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AFRICA BUSINESS GROUP

The Business Culture Dimension of Trade between Africa and the European Union: The case of Uganda (and beyond)

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Among the topics that are vastly neglected in debates (and in the research) about the reality and prospects of Africa's international trade and economic development is the issue of 'business culture', or the *dimension of inter-personal relationships and practices* (and related aspects of experiences, knowledge, orientations, habits, social skills, emotions, power, norms, values, motivations, judgments and decisions). If the presumption holds that the Africa-EU trade is in fundamental ways not only related to the conventional issues (infrastructure, tariffs, costs, standards, technical skills, quantity and quality, demand, structural power imbalances) but also a matter of the actual dynamics between the very people involved (who work either as individual traders or for the export and import firms), then we tap into a reality of Africa-EU trade that seems to-date hardly studied and discussed systematically.

This is a harmful state of affairs, above all for the trade prospects of the smaller, start-up African exporters (and their often rural and agricultural suppliers) who, at the beginning of their export venture, are likely to be less experienced in matters of international trade business culture (practices etc.), the dynamics of (i) low/high trust and mistrust, (ii) buyers' demands, pressures, and, not seldom, malpractices, or (iii) the complexity of (long-term) inter-firm cooperation. Especially (but not only) new exporters face a scenario of costly learning-by-mistake with regard to getting into, managing and deepening the relationships with (potential/actual) buyers abroad. On the other hand, European buyers who (wish to) source from Africa face and have to tackle a number of issues as well regarding the business culture of their suppliers.

This presentation tries to contribute to a debate about the business culture dimension of Africa-EU trade. To make his points, the presenter will use extensive interview data (collected in Uganda and some European countries) from a qualitative study on the governance of inter-firm relationships in Global Value Chains between Uganda and Europe. He will build on some of the arguments made in the journal article 'Beyond harsh trade!?' and in his recent book as well as use relevant insights from his current PhD research.

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Room 116, 12.30pm-2pm
RSVP essential, fees apply
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