

## **“Umoja Africa Campaign – Youth Contributing to the Implementation of the AfCFTA”**

*“Umoja Ni Nguvu, Utengano Ni Udhaifu”*

*“Unity is Strength, Division is Weakness”*

– Swahili proverb

### **I. Background and Context**

With some of the fastest growing economies in the world, Africa has achieved substantial progress over the past decades in reducing poverty, accelerating productivity and expanding its participation in global trade. Despite these efforts, economic development in Africa has yet to reach its full potential with Africa’s intraregional export volumes remaining at a staggeringly low 18 percent relative to that of Asia and Europe which stand at 59 percent and 69 percent respectively. Africa’s significantly lower intraregional trade contribution results from existing barriers not limited to trade protectionism, poor infrastructure and corruption that complicate trade within the continent. In order to facilitate greater regional economic integration, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was established to create a harmonised and liberalised continental market that will promote an increase in trade competitiveness and better allocation of the continent’s resources, ease the movement of people across African borders and resolve the challenges with multiple and overlapping memberships to trade blocs.

Driven by the member states of the African Union, the AfCFTA agreement has created the largest free trade area in the world. The agreement brings together about 1.3 billion people across Africa that contribute a total gross domestic product (GDP) valued at US\$3.4 trillion. If successfully implemented, the sheer scale of participation has the potential to uplift 68 million people from moderate poverty and 30 million others from extreme poverty by 2035. Moreover, real income could increase by 7 percent (US\$450) while intraregional trade could rise by more than 81 percent compared with current levels. In furtherance of the envisioned pan-African free trade area, the AfCFTA agreement seeks to:

1. Remove tariffs and other non-tariff trade barriers to liberalise trade in goods and services amongst African countries.
2. Ease the movement of people across borders to reduce trade costs, accelerate supply chain operations and encourage the overall interest in intra-continental trade.
3. Increase the competitiveness of the economies of State Parties through greater use of competitive advantage, diversification and value chain development.
4. Resolve the challenges that follow multiple and overlapping memberships in smaller trade agreements between African states.
5. Promote a sustainable and inclusive economic development that addresses problems with gender equality, poverty gaps and other structural issues in Africa.

In realising the aims and visions of the AfCFTA, the active involvement of the African youth population cannot be overstated. Comprising 60 percent of the continent’s total population (with the number expected to double by 2050 to 830 million), the African youth with their innovation and participation can play a vital role in the economic transformation of the region. However, according to the African Development Bank, while about 10 to 12 million youths join the workforce each year, only 3.1 million jobs are created to accommodate the influx. This severe lack of employment results in poor standards of living among youth, propels migration out of Africa in search of better opportunities and incites conflicts out of prolonged and sustained frustration. Moreover, confidence in “Made in Africa” products and services remains relatively low amongst this burgeoning population which has a greater affinity for non-African commodities. The AfCFTA provides new avenues for growth that will help address the current issues facing the youth population and invigorate their creativity, innovation and involvement to transform the continent.

Nonetheless, youth sensitisation towards the objectives of the AfCFTA will require first and foremost, a clear and practical knowledge about what the regional integration initiative means. Recent attempts to engage the youth in leveraging the opportunities brought about by the AfCFTA revealed that in fact, many Africans are still unaware of or not adequately informed about the existence and nature of the agreement. This is concerning as the aims of the AfCFTA cannot be effectively realised if the wider population is restricted by information asymmetry. In overcoming this hurdle, the Youth Alliance for Leadership and Development in Africa (YALDA) in collaboration with the Afrexim Bank, AfCFTA Secretariat, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), International Trade Centre (ITC) and UNDP Africa has launched a campaign titled “*Umoja Africa Campaign – Youth Contributing to the Implementation of the AfCFTA*” to promote the vision of the African Union Agency of 2063 and increase the understanding of the AfCFTA.

## **II. Objectives of the Workshops**

The primary objective of the campaign is to digest complex information about the AfCFTA to create simple and easy to understand content that will help the average African youth learn what it is, how it benefits them and how they can leverage the opportunities that the AfCFTA brings. This series of workshops comprising 4 engaging modules is one initiative towards breaking down information asymmetry. The modules will introduce African youth to the AfCFTA, help them to understand their distinct and significant role in the success of the initiative, allow them to critically assess the existing hurdles in achieving the AfCFTA objectives as well as the challenges that its implementation can bring about. Last but not least, through the modules, participants will also evaluate strategies necessary to ensure its sustainable future. The 4 modules designed for the program are:

### **Module 1: Towards Greater Integration: An Introduction to the AfCFTA**

In this module, participants will be provided an overview of the AfCFTA. Beginning with the context in which the AfCFTA became necessary, we will connect the trends in economic development in Africa over the years to the vision of an integrated and liberalised market. African youth will also become familiarised with the AfCFTA’s current member States, its core objectives, the structure of governance as well as the potential political, social and economic benefits of the newly formed free trade area. By creating a foundation of understanding about what the AfCFTA is, African youth will be sensitised to its objectives and begin to reflect on their role in advancing its initiatives.

### **Module 2: Enabling Youth Engagement in the AfCFTA**

Through this module, we will take a step further towards understanding the AfCFTA by evaluating the specific role of African youth engagement. Particularly, we will outline the role of the youth in the free trade agreement’s success, identify the challenges that may slow down or inhibit their full participation and brainstorm strategies necessary to mitigate the identified threats. Participants may also contribute to the discussions by relating youth challenges to their own country contexts and perceptions of collaboration to highlight the multifaceted nature of experiences within the continent. Furthermore, we will analyse how the consumption of African made products and services amongst this population can boost demand and reduce the overreliance on non-African markets for international trade. Hence, under the umbrella of considering potential contributions of the youth to intra-African trade, we will explore the importance of “buying Made in Africa”. In doing so, African youth will gain confidence in African-made products, better understand ways to leverage the opportunities provided by the AfCFTA and harness their talents in finding innovative ways to tackle any existing or future hurdles.

### **Module 3: Opportunities vs Challenges: Assessing the Impacts and Hurdles of the AfCFTA**

The establishment of a Free Trade Area is not without its challenges. In this module, we will critically assess the challenges with trade facilitation, rules of origin, loss in national revenue, corruption, existing ties with other non-African countries, public opinion and so on, that threaten the achievement of the AfCFTA’s objectives. This discussion will also include the problems specifically brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of these on intraregional trade and overall African economic development. Moreover, given that a AfCFTA may create socio-economic problems in itself,

participants will reflect on the possible negative outcomes of the AfCFTA to encourage sustainable approaches to its implementation. By identifying these challenges, African youth will be in stronger positions to address them for the future success of the AfCFTA.

#### **Module 4: Envisioning the Future of the AfCFTA**

This final module seeks to tie together all the knowledge previously gained about the AfCFTA, youth engagement and its potential challenges to help us imagine what a successful future of the AfCFTA entails. Beginning with some of the achievements and ongoing projects facilitated by the trade agreement in various African countries like South Africa, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire since its implementation in 2021, participants will become aware of the ways in which the previously mentioned objectives of the AfCFTA are being met. We will also envision a post-pandemic recovery and renewal with the help of the AfCFTA in revitalising the continent's economies. African youth may also share the impacts of the workshops and other YALDA initiatives on their personal understanding of and sensitisation to the AfCFTA.

### **III. Program Outcomes**

By the end of the workshop series, YALDA anticipates that:

1. Participants will have a clearer understanding in simple terms of what the AfCFTA is, its objectives, and the benefits to Africa's economic development.
2. African youth will be better informed about their importance in achieving these objectives and the vast economic opportunities that the free trade agreement presents.
3. Participants will apply the knowledge gained to pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors and investment in talent and innovation.
4. African youth will develop confidence in and habits of buying Made in Africa commodities. They will also understand the magnitude of impact this alone can have on the AfCFTA's success.
5. African youth will reflect and act on the current and future challenges with the AfCFTA that need to be addressed in order for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be met.
6. Other stakeholders will recognise the significance of including youth and grassroots voices in the process of policy-making to supplement the inadequacies of a solely top-down approach.

### **IV. Program Format**

This workshop series will be held entirely online, with modified sessions also being held in-person during the Campaign's youth for AfCFTA week. Each workshop will run for approximately 2 hours every month on Wednesdays at 5pm GMT, 7pm CAT and 8pm CAT.

The workshops will serve as a live, interactive platform for discussions about the AfCFTA. Expert speakers will provide insights into the various aspects of the discourse. In addition, an interactive Q&A session as well as feedback platform will be made available for an engaging and thought-provoking study of the AfCFTA.

For participants wishing to get certificates for attending the workshops, pre and post work will be required before each module and a short quiz with a stipulated pass grade administered following the end of each module.