

Regional Session on Africa

Trade can stimulate Africa's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063, especially by driving inclusive and sustainable development for women and youth. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can catalyze this ambition to realize Africa's regional integration agenda and unified markets. If effectively implemented, the AfCFTA can increase productivity and income levels, lift people out of extreme poverty, and, critically, offer substantial opportunities for including women and young people in Africa's trade liberalization. All stakeholders must collaborate and partner strategically to achieve this.

The session discussed how the AfCFTA could help African countries transform their economies from models based on natural resource extraction and export to new growth models that could deliver decent jobs, increase access to credit, reduce financing interest rates, and promote income redistribution to build resilience to external shocks. It discussed the importance of harnessing Africa's demographic dividend by investing in its young people through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, entrepreneurship, start-ups, digital technology, and incubators.

Several recommendations were formulated urging African Union Member States to:

- Establish or strengthen systematic mechanisms for including young people in monitoring, measuring, and reporting on implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Agenda 2063, and the AfCFTA.
- Adopt and ratify the African Digital Transformation Strategy, providing countries with a regulatory framework to leapfrog technology adoption.
- Develop the infrastructure to support the trade and e-commerce ecosystems, including transportation, communication, manufacturing, sustainable and renewable energy, last-mile fiber connectivity, and payment systems.
- Adopt quota systems with the AfCFTA to ensure youth and women-led businesses access at least 30 percent of government procurement opportunities and a minimum of young employees in exporting business.
- Integrate AfCFTA into their educational systems to adapt to new demands, especially in STEM fields, and support their young people in developing skills in agro-processing, automotive, pharmaceuticals, etc.
- Include young people in the development of trade policies, thus harnessing the potential of their young people in the implementation of the AfCFTA.
- Support ideas and innovations of young people through rigorous legal frameworks on intellectual property rights and subsidize youth-led businesses to help them leverage economies of scale.

Media stakeholders were also urged to disseminate information on the AfCFTA in youth-friendly ways, including in local languages.