

AFRICA YOUTH MONTH AND 2ND AFCFTA YOUTH DAY COMMEMORATION REPORT 2023



November 09th-15th



Independent Continental Youth
Advisory Council On AfCFTA



THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

www.icoyacafrica.org

THEME:

YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE AFCFTA

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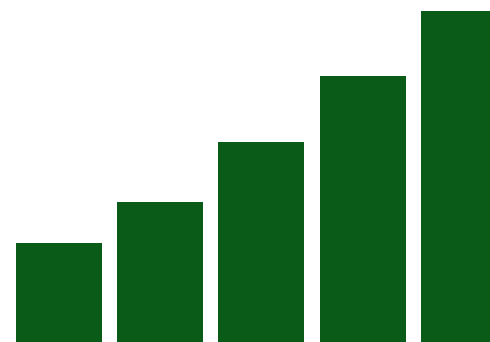
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About ICOYACA

The Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA (ICOYACA) is a multi-sector youth-led continental body initiated by young people from all around Africa, under the guidance and stewardship of YouLead Africa, The Training Centre for Development Cooperation (MSTCDC), through a partnership with the East African Community Secretariat (EAC), East African Business Council (EABC) with financial and technical assistance from the GIZ African Union Office.

The Council was launched on the 9th of November 2021 during the Africa Young Business Leaders Forum of the annual YouLead Summit convened by H.E Jakaya Kikwete, former President of the Republic of Tanzania who doubles as YouLead's Patron, and Hon. Dr. Peter Mathuki, the Secretary General of East African Community. Present also were three Senior officials of the AfCFTA Secretariat (Ms. Halima Noor Abdi, Talkmore Chidede and Paul Okech).

The Council was later officially unveiled on April 29th 2022 by H.E. Wamkele Mene - Secretary General, AfCFTA Secretariat represented by Mr. Sebahizi Prudence - Chief Technical Officer, AfCFTA Secretariat and details can be found here. The Council has since established over 54 Country Chapters and engages 10 youth in each member state and works closely with the AfCFTA Secretariat to Champion youth inclusion.

(L): Mr. Ivan Atuyambe, Former Youlead Africa Director, handing over the AfCFTA Youth Inclusion Study Report that led to the creation of ICOYACA to H.E Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat.





Vision And Mission

Vision

Facilitate the institutionalization of youth participation in the decision making process and Implementation processes of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Mission

Mobilize and empower young people to participate in Intra-African Trade.

1.0. Background

The African Youth Charter was adopted through an Executive Council Decision of the Banjul Summit of 2006 (DOC.EX.CL. /292 (IX), established the 1st November as “African Youth Day (AYD).” The day recognizes a unified voice of young people, which aims to increase awareness of commitment to and investment in youth; increase and strengthen youth participation and partnerships, as well as increase intercultural exchanges and understanding among young people.

Relatedly, the brokering of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) represents a historic milestone in Africa's economic integration. With its potential to create the largest free trade area in the world, the AfCFTA presents immense opportunities for African youth to participate in intra-African trade, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The annual AfCFTA Youth Day Commemoration which takes place on 09th November every year, the day ICOYACA was established, serves as a platform to engage, empower, and inspire African youth to actively contribute to the AfCFTA's success. This is the second commemoration, the first happened last year in Kampala, Uganda in partnership with the government of .

In line with the Decision, the African Union Commission (AUC) through the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD) and the Office of the Youth Envoy in partnership with African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Arab Republic of Egypt and Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA (ICOYACA), with support from the International Trade Centre organised Dialogue sessions as part of 2023 Africa Youth Day celebrations during the dedicated satellite event on youth employment and employability skills in Cairo, Egypt – representing the North Africa region.

The commemorations was also supported by youth-led and Youth-Focused organisations such as the Koffi Anna Foundation, Global Shapers Johannesburg Hub and the United Nations ITU/Generation Connect Youth Envoys.

2.0. Introduction

Within the expansive framework of the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) held at the Al Manara Conference Centre from the 09th-15th November in Cairo, Egypt, the council and partners organised the 2023 Africa Youth Day and the AfCFTA Youth Day commemoration. The satellite event that took place in a hybrid format on the 09th and 10th November extensively focused on youth employment and the development of employability skills in recognition of the pivotal role of the AfCFTA in providing extensive opportunities for African youth. This is because the AfCFTA directly contributes to enhancing the employability of African youth, creating job opportunities, and nurturing the acquisition of essential skills for a dynamic workforce.

2.1. About the IATF



Intra-African Trade Fair Day One Panel Session Photo

The Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) is a remarkable one week long conference that gathered all continental and global economic players at the Al Manara Conference Centre in Cairo, Egypt. This dynamic event showcased the strength of intra-African trade, featuring a robust participation of 1,650 exhibitors. The IATF's international significance was demonstrated by the presence of representatives from 45 African countries and participants from 60 countries outside Africa. With 61 countries hosting pavilions and a total active participation of 118 countries, IATF 2023 emerged as a crucial platform for fostering economic collaboration. Drawing 28,000 visitors, the event solidified its standing as a premier trade engagement hub. Additionally, the inclusion of four special days of events enriched the overall experience, offering focused discussions and opportunities for strategic networking.

2.2. Objectives of the Commemoration

The main objective of the commemoration was to foster Empowerment and Economic Growth of African Youth in trade through Employment and job creation opportunities, this included;

I. Identifying drivers and challenges for youth employment in Africa's industrialisation, and the 21st century skills that are required for youth to take advantage of Africa's industrialisation and the AfCFTA.

II. Empowering African youth with knowledge, skills, resources, and entrepreneurial support to leverage the AfCFTA for economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

III. Fostering market connectivity, intra-African trade, and youth networks while enabling youth voices to shape policies and initiatives, ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes.



A Group Photo Youth Entrepreneurs with the African Union and the AeTrade Team after the pitching session

3.0. Day One (09th)

The commemorations in day one featured the opening session, which included welcome remarks from the organising entities i.e., ICOYACA and the African Union Youth Division (AUC), A keynote address from the Host Country i.e., the Arab Republic of Egypt and two panel sessions.

3.1. Remarks by the African Union Youth Division (AUC)

The commemoration was opened with remarks from Ms. Prudence Nonkululeko Ngwenya, Director of the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate, African Union Commission (AUC). In her remarks delivered by Mr. Daniel Adugna, Program Officer at the Directorate, Ms. Ngwenya noted that African Youth Day should be commemorated everyday. With over 420 million people aged 15-35 making up to 40% of African population, the African Continent boasts the largest population of any region in the world and this is Africa's largest resource, not the gold, not the oil, not the diamond and not the land, it is the young people of Africa. She emphasized that there is need to invest in the youth so as to reap their value and to harness their full potential. That there is need to invest in their skills development, education, employment, entrepreneurship, youth civic engagement as well as the Health and wellbeing of our young people.



Mr. Daniel Adugna, Program Officer AUC speaking during the event.

She continued and stated that it is only by creating opportunities for our youth that they can become resources to themselves and eventually to Africa and the world thus contributing towards achieving agenda 2063, the Africa We All Want. She highlighted two flagship initiatives the AUC has put in place to prioritise Youth Development as well as their Economic and Financial Empowerment: **The 1 Million Next Level** and **Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative (WYFEI)**.



Photo Credit: African Union Youth Commission X Handle

In her conclusion she noted that it is evident that continental initiatives such as the IATF and the AfCFTA bring concrete opportunities to the youth in terms of creating decent jobs,, knowledge and skills transfer and pathways to a dignified life. she further stated that it is the responsibility of duty bearers such as development partners and decision makers to ensure young people remain at the center of all development efforts. This call to action was in line with the commemoration organised by ICOYACA and the AUC.

Conclusively, she thanked all partners who made the commemoration a success and ended her speech with the call to action to all youth to immerse themselves to all the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA so that they can impact the continent's growth and development.

3.2. Remarks from the AfCFTA Youth Advisory Council (ICOYACA)

The Council's remarks were delivered by Ms. Anele Simon, the Acting Secretary General of ICOYACA. In her speech, she stated that the commemoration was not just a gathering but rather a testament to the council's unwavering commitment to celebrating and advocating for the irreplaceable role of African youth in the journey towards realizing the African Continental Free Trade Area.



The Secretary General noted that last year, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth of the Republic of Uganda, the AfCFTA Secretariat, and with invaluable financial support from the International Trade Centre (ITC), the council organised the inaugural AfCFTA Youth Day. The resounding success of the AfCFTA Youth Day event was nothing short of remarkable. It saw the participation of over a thousand (1,000) youth in trade, both physically and virtually, and led to the engagement of nearly seventy thousand (70,000) young minds across the continent.

This underscored the determination and potential of our youth to shape the future of African commerce. But also underscores the determination of ICOYACA to ensure that youth voices are not merely heard but actively engaged in shaping AfCFTA policies and initiatives in all the African Union member states.

Stressing the significance of the AfCFTA, she noted that it represents a historic milestone in Africa's economic integration, poised to create the largest free trade area globally. That within this monumental initiative lies an abundance of opportunities for our young entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders. These opportunities extend beyond trade; they encompass a wide spectrum of economic activities where our youth can flourish.

She further stated that the council is here to empower African youth with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to leverage the AfCFTA for economic growth and job creation. Through market connectivity, the council aims to foster connections and networks among our youth, facilitating collaboration and the exchange of innovative ideas.



She emphasized that the AfCFTA Youth Day offers exceptional networking and partnership opportunities for our youth entrepreneurs, industry leaders, investors, and policymakers, promoting collaboration and sharing of best practices.

The SG concluded her speech by stating that the Africa Youth Month and AfCFTA Youth Day Commemoration 2023, is a beacon of hope and opportunity. Together, we shall inspire, connect, and empower African youth for the AfCFTA revolution, setting the stage for a prosperous and inclusive African economy.

3.3. Key Note Address from the Government of Arab Republic of Egypt

The key note address was delivered by Dr. Amany Elwassal, Head of Foreign Trade and Commercial Agreements Sector, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Arab Republic of Egypt. In her speech, Dr. Amany underscored the importance of economics reforms if a country is to harness the economic opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area. This she said was the reason the Egyptian government was ready to embrace a free market economy in the advent of the AfCFTA.



She said that the Egyptian government embarked on economic reforms in two phases, the Educational stage and the Structural stage. This phases according to her were responsible for preparing the Egyptian government for the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.

I. First Phase

The first phase which started in 1991 was known as the educational stage which was responsible of preparing the citizens and government employees for the transition from a fully planned economy to a free market economy. She noted that policies had to be amended to encourage a free market economy and put in place for the private sector to operate at a high level, with foreign capital from international companies and also allowing all small and medium companies mainly led by youth to flourish.

II. Second Phase

The second phase began from the early 2000s, the government effected structural economic reforms because they wanted to see the results of the amended policies on the private sector, attracting investments and encouraging ideas and innovation. She emphasized that, the only way Egypt was to benefit from a free market economy, was to industrialise however, for it to happen, capital was needed therefore necessitating the policy amendments, attracting investments for capital accumulation.

Dr. Amany attributes the government's successful transition from a planned economy to a free market economy to the country's youthful population and an education system that influenced youth to embrace technology which allows youth to be creative and innovative. The education system also ensured that the country's youth are prepared for more in-demand jobs. She noted that youth bring about policy change since they are the ones capable of innovation, and transferring new technologies and cultures to societies. This according to her is what Africa needs.



Photo Credit: MCIT-Gov Egypt Website-3rd Intake Admission Tests of DEY

Conclusively, Dr. Amany reiterated that through education, embracing of technology and amendment and/or enactment of policies that favor the flourishing of a free market economy, and most importantly prioritizing the youth in the development process, most developing and least developed countries will be about to harness the economic opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area. She concludes by saying that changes are a result of technology and therefore, first and foremost education.

3.4. Panel Sessions

The day's sessions brought together the dynamic themes of women and youth financial inclusion, industrialization within the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), employability, and the vital role of African youth in trade exchange, market connectivity, and digital solutions. Each panel session delved into essential aspects of Africa's socio-economic landscape.

3.4.1. Panel Session 1: Nexus of Women & Youth Financial Inclusion, Industrialization, and Youth Employment

This session, skillfully moderated by Ms. Rym Ben Salah from the African Union Commission, featured a dynamic lineup of experts. Ms. Jessica Annor, Head of the Youth Gender and Women's Empowerment Unit at AUDA-NEPAD, Mr. Roland Sarton, Employment Specialist from ILO CO Egypt, Mr. Precious Phiri, Founder of Awawo and Ms. Dorice Malle, CEO of Mama Mia's Soko, brought diverse perspectives and expertise to the insightful discussion.



Ms. Rym Ben Salah from the African Union Commission

The panel explored the interconnected relationships between women and youth participation in financial systems, industrial development, and the transformative potential of the AfCFTA. This discussion addressed the pressing need for increased access to financial services for women and youth, the role of industrialization in empowering these demographics, and the AfCFTA's capacity to enhance economic opportunities.



Mr. Precious Phiri, Founder of Awawo speaking during the session

Mr. Precious Phiri, Founder of Awawo highlighted that funding is a key challenge the youth entrepreneurs are facing especially for youth businesses dealing in sustainable products. He noted that they require specialised funding and when it comes to market access, he pointed out regulatory barriers and delayed products registration caused by the regulatory bodies. The opportunities he pointed out was the growing demand for sustainable products especially like their business that deals in Bamboo products and the new technologies enabling the to scale up.



Ms. Dorice Malle, CEO of Mama Mia's Soko speaking during the session

Ms. Dorice Malle, CEO of Mama Mia's Soko addressing the challenges young entrepreneurs face stated that most young entrepreneurs don't understand what cashflow is. That young people need to understand the Cashflow quadrant and recommended that they read Robert Kiyosaki's book titled "Rich Dad Poor Dad" to get a better understanding of how cashflow works. She also pointed out a critical issues that most youth entrepreneurs don't understand the language of investors which hinders scaling-up. That youth need to prepare enough to pitch their investment ideas something her organisation is doing to capacitate youth.



Jessica Annor, Head of the Youth Gender and Women's Empowerment Unit at AUDA-NEPAD, speaking during the session.

Jessica Annor, Head of the Youth Gender and Women's Empowerment Unit at AUDA-NEPAD, pointed out that the challenge of access to funding faced by youth is because the banks find investing in youth businesses risky. She noted that AUDA-NEPAD through its youth program found ways to de-risk finance for youth entrepreneurs and women. She informed the audience that NEPAD got \$74m from US-DFC which funds have been given to banks in Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia. This funds now act as a guarantee mechanism to allow youth young and women entrepreneurs access funding and NEPAD is doing the oversight to ensure the funds implementation. She also noted that the Spanish Fund Program in phase two will also include youth to help give them direct funding in-addition to financial literacy programs they run to help youth make informed financial decisions.

Mr. Roland Sarton, Employment Specialist from International Labor Organisation (ILO)-North African Region, revealed that over 38% of youth are still working in extreme poverty in Africa. Youth in Africa are working but the nature and quality of work is not productive and doesn't provide decent work conditions. Most of them are working in the informal sector with low social protection and low wages. He noted that ILO are working with governments to support them transform their economies to identify the sectors that can generate more value and more productive work. They are also working with governments and communities to conduct entrepreneurship trainings e.g., Programs like Start and Improve Your Business (IYB), they also support women enterprises and also run some financial inclusion projects and support Agro-Business Hubs.



Mr. Roland Sarton, Employment Specialist from International Labor Organisation (ILO)-North African Region, speaking during the session.

In conclusion, the panelist emphasized the transformative role of youth in driving industrialization and the significance of Agenda 2063 for youth employability and economic empowerment. One of the key takeaways was the emphasis on the pivotal role of youth as primary drivers of economic growth and development on the continent. The consensus was that financial inclusion is paramount for empowering youth and facilitating their active participation in the economy. The discussion underscored that industrialization holds the potential to generate new jobs and opportunities for African youth.

3.4.2. Panel Session 2: Africa Youth in Trade Exchange || Market Connectivity and Digital Solutions

The second in-person panel discussion focused on the critical role of youth in shaping trade policies and initiatives within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and explored the potential of digital solutions and platforms to enhance market connectivity for African youth entrepreneurs. The panel discussion was skillfully moderated by Ms. Yomna Sherif and Ms. Noha Ashraf Abdel Baky, ITU/Generation Connect Youth Envoys.



Ms. Yomna Sherif and Ms. Noha Ashraf Abdel Baky, ITU/Generation Connect Youth Envoys, moderating the event.

The panelists included Mr. Oswald Anonadanga, CEO of FloodGates Ltd, Mr. Ahmed Fathy, Founder of the YLE Foundation, Mr. Mulualem Syoum, CEO of AeTrade Group, Mr. Moustafa Abdalla, Chairman of Wavemakers United Egypt and Ms. Dina Eldalil, International Cooperation Director in the Presidential Initiative 'EBDA.' The discussion focused on engaging youth voices in shaping trade policies and initiatives within the AfCFTA, ensuring their inclusion and representation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the panel explored digital solutions and platforms to enhance market connectivity for African youth entrepreneurs operating within the AfCFTA framework.

Mr. Ahmed Fathy, Founder of the YLE Foundation, highlighted the profound impact of climate change on Africa, particularly on agriculture, industry and trade. He emphasized the challenges of acquiring loans rather than grants for technology, leading to the current debt cycle. Anticipating climate migration, Mr. Fathy stressed the need for mobility and trade readiness. He expresses optimism that implementing agreements, such as the AfCFTA, could fortify Africa's resilience against climate change.



Mr. Ahmed Fathy, Founder of the YLE Foundation, speaking during the session.

Ms. Dina Eldalil outlined the organization's focus on accelerating and facilitating Egypt's industrial sector. EBDA collaborates with Egyptian and international entities to develop internationally-accredited technical schools, emphasizing digital skills. They have inaugurated two schools, one specializing in artificial intelligence, with plans to digitize operations through a platform covering ERP, content management, training, interactive learning and an online employment platform.



Ms. Dina Eldalil, International Cooperation Director in the Presidential Initiative 'EBDA', speaking during the session.

Mr. Muluaem Syoum spoke of the Affordable Digital Finance summit decision made by the African Union in February, leading to the launch of the African Strategic Investment Alliance in July. This alliance, a fund of funds, aims to bridge the substantial \$330 billion annual gap in financing for small businesses in Africa. By mobilizing domestic resources, particularly through member state pension funds, the alliance seeks to provide affordable finance for small businesses, with a specific focus on youth and women entrepreneurs. This demonstrates a strategic and sustainable approach to providing affordable finance, particularly for youth and women entrepreneurs on the continent.



Mr. Muluaem Syoum, CEO of AeTrade Group, speaking during the session.

Mr. Moustafa Abdalla raised the critical need for knowledge-sharing and collaboration across the continent to address water-related challenges. He introduced the UN-accredited program, UN WaveMaker, urging the use of digital tools to ensure every young mind can contribute innovative solutions. Additionally, he highlighted Wavemakers United's Online Academy and Marketplace as platforms for learning, trading innovative ideas and fostering global collaboration in water management and solutions.



Mr. Moustafa Abdalla, Chairman of Wavemakers United Egypt, speaking during the session.

Mr. Oswald Anonadanga, emphasized the pivotal role of digital solutions for maximizing the benefits of AfCFTA. He talked us through the significance of democratizing access to digital platforms, particularly for MSMEs and prioritizing scalable solutions like e-commerce and digital payment platforms. Addressing the importance of trust in trade, remphasized the role of such solutions in creating a unified African market and achieving the goals of AfCFTA in a meaningful way.



Mr. Oswald Anonadanga, CEO of FloodGates Ltd, speaking during the session.

Conclusively, Both presentations by Ms Eldalil and Mr Syoum reflect innovative and comprehensive strategies to address key challenges in the areas of youth education and finance respectively. Despite time constraints, the panel offered profound insights, leaving both online and in-person audiences eager to hear more about the solutions shared by the dynamic panelists

4.0. Day Two Virtual Session

The commemorations in day two featured remarks from the Vice Chairperson of ICOYACA, two panels, a keynote address and a Policy Awareness presentation. Panel Discussion 1: Peace and Security: A Catalyst for Youth Empowerment. Panel Discussion 2: Climate/Environment and Sustainable Trade.

4.1. Remarks by the Vice Chairperson of ICOYACA

Day two of the commemoration was opened with remarks from Ms. Thembela Msibi, Vice Chairperson of the AfCFTA Youth Advisory Council. In her remarks, Ms. Thembela thanked all the online participants whose virtual support led to the successful hybrid commemoration on day one. She called upon them to continue with the same energy noting that Africa will only be built if we the youth are eager to contribute to our own developing starting with seeking knowledge. She implored them to share suggestions and recommendations of projects they would wish the council to implement in the coming year and for the day's sessions, she asked them to actively participate in the discussions. She concluded her remarks by stating that the council is here to champion all youth interests in the AfCFTA implementation processes and their active involvement in all its programs is what will lead to meaningful youth participation in the implementation processes.



Ms. Thembela Msibi, Vice Chairperson ICOYACA

4.2. Panel Session 1: Peace and Security: A Catalyst for Youth Empowerment



Moderator: Ms. Esther Shakela

The first panel discussion titled: Peace and Security: A Catalyst for Youth Empowerment, focused on the importance of Peace and Security in driving economic growth and youth empowerment within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). With the aim of outlining the linkages between peace, security and enhanced trade and economic growth. The panel discussion was skillfully moderated by Ms. Esther Shakela, a Peace and Security and youth inclusion advocate.

The session panelists included: Khoulood Baghouri, African Youth Ambassador for Peace North Africa Representative and Issah Toha Shamsoo, a Kofi Anna Foundation Young Change Maker. This platform allowed speakers to share their work and how they champion the African Union youth, peace and security Agenda in their respective institutions.

The hundreds of youth who joined virtually were able to identify areas of collaboration and gaps where synergies could be created and capitalized for the betterment of the African Union Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. The enthusiasm expressed by the virtual participants towards effective cooperation and collaboration on the African Union youth, peace and security Agenda and the nexus to Intra-African Trade was a key highlight for the AfCFTA Youth Advisory Council as cross-border collaboration and partnerships speaks to the integration agenda the Council advocates for.

During the panel, speakers were invited to explore the role that peace and security plays in fostering intra-African trade and how peace dividends contribute to effective implementation of the AfCFTA. Through their submissions, salient issues relating to the importance of stable political climates being necessary for Intra-African trade were raised; Youth in Intra-Africa Trade becoming Peace Ambassadors also came out strongly. Fundamentally, the panel had consensus that the relationship between Intra-African trade and political stability/absence of violence and conflict is directly proportional and should be regarded with grave concern if the AfCFTA is to be successful.



Khoulood Baghouri, African Union, African Youth Ambassador for Peace North Africa Representative. Photo Credit: New Era Newspaper.

In her submission, Khoulood Baghouri, noted that trade can serve as a powerful tool for peace and that the AfCFTA provides us with that opportunity to maximize trade as a tool for peace. The AfCFTA enables the continent to build economic inter-dependence which is very important. When African Country are economically inter-dependent, the cost for conflict becomes higher since there is a lot to lose than gain. So economic inter-dependence creates a strong incentive for African Union Member states to resolve disputes through dialogue and co-operation.

When it comes to the upcoming Protocol of Women and Youth in Trade, inclusivity in the formulation and implementation is key. It helps reduce economic disparities, reducing grievances hence contribute to social stability. The Protocol ensures that the benefits of Intra-African trade are inclusive and reach diverse segments of society including the marginalized group i.e., the women and youth.

Mr. Issah Toha Shamsoo in his submission stated that the AfCFTA is a very good initiative but the continent cannot leverage its economic opportunities without improving her peace and security architecture because it forms a foundation for effective trade. As the youth push their governments to open up borders for freely trade to flourish, there is a need to prioritize peace and security because “Peace is good Business” for example in West Africa where we have various terror groups and hijacking at border points. He implored youth to be concerned about issues of peace and security in Africa stating that it is not only the responsibility of the military, the police services and all other security organs but all of us the youth, in other words, youth in trade should be peace ambassadors.



Issah Toha Shamsoo, a Kofi Anna Foundation Young Change Maker

During plenary, with the excellent guidance of Ms. Esther Shakela, participants suggested that the council champions a program that will enable youth in trade become peace and security ambassadors. Other recommendations were made towards integrating the work of the Youth for Peace Ambassadors into institutions of higher learning as well.

Inconclusively, the deliberations during the session were insightful and thought-provoking, shedding light on the interaction between peace, security and trade - a conversation that is not often held so precisely. It inspired hope and courage, especially in light of recent conflicts and Coups on the continent but more so, increased understanding that in order for the AfCFTA to thrive there needs to be targeted efforts towards ensuring positive peace and security.

4.3. Panel Discussion 2 - Climate/Environment and Sustainable Trade



Moderator: Pheny Gasebonoe
Global Shapers Johannesburg Hub

The second panel discussion titled: Climate/Environment and Sustainable Trade. Climate and environmental sustainability are critical considerations for trade in Africa due to several interconnected reasons such as resource dependability, Africa's vulnerability to climate change and the environmental and social consequences from its impact. Seeing as trade might be resource-intensive, there is a need to preserve our biodiversity and how our biodiversity and environment can support our economic growth.

To unpack environmental and sustainability considerations and how they impact trade in the continent as it relates to the youth, the discussion aimed to understand the intersection of climate and environmental sustainability with trade in the African Free Trade area and the role of youth engagement in the agreement.

The keynote speaker for the event was Mr. Wiisichong Bening Ahmed, Secretary General of the Pan-African Youth Union. Other panelists included Christina Mawuse Gyisun, Youth Ecopreneur Finalist representing Sommalife, Donia Ebrahim, CEO and Founder of YuDa, David Kageena from Fie Consult and Amr Shalan, Co-Founder at TileGreen.

Mr Wiisichong began his keynote with a reminder that the AfCFTA is the largest single economic union in the world, setting the scene for the importance of the Youth Day and the discussion. He then brings to the fore a pertinent question for consideration: who are the beneficiaries of the single market? Unfortunately, Africans are not the main beneficiaries due to our reliance on imports and there needs to be a concerted effort on opportunity creation – such as job creation – through adding value to our natural resources due to Africa's wealth in natural resources.

To do this efficiently, Mr Wiisichong said we need to firstly consider advocacy, focusing on skills development and vocational training. Secondly, mobility is needed to remove obstacles such as visas and import and export taxes so that goods and African citizens (and youth) can move more freely to share skills within the continent. Thirdly, the alignment of import and export tax and a standardised regime would be key to remove further obstacles to free trade.

Fourthly, there needs to be more awareness of the Peace, Security, and Development Nexus to design a policy framework to promote a nexus between peace, security and economic development. Climate change is a key driver of conflict in the continent due to resource scarcity caused by climate change. There also needs to be a focus on climate resilience, particularly in the agrarian sector – Mr Wiisichong refers to a link between climate, agrarian development policy and food security, emphasising the importance of the AfCFTA to these particular matters and calls on the youth to ideate innovate ways to practicing agriculture to develop it resiliently. Another point that is presented is the comprehensive industrial plan and looking at it from a sustainable climate angle.

Ms. Ebrahim kicked off the panel discussion by commending the AfCFTA for providing a platform to connect young entrepreneurs to innovate and exchange goods and services amongst their respective countries. In addressing the issue of resource extraction and its environmental impact, she suggests the need for a carbon pricing mechanism to encourage businesses to adopt environmentally cleaner business practices. She also presents the opportunity for an accelerated energy transition that incentives for using renewable energy could give rise to. Adopting environmental impact assessments for businesses is another proposal she presents for increased transparency and improved mitigation interventions, along with the promotion of the circular economy.



Mr. Wiisichong Bening Ahmed
Secretary General, Pan
African Youth Union



Eng. Donia Ebrahim, CEO and Founder of YuDa

Mr David Kageenu, Agri-finance Specialist and Investment manager at Fie Consult, pointed out the value of applying and following ESG standards and reporting frameworks to support environmental conservation and protection. He also spoke about how entrepreneurs in Africa should consider climate concerns into trade when they are exporting as it could present a challenge of heightened operating costs. Making this more challenging for young entrepreneurs is that they have limited access to capital. However, he does mention that he is noticing that many new businesses are starting to consider ESG considerations from the onset of the business' conception, mitigating unexpected climate risks. Mr Kageena recognises the challenge of balancing environmental preservation and using natural resources for economic development and suggests that to do this, a portion of the profits made by using natural resources for products and trade can be used for environmental regeneration efforts.

Ms. Gysisun emphasized on the importance of shared value and doing this by leveraging technology for improved transparency and traceability in the supply chain of goods and using this to both reduce poverty and minimise waste. She alludes to her experience in managing natural resources and the opportunities they bring by creating premium markets for cultivated natural goods - that provide a stable income and livelihoods for female farmers - while protecting the environmental integrity of the resources. She also makes a recommendation for the AfCFTA to consider reducing the lending interest rates for companies that have good ESG scores for a trade ecosystem that is inclusive of youth.

Mr Shalan addressed the challenges and opportunities that could be presented and started by saying that entrepreneurs can bring the speed of execution. He also highlighted that it is important to remember that trade is not only limited to commodities, but it also extends to the trade of technologies and reinforces Ms. Gyisun's point on the opportunities that technology offers. He emphasises the importance of looking at regulations and guidelines to support the dialogue of navigating the challenges of balancing environmental sustainability with economic growth and navigating the opposing views that could be presented. On the topic of policy, Mr Shalan said that more could be done to incentivise businesses who are doing their part in protecting the environment through their targeted efforts to do so.



Christina Mawuse Gyisun
Sommalife, Youth Ecopreneur Finalist



Amr Shalan
CEO of TileGreen

The panelists left the audience with a wealth of considerations regarding sustainability in the context of African trade. Their insights prompted a reflective atmosphere, encouraging attendees to contemplate the complex dynamics and implications of fostering environmentally sustainable practices and the role of the youth and businesses to do this.

4.4. Policy Advocacy Awareness Session-Innovation for Policy Foundation

The last session of the commemoration was led by Stefan Riezebos from the Innovation for Policy Foundation (i4Policy). This is a pan-African non-governmental organization that brings citizens, communities and governments together to co-create the future!. The session looked at how youth can influence and advocate for policy.



Stefan Riezebos - Innovation for Policy Foundation (i4Policy)

In his remarks, Stefan noted that participation by youth equals to effective policy. He shared with the audience the projects i4Policy is implementing and also the Tools they can use to take part in the policy formulation process. Emphasizing that when youth have the knowledge and tools to participate in the policy formulation processes, the continent will have more of youth focused and youth-led policies which will be overall integral for the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The commemoration was closed by Mr. Lukhani Rogol, Liaison at the Office of the Chairperson, ICOYACA. He thanked the audience for the support rendered to the council during the two day commemoration noting that their attendance and active participation led to the successful commemoration.

5.0. IATF Engagements

5.1. Panel Discussion: Breaking Barriers, Expanding Horizons - Capitalizing on AfCFTA Opportunities through Education

The Council represented by Ms. Anele Simon, Secretary General, actively contributed to a pivotal panel discussion organised by International Trade Centre (ITC), Africa Business Council (AfBC) and AFREXIMBANK, that delved into the transformative prospects arising from the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The focus was on the indispensable role of education in preparing MSMEs to effectively harness opportunities within our monumental free trade area.



(Second Left) Ms. Anele Simon, Secretary General-ICOYACA

The discussion addressed key themes such as AfCFTA and Education, MSME Challenges as Catalysts for Education, the AU Theme for 2024: Education and forthcoming initiatives for African Trade. The session maintained a well-structured format, featuring a concise introduction by the moderator and opening remarks from prominent organizations, including ITC, the African Business Council and AFREXIMBANK.

In lieu of H. E. Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, Mr. Prudence Sebahizi delivered his keynote speech, setting the stage for an insightful 50-minute panel discussion. His Excellency's address placed an emphasis on the role that Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET). The distinguished panel of speakers, including Prof. Patrick Utomi, Fareed Kwesi Arthur, Frida Owinga, and Chinwe Florence Ezenwa, provided diverse perspectives on the intersection of education and trade for African MSMEs.



Mr. Prudence Sebahizi, Director DIMPC-AfCFTA Secretariat

Prof. Patrick Utomi emphasized the distinction between information and education, stressing the need to amplify, through education, the relatable ways in which the AfCFTA could benefit African MSMEs. Ms. Frida Owinga, with extensive experience in working with women in international trade, highlighted the challenges businesses face in the absence of awareness about available networks and resources.



Prof. Patrick Utomi

Chinwe Florence Ezenwa

Fareed Kwesi Arthur, who represented the Ghanaian government, underscored the importance of governments learning from entrepreneurs who have navigated cross-border trade pre-AfCFTA. He emphasized that understanding the needs of the intended AfCFTA beneficiaries is crucial for creating favorable market conditions in Africa.



Frida Owinga



Fareed Kwesi Arthur

Chinwe Florence Ezenwa, founder of a successful bag-making business, LeLook Bags Academy, shared her journey of empowering women through education and skills development. LeLook Academy has taught communities of women how to create the stylish bags and open their own bag retailing business ICOYACA emphasized the broader need for youth education on AfCFTA, extending beyond entrepreneurs to all youth across academic disciplines.



Anele Simon, Acting Secretary General-ICOYACA



PANEL GROUP PICTURE

The panel discussion highlighted the instrumental role played by organizations like ITC and Afreximbank in educating small businesses through accessible masterclasses, both online and in person. The discussion Ms. Anele Simon, Acting Secretary General, ICOYACA, talked about the council's focus on youth education through initiatives like the AfCFTA Moot Court Competition, aiming to educate law students on the dispute settlement protocol, fostering the growth of international trade lawyers. She also highlighted most of the youth engagement programs the council has been implementing over the years to capacitate the youth with the AfCFTA Knowledge.

In conclusion, the panel successfully explored the vital link between education and trade for African MSMEs within the AfCFTA framework. The joint commitment of regional organizations, development partners and the private sector to expand education initiatives emphasizes a shared effort to ensure inclusive and informed participation in the continental free trade area.

6.0. Outcomes, Action Points and Next Steps

6.1. Outcomes

I. Enhanced understanding of financial inclusion, industrialization, market connectivity and AfCFTA intersections. The need to promote African products to consumers so as to boost made in Africa Products.

II. Recognised the role African Youth in Trade can play to support the implementation of the African Union youth, peace and security Agenda.

iii. Identified drivers, challenges and solutions to youth employment in Africa's industrialization. One major change being climate change and the need to advocate for sustainable trade.

Iv. Fostered networking, partnerships, and skills development spaces for African youth, encouraging collaboration and policy influence in AfCFTA implementation.

6.2. Action Points || Next Steps

I. Modify, launch and implement the Buy Africa, Build Africa Youth in Trade campaign. It is a project whose aim among other objectives is to enhance market connectivity for African youth entrepreneurs.

II. Conceptualize and implement an AfCFTA, Youth, Peace and Security project in 2024. This project will aim at ensuring Youth in Intra-Africa Trade become Peace Ambassadors contributing to the African Union youth, peace and security Agenda.

III. Conceptualize and implement an AfCFTA, Climate Change Awareness project. It will be aimed at creating understanding of the intersectionality of climate and environmental sustainability with trade in the African Free Trade area and the role African Youth in Trade ought to play.

6.3. Next Steps

The next AfCFTA Youth Day will be commemorated in West Africa and the city of Lomé, Togo has been chosen to host. Togo was chosen because it is one of the business trading cities and has one of the active trade routes in West Africa. The country also has a vibrant youthful population engaged in trade nationally, regionally and continentally.

7.0. Meet the Organising Team



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