negotiating positions of African countries, not only at the WTO but also in bilateral trade agreements. Furthermore, African countries need to coordinate their policy and negotiating positions to ensure coherence between their trade policy priorities and other trade-related issues, especially investment and global financial governance. Extensive trade liberalization has been the priority of trade and trade-related agreements involving African countries, but, as experience has shown, this has not achieved the desired outcomes of structural transformation across the continent. In some instances, trade liberalization has instead promoted deindustrialization, unfair natural resource extraction, and the exclusion of Africans from meaningful integration into global value chains. Therefore, a united front would enable African countries to shape global discussions and narratives in ways that better represent the continent's interests.

A united front among African countries should form the basis for setting the global agenda rather than remaining reactive, which has largely been the case. The Global North has, for decades, shaped the global trade and trade-related agenda, although the rise of countries such as China is beginning to challenge

this dominance. Africa, however, continues to be more reactive than proactive in global agenda-setting. The current challenges should incentivize Africa to push for a stronger African voice in shaping the evolving global trade architecture, especially regarding emerging issues related to critical minerals, of which Africa is a major supplier, digital trade, and rising geopolitical rivalries, where countries are seeking allies in both trade and non-trade-related areas.

Trade policy design and implementation at the regional and national levels are crucial to Africa's structural transformation. Even though global challenges play an important role in shaping national development outcomes, domestic policymaking is equally crucial. African countries need to learn from the lessons of extensive trade liberalization since the 1980s and respond with appropriate policy measures. The role of the state in promoting economic development should be institutionalized in national development planning. Attracting private sector investment in some critical areas of industrial development is difficult, requiring state intervention. However, state intervention should guard against bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption if it is to succeed. Furthermore, government intervention should facilitate, rather than constrain, the growth and competitiveness of the domestic private sector. All this calls for balanced and responsive trade and development policies that take Africa's unique circumstances into account rather than transplanting external ideas into the continent.

At the regional and continental levels, African countries should

pursue integration that attaches equal importance to economic needs and people's livelihoods. While regional integration, through its different stages from a free trade area to a customs union and a common market, offers significant economic benefits, ensuring that people's livelihoods and development interests are met is equally important. Therefore, governments, together with regional and continental institutions, should create sufficient space for people's participation in trade negotiations, policy design, monitoring, and implementation. Participation should go beyond attendance at meetings to include mechanisms that assess the effectiveness of stakeholder participation and its implications for people's livelihoods.

In conclusion, promoting Africa's development agenda within the current global trade architecture requires an innovative approach that advances Africa's interests at the multilateral level while facilitating development-oriented frameworks at the national, regional, and continental levels. At the multilateral level, Africa needs to strengthen coordination not only to promote coherence between trade and trade-related policy priorities but also to ensure that these align with the AfCFTA agenda. Furthermore, Africa needs to strengthen alliances with other developing countries and LDCs to promote and defend their shared interests. The national and regional/continental agenda should be guided by the need to improve people's livelihoods, thereby facilitating inclusive development. In all these levels, the space for stakeholder participation in trade and trade-related policymaking needs to be expanded, and stakeholders' contributions should be considered before any

Africa needs to present a united front when engaging with its partners amid the current challenges facing the international trading system.

SEATINI@30: Strengthening Africa's Agency in Global Trade Governance

By Prof. Mwambutsya Ndebesa, Emeritus Chairperson and Member, SEATINI Board of Trustees

agreement is reached.

Introduction

The contemporary international trading system has its roots in the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947 and was later institutionalized through the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. Built around the principles of trade liberalization, this global trade order has largely been shaped by institutions and economic interests located in the Global North.

Trade is far more than an economic activity; it is a powerful driver of development that influences

livelihoods, industrialization, agriculture, labour, public health, environmental sustainability, and human welfare. While advocacy

of free trade argue that it promotes economic growth and reduces poverty, the experience of many African countries tells a more complex story. Although trade liberalization has generated opportunities, it has also imposed significant social, economic, and environmental costs on African economies, industries, smallholder farmers, workers, and communities.

Nearly eight decades after the establishment of the post-war trading system, Africa still accounts for only about two per cent of global trade, a stark reminder that the benefits of the global trading system have not been equitably shared.

When the rules governing global trade were first negotiated in 1947, most African countries remained under colonial rule and therefore had no voice in shaping the norms, agreements, and institutions that continue to influence international commerce today. Between the 1960s and the early 1990s, although African states had attained political independence, global trade governance unfolded within the constraints of Cold War bipolarity, limiting opportunities for Africa to influence systemic reforms.

The creation of the WTO in the mid-1990s coincided with the emergence of a unipolar international order dominated by the United States. Since then, the world has gradually evolved into an increasingly multipolar system

characterized by both cooperation and geopolitical tensions. Throughout this period, the global financial and trade architecture has remained strongly influenced by neoliberal economic principles promoted through institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the WTO.

Despite advocating trade liberalization, many developed countries have continued to protect strategic sectors through agricultural subsidies and other forms of state support. These inconsistencies have disadvantaged many developing countries and constrained Africa's ability to compete fairly in global markets.

It is within this context that SEATINI was established in 1996. Together with like-minded organisations and social justice movements, SEATINI has consistently challenged inequitable trade governance while promoting a people-centred approach to development founded on social justice, equity, and sustainable development.

SEATINI's Role in Shaping Norms and Ideas

SEATINI was founded thirty years ago as a think tank and advocacy organisations committed to advancing social justice within global trade governance. Its central mission has been to strengthen Africa's agency in shaping trade rules and policies while challenging governance systems that

privilege profit over people.

Since its inception, SEATINI has sought to ensure that issues of social justice, environmental sustainability, labour rights, public health, and human rights occupy a central place in global trade debates. At a time when many international institutions focused primarily on market liberalization, SEATINI worked alongside civil society organisations across the world to broaden the global trade agenda beyond commercial interests.

As an institution shaping progressive trade governance, SEATINI has helped influence the ideas, values, and principles that underpin trade policy at the global, continental, and national levels. Through research, advocacy, and strategic engagement, it has advanced a vision of trade that is equitable, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and centred on human development.

Through policy submissions, research publications, and participation in forums convened by the WTO, UNCTAD, the United Nations, UNFCCC, the African Union, the World Bank, IMF and other multilateral institutions, SEATINI has contributed to shaping discourse around fair trade and development. Its

work has helped socialize progressive ideas among policymakers, negotiators, civil society actors, and academic communities, reinforcing Africa's voice in global governance.

Policy Advocacy

Beyond shaping ideas, SEATINI has played a significant role as a policy advocate. It has worked to influence trade and investment policies in ways that advance development, protect social rights, and strengthen Africa's negotiating capacity.

Over the past three decades, SEATINI

has prepared policy briefs, position papers, and technical submissions for governments, regional organisations, and international institutions. It has actively participated in negotiations at the WTO, UNCTAD, COP climate conferences, and other global policy platforms while supporting the drafting of trade agreements, treaties, and policy frameworks that incorporate pro-people provisions and human rights safeguards.

SEATINI has also engaged policymakers through evidence-based advocacy, public dialogue, policy coordi-





nation, and, where necessary, public interest litigation. Its expertise has enabled it to contribute to government delegations participating in international negotiations.

At the national level, in each country where SEATINI has a presence and through its partner institutions, the organization has consistently advocated for stronger protection of labour rights, farmers' rights, gender equality, public health, a supportive policy ecosystem for agro-based MSMEs in particular and the private sector in general, trade and climate justice, and environmental sustainability in trade and investment policies.

Regionally, SEATINI has worked closely with institutions including the African Union, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, COMESA, the East African Community (EAC), East African Legislative Assembly, and SADC, contributing to policy discussions and supporting governments responsible for treaty negotiations. It has also collaborated extensively with ministries of trade, parliaments, regulatory agencies, civil society organisations, and the media to raise public awareness about the

implications of trade policy for citizens' rights and livelihoods.

Capacity Building

Capacity strengthening has remained one of SEATINI's defining contributions. The organization has trained trade negotiators, government officials, parliamentarians, journalists, civil society organisations, students, and community leaders on trade governance, negotiation skills, and policy analysis. By strengthening technical knowledge and negotiation capacity, SEATINI has helped African policymakers engage more effectively in regional and international trade negotiations.

Its internship programmes have supported students from Uganda and abroad, while its training initiatives have equipped citizens with the knowledge required to monitor policy implementation, engage constructively with government institutions, and participate meaningfully in public policy processes.

SEATINI has also worked closely with East African legislators and local governments to enhance understanding of how global trade rules affect local economies, livelihoods, and develop-



ment outcomes.

Research remains central to these efforts. Through policy-oriented research and dissemination of evidence, SEATINI has strengthened advocacy for fair trade policies while creating an informed constituency capable of holding governments and corporations accountable.

Coalition Building

Recognizing that meaningful policy change requires collective action, SEATINI has invested heavily in coalition building.

Over the years, it has established extensive networks linking civil society



organisations, academic institutions, policymakers, students, government agencies, and international partners. These coalitions have strengthened advocacy across national, regional, continental, and global platforms.

policies on communities, workers, and the environment. It has documented instances where governments or corporations fail to uphold agreed standards and has supported public interest litigation where appropriate.

Through monitoring reports, evidence-based assessments, and stakeholder engagement, SEATINI continues to promote responsible business conduct while encouraging greater accountability among governments, corporations, and international institutions.

Building Institutional Capacity

Over three decades, SEATINI has built considerable institutional capacity founded on knowledge, technical expertise, credibility, and legitimacy.

Its influence derives from rigorous research, evidence-based advocacy, strategic partnerships, and a strong reputation for intellectual leadership. By producing policy research, publications, and technical analyses, SEATINI has earned the trust of governments, development partners, civil society, and regional institutions.

Its greatest strengths remain its cognitive influence, its ability to shape public discourse, and the credibility it has built through consistent engagement over the past thirty years.

Looking Ahead

As SEATINI marks its thirtieth anniversary, its mission remains as relevant

as ever. The organization will continue advocating for a global trade system that advances the common good through equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development.

Looking ahead, SEATINI plans to establish a Knowledge Hub and a Policy Academy to strengthen research, leadership development, and policy engagement across Africa. These initiatives will enhance the continent's capacity to influence global governance and develop the next generation of policy leaders.

SEATINI also recognizes that the future of trade governance extends beyond traditional trade negotiations. Emerging issues such as digital trade, data governance, artificial intelligence, technology, and the digital economy are increasingly shaping international commerce. Consequently, SEATINI intends to expand its work into these new frontiers, ensuring that Africa actively contributes to the development of global rules governing the technologies and markets of the future.

Thirty years after its founding, SEATINI remains committed to strengthening Africa's voice in global trade governance, promoting social justice, and advancing a people-centred vision of development that leaves no one behind.

Africa in a Changing World: Why Organisations like SEATINI Matter

Dr. Africa Kiiza, Pan-African Advocacy and Policy Lead, Christian Aid, formerly of SEATINI

"The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, new pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it was worth the trouble" J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians

The world is undergoing dynamic changes. At one end, we are witnessing the rise of digitalisation, Artificial intelligence, the increasing calls for energy transition, protectionist tendencies, and the looming era of trillionaires. On the other hand, poverty, inequality, debt, unemployment, poverty-induced brain drain, climate change, and dependence on primary commodities are on the rise. Indeed, almost five billion people globally have become poorer, a rate that, unless tackled, could mean that it will take 230 years to end poverty globally³. So astonishing are the inequality levels that it would take 1,200 years for a female worker in the health and social sector to earn what a CEO in the biggest Fortune 100 companies earns on average in one year⁴. Yet, if each of the five wealthiest men were to spend one million US dollars daily, they would take 476 years to exhaust their combined wealth⁵. These are the global dynamics that Africa is confronted with.



Markets are not neutral. Rather, they are shaped by the power asymmetries and influence of two actors, i.e. the exploiter and the exploited. Africa's position in the global economy has always been full of contradictions which emerge from the extractivist relations inherited by the continent since the pre-colonial era. While Africa's share of global trade has remained abysmal (averaging 3%⁶), it supplies critical inputs like energy, minerals, and agricultural products to the rest of the world, leaving her trapped at the lower end of global value chains. For example, despite accounting for about 10–15% of the world's coffee production, Africa earns below \$4 billion from a \$200 billion global industry⁷. It gets even worse for cocoa. While the continent grows 70% of the world's cocoa, it earns less than 6% of the \$165 billion

global chocolate value chain⁸. The continent also captures only about 40% of potential resource revenues while losing approximately \$88 billion annually through illicit financial flows, \$40 billion of coming from extractive sectors alone⁹. To boost their industrial base, African countries have adopted measures to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In 2024, FDI on the continent shot up by 75% to reach \$97 billion, accounting for 6% of global FDI¹⁰. However, the fundamental flaw with foreign investment in Africa is that, over the years, it has followed a pattern of extractivism and rent seeking, resulting in an estimated annual drain of \$88.6 billion to \$192 billion¹¹ from the continent.

A scan of the current trade landscape reveals that it is littered with battles for geopolitical hegemony, in which some key powers combine the abuse of several instruments of trade policy with other forms of direct coercion to extract concessions and secure access to markets and key resources for themselves. Such countries are deploying these trade distortion measures to ensure continued access to and/or dominance over the same resources and markets. African countries are among the targets of this big power scramble for critical mineral resources. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United States, China and the European Union compete

for strategic access to cobalt and copper, while in Zimbabwe, Chinese and Western powers vie for lithium resources through investment, infrastructure financing, and supply chain partnerships aimed at securing long-term industrial and technological advantage. This intensifying competition risks perpetuating Africa's role as a supplier of raw materials, constraining domestic value addition, weakening policy autonomy, and limiting the continent's ability to leverage its mineral wealth for inclusive industrialisation and sustainable development.

To negotiate with powerful and rich economies as a united front, African countries have forged regional integration blocs. These are further strengthened by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an ambitious initiative that aims at increasing intra-African trade and investment and ultimately form an African common market. However, these initiatives are threatened by asymmetrical free trade agreements and bilateral investment treaties. Of these are the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union (EU) and its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). Under the EPA and including its negotiations process, Africa largely adjusted itself to the negotiating agenda of the EU, thereby the new agreement reproduces the imbalances at the heart of the earlier Cotonou Agreement. The EU is not alone. The numerous summits [on] Africa, fully sponsored by their hosts, e.g., China, the U.S, Japan, Russia, Italy, India, and recently Iran should be seen from the angle of fighting a geopolitical battle in Africa, further weakening the continent's development policy direction.

Regarding the global financial architecture, Africa is ensnared in a system in which its fiscal and monetary sover-

eignty is compromised. For example, what is even more perplexing is that while Africa's total debt stock in 2023 was at \$1.8 trillion (just 2.0% of global public debt and lower than that of Germany's \$2.9 trillion), eight of the nine countries that the IMF listed as being in 'debt-distress' are African¹². Moreover, Africa's public debts are mainly held by non-African lenders and in foreign currencies, yet industrialised countries usually borrow in their own currencies, e.g., 98% of public debt in the UK, China, the U.S., Canada and the EU is in their respective local currencies¹³. This makes debt harder to restructure or refinance and perpetuates exchange rate risks. The rigged global financial architecture is

The question, therefore, is not whether the world is changing; it is whether Africa will shape that change or merely endure it. History offers little comfort to nations that mistake participation for influence or access for power.

further evidenced by the IMF Voting quota system, whereby the entire African continent, with 55 countries and a population of over 1.4 billion, has just 6.47% voting rights compared to the United States, which holds 16.5% voting power¹⁴, and Germany, with a population of 83 million and 5.31% voting power¹⁵. These power asymmetries constrain Africa's influence over IMF decision-making and the allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), resulting in disproportionately small SDR distributions despite the continent's significant development financing

needs and increasing reliance on expensive external borrowing.

Finally, while digitalisation is reshaping the global system, for Africa, it also carries the risk of digital colonialism, where value, data, and power are extracted by dominant technology firms and states. Much of the continent's digital infrastructure, cloud services, platforms, and algorithms is controlled by a few global corporations, limiting local ownership and regulatory autonomy. African data is often harvested, monetised, and processed outside the continent, reinforcing dependency in the digital economy. This asymmetry constrains industrialisation, weakens data sovereignty, and locks African economies into low-value roles as data providers rather than innovators, unless stronger regional regulation and digital industrial policies are developed.

The question, therefore, is not whether the world is changing; it is whether Africa will shape that change or merely endure it. History offers little comfort to nations that mistake participation for influence or access for power. Without organised, evidence-based advocacy, the language of partnership will continue to conceal relationships of dependency, and the rhetoric of reform will legitimise an increasingly unequal order. This is precisely why organisations such as SEATINI matter. They are not simply policy institutions; they are custodians of Africa's intellectual sovereignty, exposing structural injustices, defending policy space, and ensuring that the continent engages the global economy not as a passive recipient of rules, but as an architect of a fairer international order. The struggle, therefore, is not merely for better trade or finance, but for the restoration of agency, dignity, and the sovereign right to determine Africa's own development trajectory.

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THE FUTURE OF TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Reclaiming Development Policy Space in a Fragmented Global Trading System for Green Industrialization: Imperatives for Africa

By Jane Nalunga, Executive Director, SEATINI

"As debates on WTO reform, green industrial policy, and climate-related trade governance intensify, Africa has an opportunity to reshape the global conversation fundamentally. The objective should be the transformation of Africa's position within the global economy."

The relationship between trade and climate change has become one of the defining geopolitical and economic questions of the 21st century. What was once treated primarily as an environmental concern now sits at the centre of debates on industrial policy, energy transitions, investment governance, technological competition, and the legitimacy of the multilateral trading system. For Africa, this intersection is neither abstract nor peripheral. It is deeply material, profoundly political, and increasingly existential.

Africa stands at a historic crossroads. The continent is amongst the most vulnerable to climate shocks despite contributing the least to cumulative global greenhouse gas emissions. Droughts, floods, desertification, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity are already undermining livelihoods, disrupting trade flows, and placing immense pressure on fragile development gains. At the same time, Africa has become strategically central to the global green transition owing to its vast reserves of critical minerals, significant renewable energy potential,



Africa's demand for policy space is not a rejection of sustainability. It is a demand for a just and development-oriented transition.

and youthful labour force. The continent once positioned at the margins of industrial capitalism now occupies a central place in the emerging architecture of low-carbon production.

The continent once positioned at the margins of industrial capitalism now occupies a central place in the emerging architecture of low-carbon production.

Yet this strategic importance conceals a deeper contradiction. The emerging green economy risks reproducing the same structural inequalities that have historically constrained Africa's development. While the language has shifted from fossil fuels to decarbonization, from extraction to sustainability, and from globalization to resilience, the underlying structures of unequal exchange remain largely intact. There is a growing danger that Africa will once again be confined to the role of supplier of raw materials, while value addition, technological innovation, intellectual property ownership, and high-value manufacturing remain concentrated elsewhere.

This is the central tension shaping contemporary debates on trade and sustainability: will climate governance facilitate structural transformation in Africa, or will it merely repackage older hierarchies within a new regulatory vocabulary?

In recent years, major economies have revived industrial policy with notable force. The United States, the European Union, and other advanced economies are deploying subsidies, strategic investment instruments, carbon regulations, and supply chain controls to secure green transitions and geopolitical resilience. Instruments such as carbon border adjustment mechanisms, deforestation-linked import restrictions, and sustainability due diligence frameworks reflect a decisive shift away from earlier neoliberal assumptions that discouraged state intervention.



However, this resurgence of industrial policy is uneven. Developing countries were historically discouraged from deploying similar tools such as subsidies, local content requirements, and export taxes on the grounds that they distort markets. Today, the same instruments are widely used by advanced economies to protect strategic industries and accelerate decarbonization. This asymmetry exposes a profound credibility gap within the global trading system: the rules historically imposed upon developing countries differ markedly from the practices now embraced by developed economies.

Africa cannot afford to remain passive in this transition debate. The continent's challenge is not merely to participate in green value chains, but to shape them in ways that enable industrialization, economic diversification, and technological upgrading. Trade policy, climate policy, and industrial policy can no longer be approached in a silo manner; they now constitute an integrated domain of economic sovereignty and developmental agency.

Climate-related trade measures illustrate this tension clearly. While environmental governance is necessary to address the climate crisis, many emerging instruments also function as market-access conditions. Carbon adjustment mechanisms, supply-chain due diligence regimes, and sustainability standards may pursue legitimate environmental objectives, yet they also redistribute adjustment costs and reshape comparative advantage across the global economy.

Will climate governance facilitate structural transformation in Africa, or will it merely repackage older hierarchies within a new regulatory vocabulary?

For African countries, the concern is not the principle of environmental



regulation, but the manner in which such measures are designed and implemented. When rules are developed unilaterally and imposed without early consultation, developing countries are compelled to adapt ex post rather than participate in shaping outcomes ex ante. This raises not only substantive concerns, but also procedural questions of fairness and inclusion.

African policymakers therefore must emphasize the importance of early-stage consultation, transparency, and structured dialogue in the formulation of climate-related trade measures. Without such mechanisms, sustainability governance risks becoming a form of exclusion rather than co-operation. For exporters, particularly smallholder farmers, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and emerging manufacturers, compliance with complex traceability and carbon-accounting requirements can be both costly and technically burdensome in the absence of adequate support.

This is not opposition to sustainability. African economies are amongst the strongest advocates for climate action precisely because they experience its impacts most acutely. The concern is that environmental standards are increasingly externalized through regulatory frameworks that insufficiently account for varying levels of development, institutional capacity,

and historical responsibility.

Without flexibility, transitional support, and technical assistance, such measures risk excluding vulnerable producers from global markets while reinforcing the market power of large multinational firms capable of absorbing compliance costs. Sustainability, in its current form could thus inadvertently reinforce concentration rather than inclusion.

This is why the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities remains indispensable in trade and climate governance. Climate justice cannot be divorced from historical responsibility, unequal development trajectories, and asymmetries in productive capacity. Expecting identical obligations across vastly different economies risks undermining both equity and effectiveness.

Africa's demand for policy space is not a rejection of sustainability. It is a demand for a just and development-oriented transition.

For Africa, the question of policy space is therefore central. Industrialization and climate resilience are not competing objectives; they are mutually reinforcing imperatives. Achieving both requires the ability to deploy targeted subsidies, infant industry protection, local content policies, strategic procurement, and regional value chain

development. Without these instruments, Africa risks remaining locked into commodity dependence.

The fragmentation of the global trading system further complicates this landscape. Geopolitical rivalry, subsidy races, and unilateral trade measures are weakening the multilateral framework that once provided predictability and stability. The World Trade Organization (WTO), whilst still important, now faces increasing questions regarding its relevance and capacity to manage emerging trade-climate tensions.

In this fragmented global economy, smaller economies are particularly vulnerable to marginalization. Decision-making is increasingly shifting towards bilateral and plurilateral arrangements dominated by major powers. This trend risks excluding African voices at precisely the moment when global rules governing green industrialization are being rewritten.

A development-centred reform of the multilateral system is therefore essential. Sustainability must not become a mechanism through which industrial policy space is preserved for advanced economies while constrained for developing countries. Instead, trade rules must explicitly support structural transformation, diversification, and inclusive development.

On the other hand, regional integra-

tion offers one of the most significant opportunities for Africa to strengthen its position. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a framework for expanding intra-African trade, building regional value chains, and reducing dependence on raw commodity exports. If effectively implemented, it could serve as a platform for regional industrial coordination and green economic transformation.

Trade policy, climate policy, and industrial policy can no longer be approached in a silo manner; they now constitute an integrated domain of economic sovereignty and developmental agency.

However, this potential is not automatic. Persistent infrastructure gaps, energy constraints, fragmented regulatory systems, and limited productive capacities continue to undermine competitiveness. More importantly, there remains insufficient alignment between trade policy, climate commitments, and industrial development strategies. National development plans, nationally determined contributions, and AfCFTA implementation frameworks must increasingly be treated as interconnected pillars of a broader structural transformation agenda.

Africa's role in the global energy transition must also be governed by principles of equity and economic sovereignty. The global rush for critical minerals must not become a twenty-first-century iteration of extractive colonialism justified in the language of decarbonization. Responsible mining, environmental stewardship, local community participation, and domestic value addition are not peripheral

concerns; they are central conditions for a just transition.

At the same time, the rise of market-based climate mechanisms risks commodifying African ecosystems without adequately safeguarding local livelihoods and land rights. Carbon offset schemes, large-scale land acquisitions, and speculative green investments can generate new forms of dispossession where governance frameworks are weak. Climate action cannot be pursued through models that externalize environmental costs while concentrating economic gains elsewhere.

In essence, the relationship between trade and climate change is not merely about reconciling economic growth with environmental protection. It is fundamentally about power, development, and the future organization of the global economy. The transition to sustainability will inevitably produce winners and losers. The critical political question will largely depend on whether the multilateral trading system will accommodate this reality.

A truly inclusive global trade regime must recognize that sustainability and development are not competing objectives for Africa; they are mutually interdependent.

The future legitimacy of the multilateral trading system will depend significantly on its ability to accommodate this reality. A truly inclusive global trade regime must recognize that sustainability and development are not competing objectives for Africa; they are mutually interdependent. Climate action that undermines industrialization, constrains policy autonomy, or entrenches commodity dependence

cannot deliver genuine sustainability. Nor can global decarbonization succeed if entire regions remain structurally marginalized from green industrial development.

Africa's demand for policy space is therefore not a rejection of sustainability. It is a demand for a just and development-oriented transition. The continent is not seeking exemption from climate responsibility; rather, it is insisting that the global green economy must not replicate historical patterns of extraction, exclusion, and unequal exchange under a more environmentally conscious vocabulary.

As debates on WTO reform, green industrial policy, and climate-related trade governance intensify, Africa has an opportunity to reshape the global conversation fundamentally. The objective should not be limited to improved market access, but the transformation of Africa's position within the global economy. This requires moving beyond a narrow trade paradigm focused on compliance and export dependence towards a broader vision grounded in industrial sovereignty, regional integration, technological capability, and social justice.

The green transition will only be truly sustainable if it is also equitable. Anything less risks reproducing historical inequalities beneath the rhetoric of climate ambition.

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CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY: REFLECTIONS, MEMORIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Always Questioning: Yash Tandon, SEATINI and Africa's Unfinished Journey

By Percy F. Makombe

There are institutions that provide answers. There are fewer that teach societies how to ask the right questions. For three decades, the Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) has belonged firmly to the latter tradition.

Long before industrial policy returned to fashion, before the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the inequities embedded in the global intellectual property regime, before Europe rediscovered the virtues of state intervention in energy and water, and before "economic sovereignty" became respectable political language once again, SEATINI was asking uncomfortable questions. Who writes the rules of global trade? Who benefits from them? Why does Africa continue to export raw materials while importing poverty? What does development mean if it leaves nations without the policy space to determine their own futures?

At the centre of that questioning stood Professor Yash Tandon. I first met Yash when he recruited me to join SEATINI as Programme Officer and Editor of the *SEATINI Bulletin* in 2003. Later, I had the privilege of serving as Deputy Director. Looking back, I realise that working with



Yash was less an employment than an education.

Every edition of the *Bulletin* became an intellectual exercise. Every policy paper invited deeper interrogation. Meetings rarely remained confined to the business at hand. A discussion on the next WTO negotiating text could effortlessly move to Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere or Samir Amin. One quickly learnt that behind every statistic lay a history, behind every trade agreement an ideology, and behind every policy prescription an assumption that deserved to be questioned.

That was perhaps Yash's greatest gift, not

simply providing answers but cultivating a discipline of critical inquiry. His writings reveal a remarkable consistency over the decades. Whether challenging structural adjustment programmes, exposing the limitations of aid, critiquing what he called "kleptocratic capitalism," or questioning the orthodoxy of free markets, Yash persistently redirected attention from symptoms to structures. He insisted that Africa's predicament could not be understood merely through the language of efficiency, governance or corruption. It had to be understood through the political economy of power, sovereignty and history. Those

*"Oh my body, make
of me a man who
always questions."*
— Frantz Fanon

ideas shaped SEATINI.

Founded in 1996 in the aftermath of the WTO Singapore Ministerial Conference, SEATINI emerged from the recognition that African countries entered complex global trade negotiations with limited technical and institutional support. SEAT-

INI sought to support and partner with African governments, parliamentarians, and civil society organisations not merely to participate in negotiations but to shape them.

Those were extraordinary years. The Uruguay Round had fundamentally altered the architecture of global trade. Agriculture, investment, services and intellectual property were no longer simply technical subjects; they had become defining questions about development itself. Through painstaking research, policy engagement and quiet diplomacy, SEATINI partnered with African negotiators to develop common positions on issues ranging from agricultural trade to the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), always insisting that Africa required policy space to pursue its own development priorities.

At the time, many regarded these concerns as ideological or even unrealistic. History has been unusually kind to SEATINI's questions. The COVID-19 pandemic painfully demonstrated why the debate over TRIPS was never an abstract legal argument. When wealthy countries secured vaccines for their own populations while much of Africa waited, the unequal architecture of intellectual property became a matter not of commerce but of life itself. What SEATINI had argued for years, that knowledge should serve humanity rather than monopolies suddenly became painfully self-evident.

The same may now be said about the role of the state. Across Europe, governments that once championed privatization with gusto have rediscovered the necessity of public intervention in strategic sectors such as energy and water. Britain itself is again debating questions that SEATINI had raised decades earlier: should essential public goods be governed solely by markets? Can societies surrender strategic sectors to private interests without sacri-

ficing public welfare?

Again, history has returned to questions that Yash encouraged us to ask long ago. Yet reducing Yash to an economist or trade negotiator would miss the larger point. He is, above all, a public intellectual in the finest Pan-African tradition. Like Fanon, Walter Rodney and Dani Wadada Nabudere—about whom he has written with deep admiration he believes that ideas matter because they shape institutions, and institutions ultimately shape the possibilities of freedom. His scholarship has never sought academic prestige for its own sake. It is scholarship in the service of liberation.

That spirit remains embedded within SEATINI. Today, the organisation's work extends beyond trade into taxation, investment policy, climate justice, regional integration and sustainable development. Yet its essential purpose remains unchanged: strengthening Africa's capacity to define its own development trajectory through evidence-based research, policy engagement and Africentric alternatives. The launch of the new Strategic Plan, the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy and, most fittingly, the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub represents not merely institutional expansion but the continuation of an intellectual tradition.

The choice of a "Knowledge Hub" could not be more appropriate. Knowledge, as Yash constantly reminded us, is different from information. Information is abundant. Knowledge demands critical reflection, historical understanding and intellectual independence. Africa has never lacked information; what it has often lacked are institutions capable of producing ideas rooted in its own historical experience and developmental aspirations. That is precisely the role the Knowledge Hub is now called upon to play.

Thirty years is therefore more than an anniversary. It is a moment for reflection. The world that produced SEATINI has changed profoundly. New geopolitical powers have emerged. Global supply chains are being reconfigured. Climate change, artificial intelligence and digital trade are reshaping development. Yet the central question remains remarkably familiar: how does Africa engage the world without surrendering its sovereignty?

There can be no better tribute to Yash Tandon than ensuring that future generations continue asking precisely those difficult questions. As one of the many who had the privilege of working under his leadership, I remain grateful not only for the opportunities he gave me but for the intellectual discipline he instilled in all of us. He taught us that policy without history is shallow, economics without ethics is dangerous, and development without dignity is not development at all.

That lesson remains SEATINI's enduring inheritance.

As Fanon reminded us:

"Africa shall be free. Yes, but it must get to work, it must not lose sight of its own unity... Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent."

Thirty years on, SEATINI continues that work. And in doing so, it keeps alive the questioning mind of its founder and the enduring conviction that Africa's future will ultimately be written by Africans themselves.

"Makombe is a former editor of the SEATINI Bulletin as well as former deputy director at SEATINI, Zimbabwe Office."

About the Author

Percy F. Makombe's career spans more than two decades across Africa's trade, governance, and development sectors. He served as Deputy Director of the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI), where he also edited the *SEATINI Bulletin* and wrote extensively on Economic Partnership Agreements and World Trade Organization negotiations including agriculture, services, and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. He went on to serve as Programme Manager at the Economic Justice Network in South Africa, and later as Team Leader for Democracy and Gover-

nance at the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), where he oversaw regional grant-making on civic engagement, media rights, and public accountability. His earlier career was rooted in journalism: he edited *Moto* magazine in Zimbabwe and *Africa Film & TV*, served as Chief Sub-Editor at the *Zimbabwe Independent*, and worked as a correspondent for *Mundo Negro* (Spain), *Nigizita* (Italy), and the *Africa News Bulletin*. Makombe holds an MPhil in Development Policy and Practice from the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance at the University of Cape Town, an MA in Globalization and Communications from the University of Leicester (UK), and a BA from the University of Zimbabwe.

Personal Reflection on Yash Tandon

He poured everything he had into the unfinished struggle for its genuine independence: his time, intellect, energy, finances, relationships, and, at times, even the logistics of armed resistance. His life's work was never simply about ending colonial rule; it was about securing true autonomy and responsibility to Uganda's people.

For us, this meant that home was never simply a family home—it was a political home.

Some of my earliest memories are of fleeing our house in Makere-re, Kampala, in the middle of the night because Idi Amin's soldiers had come looking for him. Later, in Nairobi, our home became a storage point for military blankets and food supplies destined for resistance fighters across Uganda. In Dar es Salaam, where both my parents taught at the university—my father in economics and my mother, Mary Olivia Tandon, in law—our house in Chuo Kikuu was a place of constant political discussion. Friends and comrades such as Dan Nabudere, Omwoni Ojwok and Edward Rugumayo were regular visitors, and politics was woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Those years in Tanzania coincided with my own political awakening. Growing up under Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's vision of *Ujamaa*, I learned that ideas were never abstract; they carried consequences, responsibilities, and commitments.

One memory to share is in 2001, after returning from the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, my father came home unusually subdued and exhausted. He spoke of a global governance system so fundamentally stacked against African countries that the language of "negotiation" itself had become a mockery. There was no genuine negotiation, he said—only a sophisticated chokehold exercised through unequal power. Yet after the disappointment, he picked himself up once again. His response was not resignation but renewed determination to build solidarity across the Global South. That conviction lay at the heart of his decision

to establish SEATINI.

16 Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Zimbabwe



He was equally committed to the next generation. I have his lecture notes from the University of Dar es Salaam. They remind me why, when my parents later moved to newly independent Zimbabwe at the invitation of Professor Nathan Shamuyarira¹⁶, he had to promise not to teach at the university. His lectures were never simply lectures; they inspired political consciousness. Teaching, for him, was itself an act of activism. And so, he joined my mother in running learning workshops in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.

By now it may be clear that ours has been an exile family.

Over four decades, we were expelled from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and eventually Zimbabwe. Each move demanded that our family begin again, carrying little more than our convictions. In Zimbabwe, my mother made an extraordinary sacrifice. She set aside her own distinguished legal career and devoted herself entirely to supporting my father's decision to establish yet another institution—this time dedicated to trade justice. Her contribution, like that of so many partners of political activists, was largely invisible but absolutely indispensable.

*Our father's first love
has always been his
country—Uganda.*

There is little more I can add.

People rarely understand the true cost that political conviction exacts on a family. They see the speeches, the books, the institutions, and the public life. They seldom see the insecurity, the displacement, the uncertainty, or the quiet sacrifices made by those who stand behind the public figure. Were it not for my brother's steadfast care and commitment, my father might well have ended his life forgotten, with little tangible recognition of what he had given.

It is a sobering reality. Yet, despite everything, the struggle continues.

Aluta continua.

Ms. Nidhi Tandon

Thinking for Ourselves: SEATINI's Three Decades of Advancing Global South Perspectives on Trade and Development

On the occasion of the SEATINI@30 Celebration (1996–2026) and the Launch of the SEATINI Strategic Plan (2026–2030) and the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub, Serena Hotel, Kampala – Wednesday, 29th July 2026.

I write as an early collaborator with SEATINI as part of the Equator School of critical thinkers led by Erik Reinert and Yash Tandon at the time and involved scholars like Mario Cimoli, Jan Kregel and Annalisa Primi. My reflections are as a fellow traveler in the Global South's enduring work to think for ourselves about trade, development, and the terms on which our economies engage the world – an agenda that SEATINI has embodied with rare consistency and dedication over the last three decades.

SEATINI was born of a simple but bold premise: that African economists, social scientists and policymakers could not simply be trained to comply with rules written elsewhere; they had to build the independent analytical capacity to question those rules, to negotiate from a position of knowledge rather than dependency, and to imagine alternatives grounded in strategic developmental realities. Under the founding leadership of Yash Tandon, the Institute did not treat trade policy as a technical endeavour. It insisted that trade policy is political economy – that market access, tariff schedules, investment treaties, and intellectual property regimes



are never neutral.

Three decades on, SEATINI's contribution can be measured in the negotiators it has trained, the research it has produced, and the policy debates in East Africa and beyond that it has shaped. But its deeper contribution, to my mind, is one of intellectual posture, policy sovereignty

and cultural confidence: it has kept alive, in a region and an era where the pressure to conform to prevailing orthodoxy is immense, the discipline of critical and independent thought.

This matters profoundly for postcolonial societies. Economic development and trade policy in the Global South are too often received as technocratic packages – “best practice,” “reform,” “liberalisation” – presented as though they were free of history and interest. Institutions like SEATINI remind us that the postcolonial economy was shaped by specific historical relations of extraction and dependency, and that genuine development requires the freedom to interrogate inherited models rather than simply administer them. Critical thought is not an academic luxury here; it is a precondition for policy sovereignty and development in its true sense. Without institutions willing to ask uncomfortable questions of both external prescriptions and domestic elites, developing countries risk trading one form of dependency for another – intel-

The Global South must generate its own knowledge, on its own terms, if it is to negotiate better outcomes for its people and for the sustainable development of the planet.



lectual dependency compounding economic dependency.

The launch of the SEATINI Strategic Plan (2026–2030) alongside the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub is therefore a fitting way to mark this anniversary. It signals continuity of mission into a new and turbulent period – one shaped by AfCFTA implementation, digital trade rules, climate-linked trade measures, and a shifting multipolar and multilateral order while institutionalizing the intellectual legacy that made SEATINI distinctive in the first place: the conviction that the Global South must generate its own knowledge, on its own terms, if it is to negotiate better outcomes for its people and for the sustainable development of the planet.

From the vantage point of the Caribbean, where similar questions

of trade justice, regional integration, and policy space animate our own small island developing states, I recognise in SEATINI's journey a shared Global South project. The specific instruments differ in magnitude but the underlying imperative is the same: that development cannot be outsourced to received wisdom, and that critical, independent, locally-rooted scholarship is itself a vital expression of cultural confidence and self-determined development.

Congratulations to SEATINI, its Executive Director Jane Nalunga, staff, and its wide network of partners on thirty years of solid work. May the next chapter be bigger and brighter.

Dr. Keith Nurse

About the Contributor

Global South Trade and Development Scholar | Policy Expert | Caribbean Development Advocate

Dr. Keith Nurse is an expert on the intersection of trade policy, innovation governance, sustainable development and the creative economy. He has contributed extensively to debates on development policy, economic transformation and the role of Global South countries in shaping fairer international economic systems.

He serves as an expert member of the United Nations Committee for Development Policy, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Commission on Geopolitics, Global-

isation and Development, and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. He is also Chair of CaribbeanTales Media Group.

Dr. Nurse previously served as President of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago, WTO Chair at the University of the West Indies, and Senior Economist and Advisor on Structural Policies and Innovation at the OECD Development Centre.

An early collaborator within the wider Global South intellectual community that shaped SEATINI's founding vision, Dr. Nurse's reflections highlight the importance of independent knowledge production, critical thinking and policy sovereignty in advancing sustainable development.

Yash Tandon, SEATINI and the Courage to Think Differently

By Dr. Andrew Mold, Director, UNECA Office for Eastern Africa, Kigali.

As SEATINI commemorates thirty years of advancing equitable approaches to trade, investment and development, it is fitting to reflect on the vision and intellectual influence of its founder, Professor Yash Tandon. SEATINI's story is, in many ways, inseparable from Yash's commitment to challenging conventional wisdom and encouraging Africans to think critically about the policies that shape the continent's future.

Over the years, I have found Yash to be one of Africa's most provocative and engaging public intellectuals. He is not a writer who seeks comfort in consensus. Rather, he has consistently questioned prevailing orthodoxies and challenged assumptions that many policymakers, development practitioners and economists have taken for granted. Whether one agrees with all his arguments or not, it is difficult to read his work without being compelled to think more deeply about the underlying political economy of development.

Two of his books in particular stand out for me: "Trade is War: The West's War Against the World" (2015) and "Ending Aid De-



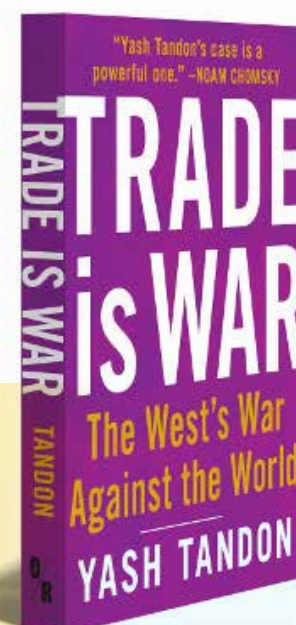
pendence" (2008). At the time they were published, both were regarded by many as controversial. Yet looking at developments today, one is struck by how relevant many of their central themes remain.

Consider "Trade is War". The title itself was deliberately provocative. At a time when the dominant narrative emphasised the benefits of liberalisation and a rules-based global trading system, Yash challenged the notion that trade could be understood as a purely technical or as a neutral process. He argued that trade relations are also shaped by power, interests and unequal bargaining positions. Many economists were uncomfortable with this framing. Yet the world we inhabit

today appears far removed from the assumptions that dominated trade discussions when the book was published.

The multilateral trading system, particularly the World Trade Organization, faces profound challenges. Trade disputes increasingly reflect geopolitical rivalries. Industrial policy has returned as a central feature of economic strategy. Major powers openly use tariffs, subsidies, export controls and investment restrictions in pursuit of national objectives. The very fact that mainstream economists and commentators now speak openly about trade wars illustrates how much the debate has shifted (Soumaya and Brown, 2026). What was once regarded as an unusually confrontational interpretation of international trade now appears remarkably prescient.

This does not mean that Yash was necessarily right about everything. But he did recognise something important: countries cannot afford to treat



In his book "Trade is War", Tandon argued that trade is never neutral—it is shaped by power, interests, and unequal bargaining positions. Mold notes that this "confrontational" interpretation now appears "remarkably prescient" in today's era of trade wars and geopolitical rivalry.



trade as if it exists independently of power. For African countries especially, trade policy must be approached strategically, with a clear understanding of national and regional interests. In today's uncertain trading environment, the African Continental Free Trade Area offers one of the continent's most promising opportunities to strengthen collective bargaining power, build regional value chains and create greater economic resilience. As other regions increasingly pursue their interests with confidence and determination, Africa must do the same.

A similar observation can be made about "Ending Aid Dependence". When the book appeared, much of the development discourse focused on improving aid effectiveness and increasing aid flows. Yash posed a more fundamental question: what are the long-term consequences of dependence? He challenged policymakers to think about sovereignty, accountability and the perverse incentives often created by external financing. At the time, these arguments often seemed uncomfortable, particularly in countries where aid played a significant role in supporting public services.

Today, however, the debate has acquired renewed urgency. Significant reductions in official development assistance have

exposed the vulnerability of countries that remain heavily dependent on external support. Many governments across Africa have faced difficult fiscal choices as donor priorities shift and resources decline (UNECA, 2026). In some cases, essential sectors such as health have come under severe pressure. Questions surrounding conditionalities, policy autonomy and ownership have once again moved to the forefront of development discussions.

What Yash recognised early on was that development cannot be sustainably built on dependence, regardless of how well-intentioned external support may be. Strong development outcomes ultimately require domestic capability, domestic resource mobilisation and national accountability. These ideas have become increasingly important as African countries seek to navigate a rapidly changing international environment.

For me, this captures one of Yash's most important contributions. He has consistently encouraged Africans to examine conventional policy prescriptions critically and to ask difficult questions about whose interests they serve. He reminds us that development is not simply a technical exercise. It is fundamentally about agency, sovereignty and the ability of societies to define their own priorities.

This spirit has been at the heart of SEATINI's work for three decades. Through its research, advocacy, policy engagement and capacity building, the organisation has created space for independent African voices in debates on trade, investment, taxation and development. At a time when global economic governance is becoming more fragmented and uncertain, that role remains as important as ever.

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Thirty Years of SEATINI: A Partnership Rooted in the Struggle for Just Trade

On behalf of Bread for the World, we warmly congratulate the Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) on its 30th anniversary. For three decades, SEATINI has been a strong and persistent voice for equitable trade, fiscal and investment policies in Africa. It has combined sound research and policy expertise with advocacy, alliance-building and the empowerment of those whose lives are directly affected by economic policies but whose voices are too often absent from the negotiating table.

The relationship between SEATINI and Bread for the World has its roots in a shared struggle for fairer relations between Africa and Europe. Long before our project-based cooperation began, our paths crossed in the campaign against the Economic Partnership Agreements, or EPAs, between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Both SEATINI and Bread for the World, together with many civil society partners in Africa and Europe, critically accompanied the EPA negotiations. We shared the concern that agreements officially presented as partnerships between equals could further entrench profound economic imbalances. Reciprocal market opening be-

tween economies with vastly different levels of industrialization and competitiveness threatened local and regional markets, smallholder agriculture, food security and the prospects for African industrial development.

SEATINI played a crucial role in analysing the complex provisions of the agreements and translating them into their potential consequences for people's lives. It strengthened the capacity of African civil society organisations, parliamentarians, negotiators, farmers' organisations and other stakeholders to participate in the debates. Just as importantly, SEATINI consistently advocated for regional integration and warned against trade arrangements that could divide existing African regional blocs.

This shared engagement against the EPAs brought SEATINI and Bread for the World closer together. It was not simply opposition to a particular set of agreements. It was rooted in a common understanding that trade must serve people and sustainable development, not the other way around. Trade policy cannot be separated from human rights, food sovereignty, gender justice, environmental protection and the right of African countries to define their own development pathways.



Over time, the issues have evolved, but many of the fundamental questions remain. Today, African countries and producers must navigate new European regulations relating to deforestation, corporate due diligence and climate protection, while longstanding inequalities in agricultural value chains persist. SEATINI continues to ask the necessary questions: Who participates in shaping these policies? Whose interests are reflected in them? Who carries the costs of compliance? And how can African stakeholders move from reacting to externally defined rules towards actively shaping equitable relations between Africa and Europe?

From shared advocacy to project cooperation

Our longstanding political engagement eventually developed into direct project cooperation. This cooperation has focused on strengthening African voices in trade relations between Africa and the European Union and promoting more inclusive, equitable and sustainable agricultural trade.

Through research, accessible infor-

mation, capacity-building, public dialogue, media engagement and direct exchanges with policymakers, SEATINI brings together smallholder farmers, civil society, businesses, women's and youth organisations, policymakers, government representatives and academia. Particular attention has been given to the coffee sector and to the implications of European trade and sustainability policies, including deforestation and corporate due diligence requirements.

The projects supported by Bread for the World and independently implemented by SEATINI have also strengthened cooperation between African and European civil society and connected trade policy with climate change, human rights, gender justice and the realities of agricultural value chains. In doing so, SEATINI enables African stakeholders not only to respond to policies developed elsewhere, but to formulate their own analyses, priorities and proposals and to advocate for fairer EU-Africa trade

relations.

Making women's voices heard in trade policy

A central feature of SEATINI's work is its commitment to strengthening women's participation and leadership in trade policy. Although women play a vital role in agricultural production, processing and trade, they often have limited access to resources and decision-making spaces. By involving women and women's organisations in research, capacity-building, policy dialogue and advocacy, SEATINI enables them to articulate their priorities, defend their rights and influence the policies affecting their livelihoods. This reflects SEATINI's understanding that trade rules are never gender-neutral and that equitable trade requires women's meaningful participation.

A personal reflection

While knowing very well that SEATINI is much more than any one individual, I personally associate many of my experiences with the organisation

with Jane Nalunga. Long before I met Jane, I had heard a great deal about her work. As someone who initially knew relatively little about the intricacies of the World Trade Organization, I approached our first meeting with considerable respect – and perhaps also a little apprehension.

Jane, however, has always met me with absolute kindness and, above all, seemingly endless patience. She has never spared any effort in explaining complex issues in a way that left me feeling that I had genuinely understood them. With Jane, there are no foolish questions. This ability to share profound knowledge without ever making others feel inadequate is a rare and very special quality.

I have also had the privilege of accompanying Jane in advocacy meetings with representatives of the German government. In these discussions, I experienced her as exceptionally professional, calm and focused. She is not easily unsettled by



the person sitting opposite her and remains courteous even in situations where such courtesy may no longer feel entirely deserved. Her combination of expertise, composure and persistence makes her a highly effective advocate.

Walking through Kampala with Jane can feel a little like accompanying a celebrity: so many people know her, stop to greet her and show their appreciation. These encounters reveal not only how widely known she is, but also the deep respect she has earned through many years of committed work.

And although, after 30 years of SEATINI's struggle, many things are still not where we would wish them to be, Jane's eyes continue to show the same curiosity, energy and genuine enthusiasm for the issues. It is an enthusiasm that draws others in and

makes them want to become part of the struggle. For SEATINI's future, I can only wish the organisation the same committed, inspiring and generous leadership that has shaped it throughout its remarkable journey.

Looking ahead

Over the past 30 years, SEATINI has developed from an initiative created to strengthen Africa's participation in the emerging global trading system into a respected African think tank addressing trade, taxation, investment, debt and alternative development models. Throughout this journey, it has remained committed to social justice, African economic sovereignty and the participation of those too often excluded from economic decision-making.

For Bread for the World, SEATINI is an important and highly valued partner in the continuing struggle for eco-

nomie relations that are genuinely fair, democratic and sustainable. We are grateful for the journey we have shared from the campaign against the EPAs to our present cooperation on agricultural trade and we look forward to continuing our joint engagement in the years ahead.

We congratulate the entire SEATINI team, its founders, Board, partners and networks on this remarkable anniversary. Thirty years of persistent advocacy have made a difference. May SEATINI continue to challenge unequal structures, advance Africentric alternatives and amplify the voices of those who should be at the centre of decisions about Africa's future.

Ms. Imke-Friederike Tiemann-Middleton, Africa policy advisor and Head of the Southern Africa Unit, Bread for the World (Brot für die Welt)

Thirty Years of Courageous Leadership and Meaningful Dialogue

What has consistently distinguished SEATINI is your willingness to engage in the most demanding forums and to hold your ground once there. You bring fundamental questions about Africa to the forefront. You have also created spaces of your own, bringing together people and organisations who would rarely have occasion to speak to one another, across countries and across generations, in conversations that remain honest and open. Convening work of that kind seldom receives the credit it is due, but it is frequently where change begins. I especially admire that your work and outreach are done in the open, and that they have made a real impact. On a personal note, SEATINI has been kind to me over the years, with its time, its insight, and its willingness to include me in its work. It has shaped my own thinking on African trade issues, and I hope there are many more years of it ahead. Congratulations again on thirty years. I look forward to what comes next, and to celebrating with you.

In solidarity,

Vahini Naidu, Coordinator, Trade for Development Programme, South Centre



Celebrating 30 Years of Advancing Africa-Centred Development

It is such an exciting moment for SEATINI to be celebrating three decades as one of the leading advocacy think-tank and policy research organisations on the African continent. During this period, many organisations have come and gone, but SEATINI has consistently continued to raise the bar high, especially in areas of Trade, fiscal, and investment policy research and advocacy. We, in the NGO fraternity who identify ourselves with the work you do, wish to congratulate SEATINI upon reaching this milestone.

Patrick Tumwebaze, Executive Director, Uganda Debt Network



Celebrating 30 Years of Advancing Africa-Centred Development



On behalf of AFRODAD, please accept our warmest congratulations to SEATINI on reaching this remarkable milestone. Thirty years of steadfast advocacy for equitable trade, fiscal and

investment policy frameworks across East Africa, the continent, and beyond is an extraordinary achievement and a testament to SEATINI's enduring commitment to advancing Africa's development agenda.

We stand in strong solidarity with SEATINI as you commemorate this occasion under the theme, "Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Sustainable Development," and as you honour the enduring intellectual legacy of Professor Yash Tandon. His vision has shaped not only SEATINI but also the broader movement for African economic sovereignty, a cause to which AFRODAD is equally committed.

We look forward with great interest to the launch of the Strategic Plan (2026–2030), the

Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub and the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy. These important initiatives reflect our shared commitment to generating African-centred knowledge, strengthening policy capacity and advancing transformative approaches to trade, finance, and development.

As SEATINI embarks on its next chapter, we wish you every success and reaffirm AFRODAD's commitment to continuing our collaboration in promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development across the continent.

Dr. Yungong Theophilus Jong Acting Executive Director, African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD)

A Trusted Partner for Africa's Economic Justice Journey

I have known SEATINI for about 16 years now. I have interacted with SEATINI on a wide range of issues, particularly around tax justice. Over the years, I have admired SEATINI's energy and its consistent presence in key processes at the local, national, sub-regional, continental, and even global levels.

I have also admired SEATINI's commitment. We have partnered with them on several projects, and SEATINI has consistently delivered concrete results that have contributed to improving the lives of our rights holders. I have observed the consistency and quality of their work, whether through engagements at different levels or their ability to navigate across diverse thematic areas. From their strong initial focus on trade to their work on tax justice, public debt, and, more recent-

ly, climate-related issues, SEATINI has demonstrated remarkable agility and adaptability.

This agility is a strength that I believe SEATINI can continue to leverage as the organisation moves into its next phase. Reflecting on the current global crises and the challenges facing Africa in particular, I believe SEATINI has built a formidable body of experience that can help shape the continent's future trajectory.

As we look ahead, important questions remain: Where do we want to see ourselves as a continent in the next 30 years? How do we ensure that we achieve the aspirations and objectives outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063?

I look forward to continued partnership with SEATINI, and I am proud of



what we have achieved together so far. I believe we are positioned to deliver even greater results in the years ahead for the betterment of the lives of our most vulnerable rights holders, particularly the women and youth of Africa.

Ms. Sandra Kidwingira, Program Director, Africa Economic Justice Program, Diakonia58 1996 - 2026

Three Decades of Advancing Africa's Economic Justice and Global Advocacy



SEATINI has been an important actor since its inception in supporting Africa's struggle for economic justice and in building critical strategic alliances in Africa and the global south for fair global economic rules. The training SEATINI, ActionAid International Africa region and organizations like EcoNews provided to the first EALA in 2002, while I was a member, helped shape the legislature's commitment to protect the interests of East Africa and indeed Africa in international trade by enhancing support to negotiations by our governments in the WTO and EPAS, and deepening cooperation between African regional

economic communities (ARECs). We specifically focused on building bridges between government and citizens including economic and civic actors involved in trade issues, for example convincing EA governments to set up inter-institutional trade coordination committees in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, and supporting WTO ministerial trade negotiations in Mexico and Hong Kong in 2003 and 2005. The work of SEATINI on global tax justice is equally vital, and one which I have engaged in as a member of the AU/ ECA High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows chaired by former South African President HE Thabo Mbeki

since 2012. SEATINI's work as part of African civil society on international tax justice has resulted in the really important ongoing negotiations at the UN from 2025 on a framework convention on international tax cooperation led by the African Group in New York. I look forward to many more decades of dedicated technical support, advocacy and strategic network building by SEATINI to African governments as we continue the struggle for a fair global economic system.

*Hon Irene Ovonji-Odida
Member, Mbeki Panel on IFFs
from Africa and Independent
Commissioner, ICRICT*

My Unplanned Dip into the Deep End of Trade Justice

*By Mugambwa Owen Paul Dogoto,
Program Associate, Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development*

If you had told me nearly two years ago that I would be spending my days dissecting trade policy and economic governance, I would have laughed and asked you to repeat that in plain English.

I did not enter SEATINI through the traditional front door with an economics degree in hand. My background was actually in oil and gas. My journey began through SEATINI Uganda's Graduate Trainee Programme, where I joined a cohort of six wide-eyed trainees.

I still vividly remember our very first reflection meeting with the Executive Director. When I mentioned my petroleum background, she pointedly asked what I thought about exploiting our country's oil resources. Without hesitation, I boldly argued that we needed to exploit our oil resources for industrial development first, using the revenues generated to fund an energy transition later.

To my pleasant surprise, my response aligned directly with SEATINI's position on economic rights and policy space. Naturally, I thought, "Hey, I've got this trade thing figured out."

Spoiler alert: I didn't.

In the months that followed, I discovered that I was wrong about many other positions as well. But that was the beauty of the experience. Guided step-by-step by the Executive Director, Ms. Jane Nalunga; the Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Herbert Kafee-

ro; Mr. Musana Nice, the Programmes Manager; and the entire SEATINI team, I learned how to think rather than what to think.

SEATINI is, above all, a living learning institution. It took a chance on me, taught me to pause, look beyond the surface, constantly ask, "Why is this the way it is?" and relentlessly investigate the root causes behind economic inequalities.

That shift in mindset has shaped my core passion: understanding how Africa can move away from exporting raw materials for pennies and instead begin capturing real value, achieving food sovereignty, and securing fairer deals for our people.

The journey so far has been a fast-paced and transformative experience, but the greatest highlight has been growing from that naïve trainee into the person I am today. Stepping up to lead technical research, unpack complex trade shocks, engage with the media, and sit at negotiating tables with policymakers has been surreal.

Whether breaking down the national budget or rallying regional campaigns, I have come to realize that policy is not just a document or a process, it is a living battleground that directly shapes people's livelihoods.

As SEATINI celebrates 30 years of advancing Africentric alter-

natives, I look back on my journey with deep gratitude and a good chuckle. SEATINI took in a curious oil-and-gas trainee, challenged my assumptions and helped shape me into a passionate advocate.

Here's to continuing to ask the hard "whys" and ensuring that trade finally works for us.





Before SEATINI, There Was a Question

By Herbert Kafeero, Deputy Executive Director, SEATINI

Some journeys begin with a carefully planned career path. Mine began with a question.

As a Development Studies student at Makerere University, I spent countless hours in lecture rooms, libraries, and corridors where discussions on politics, economics, history, and development rarely ended when classes did. Those conversations shaped my understanding of the world and led me to realise that development could never be reduced to economic growth rates or impressive statistics. Trade was far more than exports and imports, while policies were not neutral documents but reflections of history, power, and competing interests that shaped opportunities and determined whose voices counted.

My education, however, extended well beyond lecture rooms.

I found another learning space in the Makerere University Development Studies Students Association (MUDESA), where intellectual curiosity was encouraged and rigorous debate was expected. Through discussions with fellow students, we wrestled with questions that have continued to define Africa's development discourse: Why, despite its immense natural wealth, does Africa remain trapped in cycles of poverty? Who shapes the rules governing international trade? Can African countries pursue development on their own terms rather than rely on prescriptions crafted elsewhere?

Those questions eventually led me to SEATINI. Before I became part of the organisation, I became a student of its ideas.

Although SEATINI had already established itself as a leading policy institution on trade and development, what attracted me most

was not only its technical expertise but its conviction that young Africans deserved to understand and question the global forces shaping their future. Rather than treating university students as passive audiences, SEATINI engaged us as thinkers whose ideas mattered.

That philosophy resonated deeply with me.

As President of MUDESA, I had the privilege of coordinating SEATINI's university outreach programme, first at Makerere University and later across several institutions of higher learning, working alongside leaders of similar student associations. Together, we transformed lecture theatres into vibrant spaces for dialogue where students from economics, political science, history, agriculture, development studies, and other disciplines critically examined issues extending far beyond examination questions.

One dialogue remains particularly memorable: **Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs): Is This the Right Development Model for Africa? Options for the Future in the Globalisation Era.**

The discussion brought together scholars, policymakers, civil society leaders, diplomats and students to debate the assumptions underpinning international trade agreements. On behalf of MUDESA, and with SEATINI's support, I had the honour of inviting Ambassador Roberto Ridolfi, then Head of the European Union Delegation to Uganda, to participate.

The significance of that event was never about challenging the European Union for its own sake. It demonstrated that universities could be spaces where evidence mattered, competing ideas could be rigorously examined, and respectful disagreement strengthened rather than weakened de-

velopment discourse.

Looking back, I realise those engagements accomplished far more than we appreciated at the time. They nurtured critical thinking, encouraged intellectual inde-

Trade was far more than exports and imports, while policies were not neutral documents but reflections of history, power, and competing interests that shapes opportunities and determined whose voices counted.

pendence and empowered young people not merely to absorb information but to analyse, question, and contribute meaningfully to conversations about Africa's future. That spirit of constructive engagement remains at the heart of SEATINI's work.

My journey was also shaped by remarkable mentors who recognised possibilities in me long before I recognised them myself.

Professor Mwambutsya Ndebesa taught us to understand development through the lens of history, reminding us that today's policy debates cannot be separated from yesterday's struggles. Professor Godfrey Asimwe instilled the discipline of rigorous analysis and comparative inquiry, emphasising that critical thinking is indispensable for meaningful societal transformation. Mr. Nyanja Musoke grounded us in the political economy of development and demon-

strated that scholarship finds its highest purpose in service to humanity. Dr. Robert Senath Esuruku transformed our understanding of development through Amartya Sen's capability approach, teaching us that true development is centred on people's freedoms, aspirations, and capabilities.

Their influence extended beyond academics. They shaped my understanding of leadership, responsibility, and the purpose of knowledge itself.

That curiosity found a new home in 2013 when I joined SEATINI as an intern.

What followed was never part of a carefully designed career plan. I initially volunteered because I wanted to remain connected to work that I believed mattered. Over time, I was entrusted with responsibilities across different pro-

gramme areas as the organisation recognised my commitment and the values I had developed through years of engagement with its mission. I also learnt immensely from colleagues such as Dr. Munu Martin and Dr. Africa Kii-za, who had joined SEATINI before me after pursuing the same undergraduate programme. Watching their professional growth and, more recently, their achievement of doctoral degrees gave me confidence that I had found the right institution at the right time and inspired me to believe that I, too, could grow while contributing meaningfully to SEATINI's mission.

Looking back today, serving as Deputy Executive Director of SEATINI, I see how a student's search for answers gradually evolved into a lifelong vocation.

The policy landscape has

changed significantly over the past three decades. Global trade is increasingly influenced by geopolitical tensions, technological transformation, climate change, and shifting centres of economic power. Yet SEATINI's mission remains remarkably constant: strengthening Africa's position in world trade while advancing development approaches rooted in African priorities.

Its methods, however, continue to evolve.

Technology has transformed how young people learn, connect, and organise. In response, SEATINI has embraced innovative platforms such as the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub, the Graduate Trainee and Internship Programme offered both physically and virtually, and the Africentric Trade and Develop-



ment Academy. These initiatives are equipping a new generation with the knowledge and skills required to navigate an increasingly green and digital global economy.

Africa's future demands young people who think critically rather than simply consume ideas. It requires researchers, policy analysts and leaders who can interrogate global systems with confidence while imagining development grounded in African realities.

Together with an extraordinary team of colleagues, I now have the privilege of advancing the mission that first inspired me as a university student. Every policy dialogue, research publication, stakeholder engagement, and capacity-building initiative reflects SEATINI's enduring conviction that sustainable development begins with informed citizens who possess knowledge, capacity, and the courage to apply both.

One of the greatest privileges of this journey has been witnessing

the remarkable paths taken by many who once sat beside me in those university dialogues. Today, they serve as civil servants, researchers, economists, entrepreneurs, parliamentarians, and leaders across Uganda and the continent. Many continue to carry the values nurtured through those early engagements into institutions where decisions shaping Africa's future are made.

When people reflect on SEATINI's legacy, they often point to the policies it has influenced, the negotiations it has strengthened, or the research it has produced. Those achievements deserve recognition.

Yet I believe the organisation's most enduring contribution is less visible.

It lives in the generations of young Africans whose confidence, curiosity and sense of purpose it has helped cultivate.

As SEATINI celebrates thirty years,

I celebrate an institution that understood, long before it became fashionable, that ideas matter; that universities remain among society's greatest engines of transformation; and that investing in young minds is among the most enduring forms of nation-building.

Whenever I think back to the young undergraduate who first walked into a SEATINI dialogue searching for answers, I realise he found something far greater than information.

He found a community that challenged him to think differently. He found mentors who believed in his potential. He found purpose.

In every meaningful sense of the word, he found a home.

Thirty years after SEATINI began its own journey, that mission continues to live in the conversations, ideas and young leaders it inspires—affirming that Africa's future can, and indeed must, be imagined by Africans themselves.



Students during a SEATINI public lecture. Through these engagements, SEATINI nurtured a generation of young Africans to question, analyse, and contribute meaningfully to development policy discourse.

Voices Of The Next Generation of Trade Policy Analysts

A Season Twice Given

By Mr. Niyas Abdulla, Graduate Trainee/Intern, Student, Master's Programme in Global Studies-Sustainable Societies and Social Change, Jönköping University

I arrived in Kampala, Uganda for the first time not entirely sure what I was looking for. I came with ideas shaped by books, scholarship and the narratives through which Africa is so often presented many insightful, others limited. Like many people educated largely outside the continent, I carried assumptions I had not yet fully examined. One of the quieter lessons of my time with SEATINI was how much there was to unlearn.

I joined SEATINI as an intern in the autumn of 2025 while pursuing a Master's in Global Studies: Sustainable Societies and Social Change at Jönköping University in Sweden. I was curious about what development might look like when viewed from African perspectives rather than explained to Africa from elsewhere. What I found was not a lesson delivered through theory, but through practice.

From my first weeks at SEATINI, I was struck by the organisation's culture. Ideas moved freely across teams, hierarchy rarely overshadowed collaboration, and warmth was simply part of the working environment. It was a place where rigorous debate and genuine collegiality existed side by side. Rather than advocating Africentric approaches only through publications and policy engagement, SEATINI embodied those values in the way it



worked.

My internship later grew into thesis fieldwork, giving me the opportunity to return and engage more deeply with the organisation. Those two periods allowed me to appreciate that SEATINI's work extends well beyond technical expertise in trade and development policy. It reflects a commitment to intellectual independence, careful research and the conviction that Africa's development priorities should be defined by Africans themselves.

That conviction resonated with many of the questions I had been exploring in my own studies about development, sustainability and alternative economic thinking. I found it refreshing to encounter an institution that did not simply critique dominant economic models but actively created space for imagining alternatives grounded in African realities and experiences.

It is against this backdrop that I have come to appreciate what SEATINI has

built over the past thirty years. To remain steadfast in the often-contested fields of trade, investment and development policy for three decades is an achievement in itself. More importantly, SEATINI has consistently argued for an Africa that negotiates from its own priorities, informed by evidence, principle and a long-term vision of equitable development.

I am not a trade economist, nor would I claim authority to assess the organisation's technical contributions. What I can say, having observed its work from within, is that SEATINI approaches policy with uncommon care and integrity. It asks difficult questions, challenges prevailing orthodoxies without resorting to rhetoric, and consistently promotes thoughtful, evidence-based alternatives. That combination feels increasingly valuable in today's policy landscape.

Thirty years is long enough to witness changing development paradigms, shifting political priorities and evolving global economic debates. Through these changes, SEATINI has maintained remarkable consistency in its mission while continuing to evolve its approaches. Its willingness to uphold Africentric perspectives, question inequitable systems and invest in new generations of thinkers speaks not only to its resilience but also to its relevance.

As SEATINI celebrates this milestone, it is also looking ahead through initiatives such as the Strategic Plan 2026-2030, the Yash Tandon Trade and De-

velopment Knowledge Hub, and the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy. These initiatives demonstrate that the organisation's greatest contribution may not simply be what it has achieved over the past thirty years, but the ideas, institutions and people it is helping to shape for the decades to come.

My time at SEATINI was brief in the

context of its long history, but it left a lasting impression. It offered not certainty, but a different way of asking questions about trade, development and Africa's place in the world. For that, and for the generosity with which I was welcomed into its community, I remain deeply grateful.

For thirty years of principled advocacy, intellectual leadership and un-

wavering commitment to Africentric alternatives for sustainable development, SEATINI has earned not only recognition for its past but confidence in its future. I count myself fortunate to have experienced, however briefly, a small part of that journey.



Mr. Alexander Eriksson, Graduate Trainee/Intern, Global Studies student at Jönköping University, Sweden

My experience at SEATINI provided a rich and practical understanding of development and trade issues across different contexts.

A key learning point has been understanding the diversity within Africa and the importance of context-specific approaches. Field visits, including engagements in Rwanda, highlighted the differences in policy implementation and development approaches across countries in the region.

I also participated in field activities, including discussions with local leaders in areas such as Apac, focusing on taxation and revenue mobilization. These interactions emphasized the importance of first-hand experience in understanding policy impact.

In addition, visits to communities, schools, and national parks such as Murchison Falls provided deeper insights into Uganda's social, cultural, and environmental landscape. These experiences strengthened my appreciation of participatory and community-centered development approaches.

Mr. Julian Roberts, Graduate Trainee/Intern, Global Studies student at Jönköping University, Sweden

At SEATINI, my experience primarily centered on policy research and analysis within the office environment.

One of my key assignments involved contributing to a policy brief on recycling and the circular economy, developed in collaboration with colleague Alex and supported by guidance from SEATINI Uganda. This work strengthened my understanding of practical policy development and implementation in a real-world context.

I have also engaged in extensive read-

ing, fieldwork, and participation in conferences, including discussions on the coffee sector and its value chain challenges in Eastern and Southern Africa, particularly Uganda and Ethiopia.

I am working on research examining the impact of unilateral trade agreements and tariffs on Uganda and the East African Community (EAC). This has deepened my interest in trade policy and development economics.

Overall, this internship has provided valuable exposure to policy processes, research methods, and regional trade dynamics, significantly enriching my academic and professional growth.



THE ROAD AHEAD (2026–2030)

Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Equitable and Sustainable Development

As SEATINI celebrates 30 years of advancing Africa's voice in trade and development policy, the organisation enters a defining new chapter guided by its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan under the theme "Advancing Africentric Alternatives for Equitable and Sustainable Development." This milestone is not only a celebration of three decades of impact, resilience, and commitment to Africa's development aspirations; it is also a moment to reflect on the continent's development journey and reaffirm the need for bold, transformative, and Africa-centred solutions for the future.

Built on nearly three decades of rigorous research, policy engagement, capacity strengthening, and advocacy, the new strategy responds to a rapidly evolving global environment marked by profound economic, social, environmental, and geopolitical shifts. It reflects SEATINI's continued commitment to strengthening Africa's agency in shaping the policies, institutions, and systems that influence its development trajectory.

Africa continues to navigate deep-rooted structural challenges arising from unequal participation in global economic governance. Climate change, rising debt vulnerabilities, geopolitical fragmentation, economic shocks, and widening inequalities have further exposed the limitations of prevailing development approaches. These realities have reinforced the urgency of pursuing development pathways that are grounded in African realities, informed by local knowledge, and responsive to the aspirations and priorities of African peoples.

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan emerges from this imperative. It reaffirms SEATINI's commitment to generating rigorous, evidence-based, and transformative Africentric policy alternatives that strengthen Africa's capacity to shape trade, fiscal, investment, and development policies. At its core is the conviction that equitable and sustainable development must be people-centred, rights-based, environmentally responsible, and rooted in the lived experiences and knowledge systems of the continent.

The strategy is anchored on four mutually reinforcing thematic pillars:

Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development

This pillar seeks to advance fair, inclusive, and climate-responsive trade and investment frameworks that contribute

to structural transformation, green industrialisation, food security, women's economic justice, and a just energy transition. It recognises the need for Africa to move beyond dependency on the export of raw materials and strengthen value addition, productive capacities, innovation, and sustainable industrial development.

Financing for Development

This pillar focuses on promoting equitable and accountable financing systems through tax justice, domestic resource mobilisation, transparent public finance management, responsible debt management, and innovative financing approaches. It seeks to expand Africa's fiscal space and strengthen the capacity of African states to finance sustainable development priorities.

Building Africentric Alternatives for Social Justice

This pillar represents a strategic investment in ideas, knowledge, and leadership as essential foundations for Africa's transformative development agenda. Through forward-looking initiatives such as the Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub, the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy, and the Graduate Trainee Programme, SEATINI will strengthen African policy thought leadership, promote critical engagement with development paradigms, and nurture a new generation of thinkers, researchers, negotiators, and policy leaders equipped to shape Africa's future.

The Yash Tandon Trade and Development Knowledge Hub will serve as a pan-African platform for generating transformative knowledge, advancing Africentric policy research, and fostering critical dialogue on trade, development, and global economic governance. Inspired by the intellectual legacy of Professor Yash Tandon, SEATINI's founder, the Hub will contribute to strengthening Africa's capacity to challenge dominant development narratives and advance policy alternatives rooted in African realities and aspirations.

Complementing this knowledge-generation agenda, the Africentric Trade and Development Policy Academy will provide a continental platform for strengthening policy leadership and capacity among government officials, trade negotiators, civil society actors, researchers, and emerging young leaders. Through practical learning, policy analysis, and critical engagement with development approaches, the Academy will support the emergence of

a new generation of African policy actors capable of advancing equitable and sustainable development pathways.

Together, these initiatives represent SEATINI's investment in Africa's intellectual sovereignty and policy capacity, ensuring that the continent is better equipped to generate ideas, influence global debates, and shape development solutions that respond to the needs and aspirations of its people.

Institutional Development and Sustainability

This pillar focuses on strengthening SEATINI's organisational systems, partnerships, governance structures, and institutional resilience to ensure effective programme delivery and sustained impact in the years ahead.

Across these pillars, SEATINI will continue to advocate for reforms in global trade and financial governance, strengthen Africa's collective voice in regional and international policy spaces, expand citizen participation in economic governance, and promote development pathways that integrate economic, social, cultural, and environmental justice. Research, policy analysis, strategic communications, alliance building, and capacity strengthening will remain central to the organisation's approach.

As SEATINI enters its fourth decade, it remains firmly guided by its founding mission of Strengthening Stakeholders capacity to effectively influence trade, fiscal and investment related policies for sustained equitable development and improved livelihoods in the EAC and Africa at large. The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan is more than a roadmap; it is a call for collective action bringing together governments, civil society, academia, communities, regional institutions, and development partners to advance Africentric alternatives that contribute to equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development across the continent.

The road ahead builds on the lessons, achievements and partnerships of the past thirty years while reaffirming SEATINI's commitment to strengthening Africa's policy agency, advancing democratic participation in economic governance, and contributing to a future where Africa is not merely a participant in global decision-making but an active architect of its own development trajectory.



YASH TANDON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE HUB

Launched by

Rt. Hon. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda,
Special Envoy for Special Duties, Office of the
President and Prime Minister Emeritus of Uganda.

29th July, 2026



For more information please contact

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