



# AFRICA PROSPERITY DIALOGUES (APD) 2026

ACTION COMPACT

**THEME:**  
**EMPOWERING SMES, WOMEN & YOUTH IN AFRICA'S  
SINGLE MARKET: INNOVATE. COLLABORATE. TRADE.  
(MAKE AFRICA BORDERLESS NOW!)**

DONE AT THE ACCRA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE,  
ACCRA, GHANA



**AUDA-NEPAD**  
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



# ACTION COMPACT



# AFRICA PROSPERITY DIALOGUES (APD) 2026 ACTION COMPACT

***Empowering SMEs, Women & Youth in Africa's Single Market:  
Innovate. Collaborate. Trade.***

***Accra International Conference Centre, Ghana | 6 February 2026***

## **Preamble**

From Wednesday 4th to Friday 6th February 2026, 6,530 participants, including Vice Presidents, Ministers of State, senior government officials, representatives of the African Union and its organs, chief executives of Pan-African financial institutions and their representatives, private-sector leaders, SMEs, women and youth entrepreneurs, development partners, Global Africans, and civil society organisations, convened in Accra, Ghana, for the Fourth Africa Prosperity Dialogues (APD 2026) under the theme: ***“Empowering SMEs, Women & Youth in Africa’s Single Market: Innovate. Collaborate. Trade.”***

We examined Africa’s greatest paradox: immense demographic and entrepreneurial potential constrained by fragmentation and weak implementation of agreed integration frameworks. While women constitute over half of Africa’s population and own approximately one-third of all businesses, they contribute only about 13% of Africa’s GDP, despite evidence that full gender inclusion could add up to US\$1 trillion to the continent’s economy by 2043.

We further noted that Africa, with a median age of about 19 years and over one billion people under the age of 35, is the youngest continent in the world. To absorb this rapidly expanding labour force, Africa must create approximately 20 million jobs annually. We recognised that this opportunity lies primarily in the SME sector, which accounts for about 80% of employment and over 90% of economic activity across the continent.

We overwhelmingly concluded that without deep economic integration, efforts to empower SMEs, women and youth will remain slow, fragmented and unimpactful, as systemic barriers, restricted mobility, fragmented markets, high transaction costs, weak payment systems and non-harmonised standards, all continue to stifle enterprise growth. We therefore affirmed the urgent need to dismantle these barriers through targeted policy reforms, accelerated skills development, the integration of digital trade tools, and, critically, the full and timely implementation of African Union treaties and protocols that enable the free movement of people, goods and services, across Member States.

We emphasised that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) must evolve beyond a set of technical trade instruments into a transformative engine for inclusive and sustainable prosperity. Its success must be measured not merely by tariff schedules, but by its ability to deliver real opportunities for SMEs, women and youth, particularly through the proactive

implementation of key protocols, including those on Free Movement of Persons, Digital Trade, and Women and Youth in Trade.

We agreed that formalising the informal sector, through comprehensive digitalisation across Member States and significantly increased investment in digital infrastructure, is essential to building a resilient and inclusive foundation for growth.

We further acknowledged that enterprises are fundamentally constrained when borders block movement, payments fail to flow, and regulatory fragmentation multiplies costs. A single, integrated African market is therefore indispensable for enabling SMEs to grow into regional champions, allowing women entrepreneurs to scale with dignity, and positioning African firms to compete globally. Recognising that every major global brand was first built on a large, integrated home market, we affirmed that Africa must build its own champions through unity, openness and scale.

**Recalling** the objectives of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, and the transformative intent of the Abuja Treaty (1991) and the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA (2018) to create a single African market for goods and services, facilitated by the movement of persons and deeper economic integration;

**Acknowledging** that SMEs, women and youth form the backbone of Africa's economies, yet continue to face structural constraints in access to finance, markets, skills, technology and enabling legal and regulatory frameworks;

**Recognising** that the full potential of the AfCFTA's 1.5-billion-person market, with a combined GDP of over US\$3 trillion, can only be realised through the deliberate inclusion and empowerment of these groups;

**Convinced** that empowering SMEs, women and youth is not merely a question of equity, but a strategic imperative for innovation, industrialisation, job creation and shared prosperity;

**Emphasising** that African leaders have, from the Abuja Treaty (1991) to the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade (2024), repeatedly and rightly committed their sovereign states to treaties and protocols designed to advance economic integration;

**Regretting** that, despite formal adoption, political will and implementation capacity remain insufficient to translate these commitments into tangible outcomes;

**Expressing** concern that the Abuja Treaty provided a clear legal and institutional roadmap, with a transition period up to 2028, to establish a single market, customs union, single currency and African Central Bank, yet progress remains significantly below expectations as this deadline rapidly approaches;

**Further expressing** grave concern that the 2018 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment has been ratified by only four Member States, namely, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe, far below the minimum fifteen required for entry into force;

**Deeply concerned** that without effective implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the objectives of the AfCFTA cannot be fully realised;

**Recognising** that it is in the collective interest of Africa's leadership and economic sovereignty to implement agreed treaties and protocols in order to advance peace, stability, dignity, growth and shared prosperity for all Africans;

**Inspired** by the vision of a borderless Africa, where the free movement of people, goods, services and capital unlocks unprecedented opportunities for innovation, job creation and continental unity, particularly for SMEs, women and youth entrepreneurs;

**Welcoming** leadership and advocacy across the continent in championing a borderless Africa as a pathway to unity, resilience and prosperity;

**Having engaged** in robust dialogue across seven thematic sessions, specialised breakfast meetings, masterclasses, workshops and executive roundtables at APD 2026, generating practical insights and actionable pathways;

We concluded that, in order to empower Africans, enabling large African enterprises to emerge as global champions, allowing SMEs to scale and create jobs at speed, and building a truly inclusive African single market, the necessary treaties and protocols are already in place. What is now required is decisive political will to implement them fully and without delay. We further affirmed that effective implementation will significantly enhance peace, stability, dignity, shared prosperity, and Africa's collective economic sovereignty, while strengthening the continent's global influence and negotiating power in an increasingly competitive world.

We, therefore, commit ourselves, and call on Africans and friends of Africa everywhere, to the Make Africa Borderless Now! Movement, and to the mobilisation of ten million signatures to be presented to the 40th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa in February 2027. We affirm this as a people-driven demand for action, and pledge to actively support and advance the Movement's objectives until Africa's integration treaties and protocols are fully implemented.

### **Why This Compact Matters**

Africa's borders were drawn in 1884/5 in Berlin without African consent, designed for extraction rather than our prosperity. At independence, those borders were preserved, leaving Africa politically sovereign but economically fragmented, independent without scale. Today, these inherited barriers still divide a market of over 1.5 billion people, restrict the movement of talent and goods, raise costs, trap capital, and limit jobs. As Africa heads toward a population of over 2.1 billion by 2040, the world's largest workforce, the choice is stark: remain divided and constrained, or integrate and prosperous.

Integration is no longer a vision; it is an economic necessity. That is why the Africa Prosperity Network and its partners have launched Make Africa Borderless Now! It is a people-powered movement to turn long-agreed treaties into action.

A borderless Africa does not mean weaker security. It means smarter security. Fragmented border systems create blind spots that criminals exploit. Integrated biometric identification, shared databases, and digital verification strengthen control while enabling lawful movement. Mobility follows opportunity, not chaos and integrated markets are more stable, not less.

Africa's future will be written by its enterprises. But SMEs, women- and youth-led businesses cannot scale across 55 disconnected markets. Every global economic power was built on a large, unified home market. To build African champions, create jobs, and unlock shared prosperity, Africa must unite its market.

## **12-POINT PEOPLE'S COMPACT FOR A SINGLE AFRICAN MARKET**

### **A Practical Blueprint for a Borderless Continent**

The blueprint for integration already exists in signed treaties and protocols. These twelve action priorities represent the unfinished business of African unity, now claimed by its people.

#### **1. Abolish Visas for Africans in Africa**

Africa cannot integrate if its entrepreneurs cannot move. Visa restrictions raise costs, delay deals, and stifle opportunity. Abolishing visas for Africans travelling within Africa treats mobility as essential economic infrastructure, enabling businesses to explore markets, establish partnerships, and deploy talent freely across the continent.

#### **2. Open Africa's Skies Now**

Closed skies keep Africa expensive and disconnected. Fully implementing the Yamoussoukro Decision (1999) and the Single African Air Transport Market (2018) will slash airfares, connect cities directly, and turbocharge trade, tourism, and logistics, expanding markets and creating jobs.

#### **3. Launch One African Biometric Passport & Digital ID**

Enterprises need speed, trust, and certainty. A single or common African biometric passport and interoperable digital ID will simplify travel and business establishment, support secure digital services, ensure security, and lower verification costs, turning seamless movement into a driver of secure economic activity.

#### **4. Activate the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol (2024)**

With African enterprise increasingly digital, we must activate the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol to create one continental digital market. This enables businesses to sell services and content across borders, scale without physical relocation, and compete globally from an African base.

#### **5. Make Cross-Border Payments Seamless Across Africa**

Intra-African trade requires frictionless finance. The full operationalisation of the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) and continent-wide

mobile-money interoperability by 2027 (as recommended at the 6th AU Mid-Year Coordination Meeting in 2024) will significantly enhance intra-African trade, reduce transaction costs, and save billions lost annually to foreign currency conversion.

**6. Unlock African Talent Through Mutual Skills Recognition**

African enterprises need skills, which are readily available among Africans at home and beyond. Africa's young people need jobs. Mutual recognition of professional and vocational qualifications will allow firms to recruit continent-wide, deploy staff across markets, and build the specialised, competitive teams needed for global success.

**7. Harmonise Standards to Create One African Market**

Multiple national standards force businesses to treat Africa as 55 or so separate markets. The African Organisation for Standardisation already exists. Harmonising regulations ensures goods approved in one country can be sold across the continent, unlocking manufacturing, agro-processing, and light industry, and enabling enterprises to scale into true continental brands.

**8. Establish One African Customs Union**

The AfCFTA cannot reach its potential without a customs union. The Abuja Treaty's 2028 deadline for this must be honoured. A digitised, unified customs system will reduce delays, boost industrialisation and cross-border trade, lower costs for SMEs, and attract global manufacturers to set up operations in Africa.

**9. Build Continental Infrastructure That Connects Africa**

Enterprises cannot scale on disconnected infrastructure. We must invest jointly in roads, rail, ports, energy, and digital networks. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam shows what is collectively possible. Innovative financing, such as the proposed One-Dollar-a-Day African Infrastructure Fund, can mobilise citizen savings, pension funds, and private capital into bankable projects that physically unite the continent.

**10. Enforce Integration Through the African Court of Justice**

Markets require rules, and rules require enforcement. Operationalising the supranational African Court of Justice, as provided for in the AU Constitutive Act, will provide a huge incentive for investors because of the certainty and protection for enterprises against arbitrary barriers. It will ensure that the single market rules and regulations have to be applied and uniformly so across member states.

**11. Put SMEs, Women, and Youth at the Centre of Trade**

Women and youth-led SMEs dominate African trade yet face the highest barriers. Full implementation of the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade is essential to ensure access to finance, simplified procedures, safe mobility, and true continental market access for our most dynamic entrepreneurs.

## 12. Negotiate as One Africa on the Global Stage

Fragmented Africa is a price-taker; integrated Africa is a rule-maker. Negotiating as one bloc on the big issues, such as trade, digital governance, and climate action, establishes Africa's global stature, enhancing our efforts towards self-determination and socio-economic development.

### **A New Pan-Africanism: Owned and Driven by the People**

This is a new kind of Pan-Africanism. It moves from summit halls and political rhetoric into markets, factories, studios, farms, and digital platforms. It is owned and driven by the people: by the entrepreneurs, workers, creators, and youth whose future is at stake.

The "Make Africa Borderless Now!" movement does not weaken our nations; it strengthens them by giving our enterprises the scale to generate wealth, innovation, and jobs at home. The Berlin Conference divided Africa without Africans. This generation will surely succeed if the treaties and protocols that our leaders have signed up to over the years are implemented. That will give the people and enterprises the practical tools of open markets, seamless mobility, and shared opportunity.

The time for a united, prosperous, and borderless Africa is now. This is our collective moment to act.

We call on every African (and every friend of Africa) to become a builder of this new reality. Sign the petition. Share the demand. Mobilise your community. Let us transform 10 million signatures into a continental roar that the continent's 50-plus governments cannot ignore. [www.makeafricaborderlessnow.com](http://www.makeafricaborderlessnow.com)

Let us move from debating borders to erasing them. From accepting fragmentation to demanding integration. From hoping for unity to enacting it. The lines that divide us are not our destiny. Our destiny is in our unity.

Together, let us MAKE AFRICA BORDERLESS NOW

Done in Accra, Ghana, This day, 6th day of February 2026.

SIGNED .....



Make Africa Borderless Now!  
Join the movement, sign the petition:  
<https://makeafricaborderlessnow.com>

Contact us  
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