



# Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council On AfCFTA

**YOUTHCONNEKT AFRICA SUMMIT 2023**

**8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

**NAIROBI, KENYA**



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## INTRODUCTION

The YouthConnekt Africa Summit 2023, held in Nairobi, Kenya from December 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, was a collaborative initiative between the YouthConnekt Hub, the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Kenya. This was the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the event and the theme of this year's edition was 'Youth Innovation: A Borderless African Renaissance.' The event attracted a diverse audience of 20,000 youths from across Africa, including African leaders, policymakers, academics, entrepreneurs and commissioners.

The primary objective of the forum was to empower and highlight youth leadership and innovation through various activities. These included engaging policy discussions, compelling storytelling sessions, networking opportunities and entrepreneur-focused programs. The event also featured a marketplace and investor meetings, providing a platform for youths to showcase their innovations, connect with potential investors, and participate in discussions that contribute to shaping policies relevant to their demographic.

The overarching theme, 'Youth Innovation: A Borderless African Renaissance,' underscored the importance of fostering innovation without borders and promoting a renewed and inclusive African vision; a sentiment particularly timely and relevant in the era of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). As Africa takes strides towards economic integration, the YouthConnekt Africa Summit highlighted the pivotal role of youth-led innovation in breaking down barriers to trade and collaboration across the continent. The theme resonates deeply with the AfCFTA's mission to create a single market that transcends national boundaries, encouraging cross-border partnerships and fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among the continent's youth. By championing innovation without borders, the summit not only aligns with the AfCFTA's objectives but also positions the youth as key drivers of the envisioned African renaissance. Through dynamic sessions and collaborative forums, the YouthConnekt event aimed to equip young leaders with the tools and insights needed to drive positive change and contribute to the development of the continent. This report summarises some of the noteworthy sessions that ICOYACA both contributed to and actively participated in.



(L-R) Diana Majala, Anele Simon, Dode Seidou and Teniola Tayo.

## **CONTRIBUTING TO POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

In a collaborative effort between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Africa and the Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on the AfCFTA (ICOYACA), the capacity-building session titled "Policymaking by and for African Youth" educated the audience on how they can become policy drivers. The focus was on discussing the opportunities presented by AfCFTA and exploring the role of governments in accelerating its implementation.

The session facilitators, Anele Simon (ICOYACA) and Komi T'sowou (UNDP Africa), highlighted practical ways for youth to contribute to policy making, such as joining regional or continental youth organizations aligned with their interests. Emphasizing the importance of self-education in trade, policies and related areas, they underscored that informed youth are better positioned to advocate for the policy changes they desire.

UNDP Africa demonstrated that the AfCFTA is a gateway to abundant opportunities, emphasizing the imperative for governments to tackle logistical and infrastructural hurdles to enable smooth cross-border transportation of goods. The discussion acknowledged ongoing

efforts to address infrastructural challenges, highlighting the potential for entrepreneurs to capitalize on emerging opportunities by providing innovative logistic solutions for their counterparts.

A significant challenge identified by the youth audience was the lack of awareness among entrepreneurs regarding the tools available under AfCFTA. To overcome this, there was a consensus that educating entrepreneurs across Africa about AfCFTA is crucial but also that self-education and awareness is equally important. ICOYACA shared various online resources that youth entrepreneurs could access to get started. Additionally, the session-leaders stressed the importance of developing the skills necessary for successful trading under AfCFTA.

Encouraging an exchange of trade among countries was highlighted as a means for individuals to learn from each other. It was proposed that governments and various organizations should conduct frequent sensitization sessions to bring entrepreneurs and individuals together. AfCFTA facilities and other organizations are on the fore-front in aiding people understand the structures and policies, particularly those affecting cross-border trade.

ICOYACA encourages the youth that policy advocacy is far more impactful when youth associations collaborate and use their strength in numbers to move their policy recommendations forward. Furthermore, successful policy advocacy goes beyond submitting recommendations; it is necessary to set up a means of monitoring implementation and testing whether policies are fit for purpose for our dynamic needs.

In conclusion, the session highlighted the crucial role of self-education and youth collaboration in order to have meaningful momentum behind the policy recommendations that youth put forward. With the correct policies in place and proactive government initiatives African youth will be best positioned to maximize the benefits of AfCFTA.



Komi Tsowou, UNDP Africa’s Regional Advisor on AfCFTA and Anele Simon, Secretary General – ICOYACA

### **YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE - EXPORT READINESS MASTERCLASS**



Mr. Dode Seidu, CEO of the Africa Trade Academy, collaborated with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to deliver an export readiness masterclass. The training focused on educating agripreneurs on preparing their products for export and leveraging the opportunities provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Mr. Dode Seidu emphasized the

importance of thorough market research, including understanding the target audience, pricing factors and the market environment.

Mr. Seidu highlighted the incorporation of the 5 Ps of marketing into the overall business marketing strategy. Additionally, participants were encouraged to familiarize themselves with the international markets, establish partnerships with service providers, understand market practices and strategically position their products for optimal market impact.

Mr. Seidu recommended starting with indirect exportation as a practical way to begin exporting to different countries. Entrepreneurs were advised to make the most of product exhibitions and trade-sale fairs to display their products, increased visibility, collect contact information and attract potential investors. Using national and bi-national chambers of commerce was also suggested as a helpful strategy.

Understanding the contract of sale before initiating the exporting process, as well as knowledge of export requirements in the home country and import requirements in the receiving country, were emphasized. Entrepreneurs were urged to familiarize themselves with export controls, getting to know exporting free products, obtaining certificates of origin and understanding intellectual property rights in both the home and countries they wish to export to.

Before exporting, it is crucial to check if the home country has trade agreements with the target country. The youth agripreneurs were advised to target countries with low entry barriers and non-tariff measures when exporting.

In conclusion, agripreneurs were invited to join the [African Youth Agripreneurs](#) platform; it is an online community supported by the FAO. This platform is designed to foster networking, facilitate learning and encourage the exchange of information-sharing among individual young agripreneurs and rural youth organizations.



Mr. Dode Seidou and a youth sign-language interpreter delivering a masterclass.

## **AFRICAN YOUTH MOBILITY TO POWER AFRICAN LABOUR MARKETS & TRADE**



The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) successfully hosted an impactful discussion on enhancing the mobility of African youth to drive labour markets and trade on the continent. The free movement of goods, services, jobs and people are closely connected, this panel looked at a holistic approach to fostering economic growth and development in Africa.

The session was commenced by opening remarks from the Libyan Minister of Youth, Mr. Fathallah Al-Zani, who emphasized the importance of investing in the energy of African youth, organizing resources to assist youth more meaningfully and benefitting from the rich ethnic and cultural diversity in the continent.

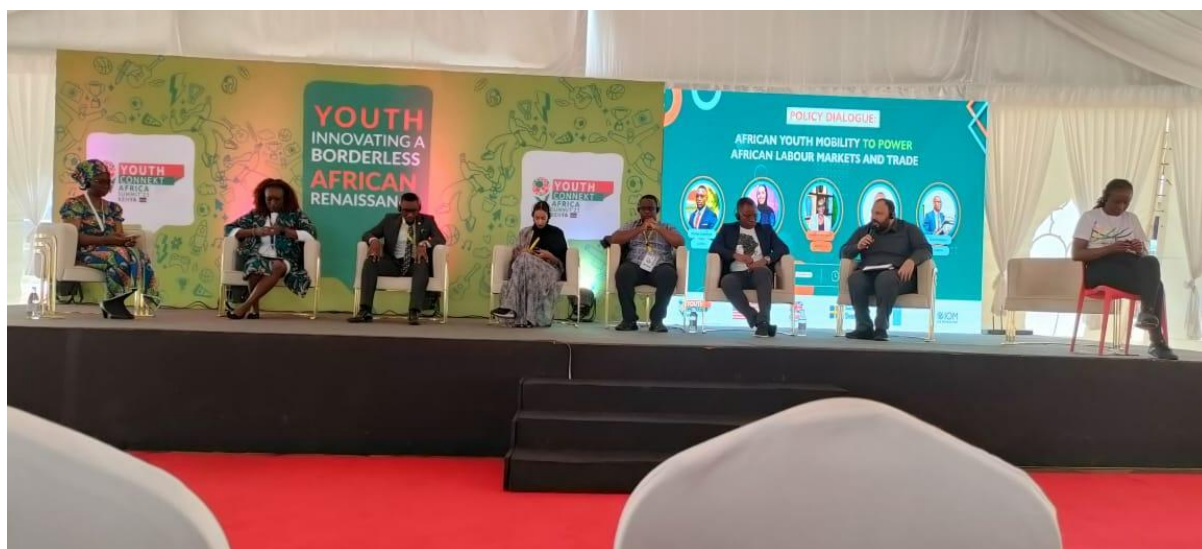
Many African youths, including Muna Jama, a British-Somalian beauty entrepreneur, have experienced life in the diaspora from a young age. Drawing from her personal journey, Jama encourages fellow African youth in the diaspora to actively engage with their home communities. Exploring opportunities for social and economic contributions, such involvement holds the potential to not only enhance the country's GDP but also empower local communities with a diverse range of skills, ultimately creating a positive impact.



The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is actively working towards lowering tariffs and non-tariff barriers, enabling traders to export to various countries. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to engage in trading through digital marketplaces in anticipation of the AfCFTA's Protocol on Digital Trade. Moreover, one panelist highlighted the need for Public-Private Partnerships to provide skilled mentorship to youths, bridging the wide employment gap.

Highlighting the need to bridge digital gaps, the focus extended to underscore the importance of empowering youth with digital skills and fostering their knowledge of digital trade in Africa through masterclasses and other interventions by youth-led organizations.

In conclusion, it is important that African governments demonstrate an unwavering commitment to ensuring the free and safe movement of individuals across the continent. This commitment involves the development and implementation of policies and practices that not only facilitate unrestricted mobility but also prioritize the safety and well-being of those moving within and between African countries. By fostering an environment conducive to free movement, governments would contribute significantly to regional integration, economic growth and the overall prosperity of the continent.



Panelists including Sharon Dimanche, Muna Jama, Komi T'sowou and Libyan Minister of Youth Fathallah Al-Zani

## OTHER NOTEWORTHY INTERVENTIONS:



Nardos Bekele-Thomas, the CEO of AUDA-NEPAD, offered valuable insights during the event, urging attendees to consistently invest in personal development through continuous rejuvenation, continual growth, and daily learning. She emphasized the transformative power of knowledge, highlighting its role in unlocking doors to diverse opportunities. Bekele-Thomas recommended that youth embrace technology, viewing it as both a ‘toolset’ and a weapon to effectively overcome challenges in their pursuits.



(L-R): Ms. Charity Mwathi, Honorable Bakary Badjie, Ms. Prudence Ngwenya and Arlette Akingeneye

The Youth Envoy of the African Union Commission hosted an intergenerational mentorship panel under the theme "Leveraging Innovation to Accelerate Sustainable Development for Youth

in Africa." The panel was moderated by Ms. Arlette Akingeneye and the distinguished panelists included the Honorable Bakary Badjie, the Gambian Minister of Youth and Sports; Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, African Union Director of the Women Gender and Youth Directorate; and Ms. Charity Mwathi, a Research Stakeholder from The Commonwealth Secretariat. During the session, Ms. Ngwenya imparted valuable insights, emphasizing that her key to success lies in a commitment to continuous improvement, challenging herself and never settling for mediocrity. This attitude of rejecting mediocrity can drive African youth in trade to embrace a mindset of innovation and excellence, driving transformative advancements in the field.



The AfCFTA Secretariat led a compelling panel discussion titled 'Enterprise Development: The Future of Africa's Borderless Commerce,' in which Mr. Prudence Sebahizi, the Director for Institutional Matters and Programmes Coordination, emphasized the Secretariat's commitment to fostering youth entrepreneurship and advancing borderless African trade. He highlighted the importance of equipping young entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and tools to navigate the market and job ecosystems under the AfCFTA. The panelists shared diverse perspectives and experiences related to exporting goods across Africa. The session concluded with a robust Q&A, revealing that many attending youth face challenges due to a lack of training and understanding of the technical aspects of the AfCFTA.

## OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS THAT EMERGED FROM THE FORUM



Only four African countries have ratified the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons. It would be beneficial for African countries to enter agreements that promote unrestricted movement, as this would simplify intracontinental trade and the export of goods within the region.

There is a need to bridge digital gaps, it is crucial to empower African youth with digital skills and better knowledge of digital trade.

### **1. Policy Advocacy and Implementation**

Recommendation: ICOYACA needs to facilitate more workshops and training sessions for youth businesses to enhance their understanding of AfCFTA policies, emphasizing the importance of active engagement in policy advocacy with each intervention. ICOYACA needs to encourage collaboration among youth associations to amplify our impact and establish mechanisms for monitoring policy implementation regionally.

### **2. Trade and Export Readiness in Agriculture**

Recommendation: We need targeted resources and support to youth agripreneurs, including guidance on participating in national and bi-national chambers of commerce. ICOYACA should partner with other organisations to offer training on export controls, certificates of origin and intellectual property rights. Developing specialized online courses tailored for

specific sectors, then issuing certificates of completion and subsequently endorsing these purpose-driven youth businesses for funding opportunities would generate meaningful value for all parties involved.

### **3. Digital Skills and Trade in Africa**

Recommendation: The Council should organize specialized masterclasses and interventions focusing on digital skills and knowledge of digital trade for youth businesses; this can be outsourced or it can be a collaborative effort to maximise on quality and capacity needed for the project. ICOYACA should advocate for increased participation in digital marketplaces, ensuring that the youth are well-prepared for the AfCFTA's Protocol on Digital Trade. Partnering with tech-oriented organizations to explore mentorship opportunities would greatly benefit ICOYACA's members.

### **4. Interconnectedness of Mobility and Economic Growth**

Recommendation: ICOYACA's Research Directorate should advocate for the development and implementation of policies that support the free movement of persons within Africa. ICOYACA plays a crucial role in offering guidance to youth businesses, helping them navigate the intricacies of linked mobility, with a particular focus on the potential economic benefits. ICOYACA must better encourage African youth to engage in discussions on proposed protocols, ensuring that their perspectives are always considered.