

MANUAL

AfCFTA NATIONAL YOUTH CHAMPIONS FELLOWSHIP

(Cohort 3) - Virtual



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

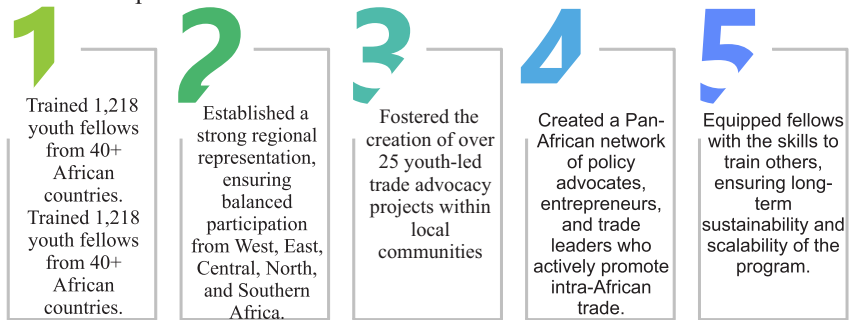
The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents Africa with an unprecedented opportunity to create the world's largest free trade area, integrating 54 of the 55 African Union (AU) member states, with a market of over 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion (World Bank, 2023). The agreement is projected to increase intra-African trade by over 52% by 2025 and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035 (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2023). However, despite this transformational potential, a significant knowledge gap persists among African youth regarding AfCFTA's implementation, benefits, and opportunities.

The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship (3rd Cohort) is a flagship initiative designed by the African Center for Youth Development, Education, and Advocacy Initiative (ACYDEAI) to bridge this information gap and empower African youth with the necessary knowledge, skills, and network to actively participate in AfCFTA's implementation. Since its inception, the fellowship has successfully trained 1,218 young entrepreneurs and AfCFTA advocates across Africa, equipping them to implement projects and serve as trainers in their communities.

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with over 60% of its population under the age of 25 (UNDP, 2023). Yet, youth unemployment and limited participation in trade and economic development remain pressing challenges. The AfCFTA, if fully implemented, is expected to generate 18 million new jobs by 2035 (World Economic Forum, 2023), yet the lack of youth involvement in its development and implementation remains a major concern.

Impact and Achievements

Through two successful cohorts, the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship has:



WHY THIS FELLOWSHIP MATTERS



THE 3RD COHORT: SCALING IMPACT

For the 3rd cohort, ACYDEAI aims to expand outreach, enhance the program's digital component, and strengthen the post-fellowship impact. This will include:

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



Highlight 01

Training at least 500 new youth fellows across all AU regions.



Highlight 02

Establishing national AfCFTA youth hubs to facilitate policy engagement at the country level



Highlight 03

Strengthening mentorship programs by linking fellows with leading policymakers, trade experts, and business leaders.



Highlight 04

Creating a digital repository of AfCFTA learning materials for continued access to trade knowledge.

Sponsorship, Partnership, and Collaboration Opportunities

The sustainability and success of this initiative require strategic sponsorships, partnerships, and multi-stakeholder collaborations. The 3rd cohort presents an opportunity for organizations, private sector stakeholders, and international partners to:

- 1 Sponsor the fellowship, gaining visibility in Africa's leading youth trade empowerment initiative.
- 2 Partner in program execution, offering expertise, mentorship, and resources.
- 3 Support community-based projects, fostering sustainable economic growth through youth engagement.

Investing in Africa's youth is investing in the future of AfCFTA. Through this fellowship, we are not just training youth; we are shaping Africa's next generation of trade leaders.



INTRODUCTION: — The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship: Bridging the Knowledge Gap

Africa is at a crucial turning point in its economic history. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is poised to transform the continent's trade landscape by eliminating barriers, enhancing cross-border commerce, and fostering economic integration. However, one of the most significant challenges to its successful implementation is the lack of awareness and technical knowledge among Africa's youth, who constitute over 60% of the continent's population (UNDP, 2023). To address this, the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship was established as a Pan-African initiative aimed at empowering young leaders with the knowledge, skills, and networks to actively participate in AfCFTA's implementation.

The fellowship is not just a training program; it is a strategic intervention designed to equip Africa's youth with practical trade knowledge, advocacy tools, and entrepreneurial acumen to maximize opportunities within the AfCFTA framework. By fostering youth-led projects, policy engagement, and community-based trade initiatives, the fellowship ensures that young people are not just beneficiaries of AfCFTA but key players in its operationalization and success.

The AfCFTA is projected to:



01

Boost intra-African trade by over 52% by 2025 (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2023).

02

Increase Africa's GDP by \$450 billion by 2035 (World Bank, 2023).

03

Lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty by fostering regional economic growth (WEF, 2023).

04

Create 18 million new jobs by 2035, particularly for Africa's youth (AfCFTA Implementation Report, 2023).

However, without an informed, empowered, and actively engaged youth population, these projections may not be fully realized. This makes the fellowship a timely and strategic investment in Africa's future economic leaders.

THE ROLE OF THE FELLOWSHIP



The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship is designed to:

1. Provide Comprehensive Training: Equip youth with practical knowledge on AfCFTA policies, trade regulations, and economic integration.
2. Foster Youth Participation: Train and mentor young people to become AfCFTA Champions who will drive trade awareness and advocacy in their communities.
3. Promote Intra-African Trade: Empower young entrepreneurs with insights into regional value chains, trade facilitation measures, and cross-border business opportunities.
4. Develop a Pan-African Network: Build a network of young trade leaders collaborating across borders to drive Africa's economic growth.
5. Support Community-Based Implementation: Equip fellows to launch local projects that translate AfCFTA policies into tangible economic activities.

WHY THIS FELLOWSHIP MATTERS NOW.....

The success of the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship is vital to securing Africa's long-term economic transformation. By bridging the knowledge gap, fostering youth participation, and scaling impact through community-driven initiatives, the program ensures that Africa's next generation of leaders is equipped to shape and benefit from the continent's largest trade agreement.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The fellowship seeks to engage a diverse group of young Africans between 18 and 45 years old, including:

- AfCTA Advocates
- Aspiring trade leaders keen on shaping Africa's economic future.
- Entrepreneurs and business owners leveraging AfCFTA opportunities.
- Policy advocates and researchers specializing in economic development.
- Tech innovators and digital entrepreneurs involved in e-commerce and fintech.

IMPACT OF PREVIOUS COHORTS

Since its inception, the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship has empowered 1,218 young entrepreneurs, trade advocates, and AfCFTA enthusiasts across Africa. By equipping youth with trade knowledge, leadership skills, and advocacy tools, the fellowship has created a network of youth-led trade initiatives that are driving economic transformation across the continent.



Key Achievements

1. Expanding Youth Participation in AfCFTA Implementation

- 1,218 fellows trained across 40+ African countries, ensuring balanced regional representation.
- Over 250 youth-led trade advocacy projects launched at the community level.
- Thousands of indirect beneficiaries reached through training, awareness campaigns, and digital engagement.

2. Strengthening Regional Economic Integration

- Fellows have engaged with trade policymakers, business leaders, and AfCFTA experts to advocate for youth-inclusive policies.
- More than 60% of fellows have initiated cross-border trade collaborations leveraging AfCFTA provisions.
- The fellowship has facilitated strategic partnerships between youth-led businesses and trade institutions.

3. Fostering Sustainable Youth-Led Entrepreneurship

- 65% of fellows have started or expanded their businesses, leveraging AfCFTA trade opportunities.
- The fellowship has connected young entrepreneurs with regional value chains and investment opportunities.
- Many fellows have transitioned into trainers, creating a multiplier effect in their local communities.

4. Addressing Policy & Trade Barriers

- Fellows have identified key challenges limiting youth participation in intra-African trade.
- Policy recommendations from fellows have been submitted to national and regional trade bodies.
- Over 30 fellows have been involved in national trade negotiations, influencing youth-centered AfCFTA policies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FELLOWSHIP

The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship is a transformative initiative designed to equip young Africans with the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to drive Africa's trade agenda. The core objectives of the fellowship are centered around youth empowerment, economic participation, and sustainable trade development.

1. Enhance Youth Knowledge and Awareness of AfCFTA

- Provide in-depth training on AfCFTA policies, trade regulations, and economic integration.
- Increase youth awareness of intra-African trade opportunities and market access frameworks.
- Develop digital and trade literacy to enable participation in cross-border trade.

2. Foster Youth Participation in AfCFTA Implementation

- Train 500+ youth fellows to become AfCFTA champions promoting trade advocacy.
- Encourage youth-led initiatives that align with AfCFTA's objectives, including business collaborations, policy engagement, and trade awareness campaigns.
- Strengthen youth representation in national and regional trade discussions to shape policy decisions.

3. Support Youth-Led Trade Innovation and Entrepreneurship

- Provide tools and mentorship for young entrepreneurs to understand and leverage AfCFTA's business landscape.
- Connect fellows with investment opportunities and regional value chains to scale their businesses.
- Facilitate the creation of youth-led digital trade platforms, fintech innovations, and e-commerce initiatives to boost intra-African trade.

4. Strengthen Regional Trade Networks and Collaboration

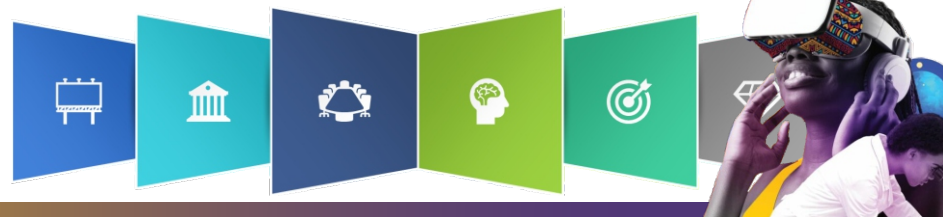
- Establish a Pan-African youth network of trade leaders, policymakers, and entrepreneurs.
- Encourage cross-border partnerships and facilitate joint ventures across African countries.
- Provide platforms for youth to exchange insights, collaborate on trade projects, and engage with trade institutions.

5. Develop Community-Based AfCFTA Awareness and Capacity-Building Programs

- Equip fellows with the skills to train and educate others in their communities, ensuring the spread of AfCFTA knowledge.
- Establish community-driven trade initiatives, focusing on women-led businesses, SMEs, and informal trade sectors.
- Promote research and data collection on youth participation in intra-African trade, leading to actionable policy recommendations.

6. Influence Policy and Governance for Youth Inclusion in AfCFTA

- Engage policymakers to prioritize youth participation in national AfCFTA implementation strategies.
- Advocate for the reduction of barriers to entry for young traders, such as financing challenges, trade restrictions, and limited market access.
- Ensure youth perspectives are incorporated into AfCFTA regulatory frameworks and trade facilitation policies.



FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE

The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship is designed as a **comprehensive, multi-phase program** that equips young African leaders with the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to champion intra-African trade. The fellowship is delivered through an **interactive, digital-first approach**, ensuring accessibility for youth across the continent while maintaining **high-impact learning and mentorship opportunities**.

1. Selection Process: Identifying Africa's Future Trade Leaders

The fellowship follows a **rigorous and merit-based selection process** to ensure the most promising young leaders are equipped with AfCFTA knowledge and advocacy tools.

Application Stages:

- **Call for Applications:** Open for interested youth across Africa to apply.
- **Review & Shortlisting:** A panel of experts reviews applications based on merit, leadership potential, and commitment to trade advocacy.
- **Final Selection:** The top 500+ candidates are selected and onboarded into the program.

2. Training Modules: Comprehensive AfCFTA Capacity Building

The fellowship features structured learning modules delivered by industry experts, policymakers, and successful entrepreneurs.

Core Training Modules:

- **Module 1: Introduction to AfCFTA & Africa's Trade Landscape**
 - Overview of AfCFTA goals and structures.
 - Key benefits and opportunities for young entrepreneurs.
 - Challenges in intra-African trade.



FELLOWSHIP STRUCTURE - Continuation

- **Module 2: Trade Policy & Economic Integration**
 - Trade liberalization and market access under AfCFTA.
 - Customs regulations and the role of regional economic communities (RECs).
 - Understanding trade facilitation measures.
- **Module 3: Digital Trade & Innovation**
 - Leveraging e-commerce and fintech solutions for cross-border trade.
 - The role of digital platforms in AfCFTA implementation.
 - Blockchain, AI, and digital payments in trade facilitation.
- **Module 4: Leadership & Trade Policy Advocacy**
 - Youth-led trade policy advocacy and stakeholder engagement.
 - Strategies for influencing national trade policies.
 - Case studies of successful youth-led trade initiatives.
- **Module 5: Project Development & Implementation**
 - Designing community-based trade initiatives.
 - Developing scalable trade projects and business models.
 - Presentation and evaluation of final projects.

3. Mentorship & Networking: Connecting Fellows with Industry Experts

Each fellow is paired with an **industry mentor** including policymakers, trade professionals, and entrepreneurs. The mentorship program provides:

- **One-on-one coaching sessions**
- **Industry insights on trade facilitation and business**

- **Networking opportunities with trade stakeholders**

4. Capstone Project: Community Implementation & Impact

Fellows are required to implement a **community-based project** focused on AfCFTA education, trade facilitation, or entrepreneurship. Projects may include:

- Trade awareness campaigns for local entrepreneurs.
- Digital solutions for streamlining cross-border transactions.
- Youth-led policy advocacy for inclusive AfCFTA implementation.

5. Certification & Alumni Engagement

Upon successful completion of the program, fellows receive:

- **A Certificate of Completion.**
- **Induction into the AfCFTA Youth Trade Network**, ensuring continued engagement in trade policy discussions and networking.
- **Access to post-fellowship opportunities**, including internships, grants, and investment linkages.



AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

Creating One African Market



FELLOWSHIP MONITORING & EVALUATION PLAN

The success of the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship is contingent on a robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework that ensures transparency, accountability, and measurable impact. The M&E plan will track the effectiveness of the fellowship, measure participant progress, and assess long-term contributions to intra-African trade

1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To ensure measurable success, the following KPIs will be tracked:.

Metric	Measurement Approach	Target for 3rd Cohort
Youth trained in AfCFTA policies	Completion of training modules	1,500+ fellows
Youth-led advocacy initiatives	No. of community projects launched	100+ projects
Cross-border trade participation	No. of fellows engaging in trade collaborations	75% participation
Policy engagement & impact	No. of policy briefs submitted	50+ recommendations
Business & entrepreneurship growth	No. of new youth-led trade startups	30+ businesses
Digital learning adoption	No. of fellows using digital trade tools	85% engagement



2. Data Collection Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data will be collected through:

- Pre & Post-Training Assessments: Measuring knowledge gain and application.
- Surveys & Questionnaires: Capturing participant feedback and challenges.
- Case Studies & Success Stories: Documenting the real-life impact of the fellowship.
- Field Reports & Trade Engagement Metrics: Assessing community project implementation.
- Stakeholder Interviews & Focus Groups: Gaining insights from trade policymakers and industry leaders.

3. Evaluation Timeline

M&E activities will be conducted at key intervals throughout the fellowship:

- Baseline Assessment (Month 1): Pre-program knowledge assessment & fellowship expectations.
- Mid-Term Review (Month 6): Evaluating progress, participation, and challenges.
- Final Impact Assessment (Month 12): Measuring outcomes, community engagement, and trade participation.
- Post-Fellowship Follow-Up (6-12 months after completion): Longitudinal tracking of career advancements and entrepreneurial growth.

4. Reporting & Stakeholder Engagement

Regular reporting ensures transparency and keeps stakeholders informed of the fellowship's impact:

- Quarterly M&E Reports: Shared with sponsors, partners, and key stakeholders.
- Annual Impact Report: Comprehensive documentation of program achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Public Webinars & Forums: Engaging the trade community in discussions on youth participation in AfCFTA.

5. Learning & Continuous Improvement

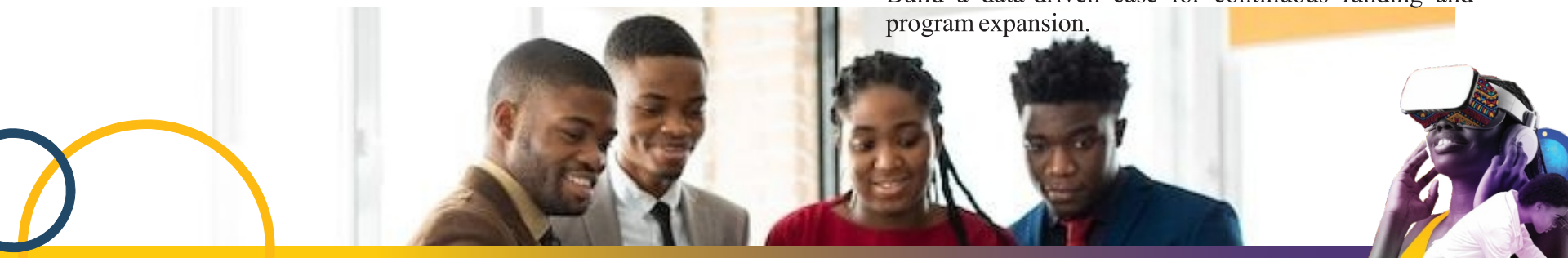
The M&E framework will not only track success but also facilitate continuous improvement by:

- Identifying gaps in training and mentorship.
- Incorporating real-time feedback loops for program adaptation.
- Strengthening collaboration between fellows, policymakers, and trade organizations.

6. Sustainability & Institutional Integration

To ensure long-term impact, the fellowship's M&E findings will be used to:

- Influence national trade education policies.
- Strengthen youth representation in trade decision-making.
- Build a data-driven case for continuous funding and program expansion.





CONCLUSION & CALL FOR COLLABORATION

The **AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship** represents a transformative initiative designed to empower Africa's youth to actively engage in the implementation of **the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**. By equipping young entrepreneurs, policymakers, and trade advocates with the necessary knowledge and skills, the fellowship ensures that Africa's economic integration is driven by those who will inherit its benefits—the youth.

Through the fellowship, over **1,218 fellows from 40+ countries** have been trained, leading to the establishment of **250+ community-driven trade projects**. As we launch the **3rd cohort**, we seek to scale this impact even further, expanding access to **500+ new youth fellows**, strengthening policy engagement, and fostering sustainable cross-border trade collaborations.

Call for Collaboration & Support

The AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship invites all stakeholders to join this mission by:

- Becoming a sponsor or funding partner to expand youth engagement in trade.
- Providing mentorship and technical expertise to strengthen young entrepreneurs and trade leaders.
- Advocating for policy frameworks that integrate youth-led trade solutions into AfCFTA's operational framework.

The success of AfCFTA depends on the capacity of Africa's youth to seize trade opportunities, drive innovation, and influence policy decisions. Through strategic partnerships and continued investment, the AfCFTA National Youth Champions Fellowship will ensure that the next generation of leaders is equipped to shape Africa's economic destiny.





African Center for Youth Development
Education and Advocacy Initiative

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