

The logo features a stylized map of Africa composed of orange dots on the left. To its right, the text "ADS 2023" is written in large, bold, orange letters, with "Africa Dialogue Series" in smaller, blue letters below it. Two orange curved lines frame the text.

ADS 2023

Africa Dialogue Series



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



United Nations
Office of the Special Adviser
on Africa

Media Advisory

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could raise income by billions, powering the African middle class to transform the African economy.

Accra, Addis Ababa, New York, and Vienna, 8 to 12, May 2023 – Driven by a growing middle class, African economies are poised to transform and shift toward import substitution, fuelled by domestic demand and increased production.

Entering its second week, the Africa Dialogue Series 2023 focuses on the role of the African middle class in transforming economies across the continent under the sub-theme “Growing Middle Class and Continental Import Substitution: Connecting the Dots to Unlock Made in Africa.” This middle class holds the key to unlocking the potential of increasing production in Africa, buoyed by the AfCFTA to usher in an era of transformation and growth fuelled by an increase in domestic demand and a shift towards import substitution.

The week is organized into several activities, including an international webinar with technical experts, an exchange with young people and the screening of video documentaries and interviews.

Two key events

[Live-streamed via YouTube](#), the webinar takes place on 10 May at 3:00 p.m. Vienna time. It features the participation of the Zimbabwean Minister of Industry and Commerce, Her Excellency Ms. Sekai Nzenza, and the Commissioner for Common Market, Economic, Commerce, and Financial Affairs of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS), His Excellency Mr. François Kanimba. The UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, will set the stage, followed by remarks from Ms. Cristina Duarte, UN Special Adviser on Africa. Her Excellency Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the UN, will deliver the closing message. Senior officials from the AfCFTA Secretariat and UNIDO will also participate.

On 11 May at 9:00 a.m. New York time, during a “Youth Voices” exchange on [Twitter Spaces](#), young leaders and entrepreneurs from Africa, including Ms. Chido Mpemba, the African Union Youth Envoy, will contribute their ideas and share concrete recommendations from a youth perspective on policies that could unlock “Made in Africa,” leveraging the strength of Africa’s growing middle class.

Anchoring materials

The week starts with the screening of documentary videos from UNIDO, highlighting UN initiatives to strengthen and diversify Africa’s economies.

An [interview](#) with Her Excellency Ambassador Josefa Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture at the African Union Commission, will be featured on the second day. This interview is part of “Let’s Talk Africa,” a series of video conversations/interviews organized by the UN Special Adviser on Africa.

A new policy brief titled “[Growing Middle Class and Continental Import Substitution: Connecting the Dots to Unlock Made in Africa](#)” anchors the exchanges throughout the week, highlighting how African countries are on the verge of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity driven by their middle classes. Providing concrete recommendations, the policy brief argues that “Strengthening the distributional impact of the AfCFTA is indispensable for the continuous growth of Africa’s middle class. This will provide support for achieving the transformational outcomes envisaged in the implementation of AfCFTA.”

Perspectives from the first week

During the first week, the Africa Dialogue Series 2023 focused on the sub-theme “Boosting Trade Facilitation and Rethinking the Foundations of Africa’s Export Diversification” with the AfCFTA Secretariat, the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) collaborating to bring key activities and materials to underpin the exchanges throughout the week.

From the perspectives of the organizing partners, the first week held the following key messages/recommendations:

- The AfCFTA can create the necessary policy space to drive industrialization, promote economic structural transformation, and deepen regional integration.
- Addressing the high costs associated with trade is key towards boosting intra-Africa trade, requiring a reduction in Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and the full implementation of Trade Facilitation Agreements (TFA).
- Africa's export sector must diversify and reduce its reliance on a few primary commodities. To achieve this objective, African countries need to focus on developing their manufacturing industries and value chains, promoting innovation and technology transfer while supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in entering new markets.
- SMEs are the backbone of Africa's economy by driving innovation, encouraging entrepreneurs, creating jobs, improving competitiveness and facilitating cross-border trade. African countries must create an enabling environment for SMEs to thrive, improving access to finance, building infrastructure, and streamlining regulations.
- Moving beyond traditional commodity exports towards value-added manufacturing requires investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and human capital development to facilitate trade and enable economic growth.
- To integrate in global value chains, significant investment in education and training is needed for African stakeholders to develop the skills and knowledge required to compete in global markets. This should be coupled with investment in research and development to foster innovation and create new products and services that meet the evolving needs of consumers.
- CFC highlighted how trade facilitation and export diversification can drive local development in Africa, leading to a reduction in Africa's commodity dependence and accelerating the continent's prosperity.
- Through the AfCFTA, African small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including those the CFC supports, can access new markets, benefit from cross-border investments and ultimately grow, contributing to boost export diversification.
- Focusing on crop value addition can also help in meeting different consumer needs, enhancing product and geographic diversifications.

- On the infrastructure side, harnessing digitization improves information flow between actors across the value chain while providing new technologies that can boost African SMEs' diversification and integration.
- UNCTAD outlined how African countries can promote export diversification under the AfCFTA by leveraging financial technologies, boosting industrialization and ensuring more resilient financial and economic systems. It also mobilized leading African youth to discuss ways to facilitate trade and diversify exports across the continent.

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Organizing Entities

The Africa Dialogue Series 2023 is organized by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa ([OSAA](#)) and the African Union Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations ([AUPOM](#)) in partnership with the African Continental Free Trade Area ([AfCFTA](#)) Secretariat, the Common Fund for Commodities ([CFC](#)), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ([ECA](#)) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#))

Key Links:

- ADS 2023 [programme](#) and [website](#)
- Participate in the international webinars and the “Youth Voices” segments

Sub-theme	International Webinar	Youth Voices
Growing Middle Class and Continental Import Substitution: Connecting the Dots to Unlock Made in Africa	10 May	11 May
Digital Service Trade: Great Potential but Regulatory Frameworks Are Urgent	17 May	18 May

- Follow the High-level Policy Dialogue on [UN WebTV](#)

Social Media:

Hashtags: #ADS2023, #AfricaDialogueSeries, #AfCFTA

UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa

- Facebook: [UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa](#)
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African Union Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations

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African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat

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UN Industrial Development Organization

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Contacts:

United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa

- Rado Ratovonarivo | ratovonarivo@un.org
- Keolebogile Diswai | keolebogile.diswai@un.org
- François Charlier | charlier@un.org