KTA ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM 2026

Building Africa's Digital Single Market

The Role of Government and the Private Sector in Achieving Regional Integration

22nd – 23rd October | Format: Hybrid



In January 2012, the African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the decision to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a means of boosting intra-African trade. This Agreement entered into force in May 2019, with trading commencing in January 2021. Once fully operational, the AfCFTA will form the world's largest free trade area, encompassing a market of 1.3 billion consumers and projected to reach 1.7 billion by 2030[1].

A core objective of the AfCFTA is the creation of a single market for goods and services. This vision is inextricably linked to the digital economy. Consequently, one of the main goals of the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (DTS) 2020-2030 is to establish an African Digital Single Market (DSM) by 2030. This DSM is defined as enabling the "free movement of persons, services, and capital" where individuals and businesses can "seamlessly access and engage in online activities in line with the AfCFTA [2]."

Achieving this vision requires harmonized rules and principles on digital policy across the continent. Countries must agree on shared standards on data protection, cybersecurity, platform regulation, e-payments, and consumer protection[3]. For many states, this will involve developing new legislation, while for others it will require updating or aligning existing regulatory frameworks. However, regulatory harmonization alone is insufficient. Implementation depends on foundational enablers such as digital infrastructure, digital skills, and institutional capacity, all of which vary significantly across African countries.

Furthermore, a digital single market is only possible if systems are interoperable, enabling seamless cross-border digital trade, from payment systems that facilitate transactions to digital postal and logistics systems that support last-mile delivery. These systems form the backbone of a functional, integrated digital economy.

To steer member states towards this necessary harmonization, the AU has established key normative and policy instruments:

- **The AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention):** This is a legally binding instrument that requires states to enact national frameworks to secure personal data and combat cybercrime. This is complemented by the AU Data Policy Framework, which provides high-level, principle-based guidance for member states developing their data protection and governance regimes.

- **The Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA on Digital Trade:** This protocol aims to support the single market objective by laying down rules and principles that will directly govern digital trade and e-commerce across the free trade area.

- **The Digital Transformation Strategy (DTS):** This provides a continental strategy on digital transformation, identifying the foundational pillars (enabling policy, digital infrastructure, digital skills, and digital innovation) upon which national digital transformation agendas should be built.

[1] "The African Continental Free Trade Area | African Union," accessed December 3, 2025, https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area.

[2] THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY FOR AFRICA (2020-2030).

[3] "The African Continental Free Trade Area | African Union."

Together, these instruments provide a continental blueprint, but effective implementation will depend on coordinated action at regional and national levels, as well as meaningful engagement with the private sector. The core challenge now to how these frameworks will be practically and effectively implemented to achieve a Digital Single Market.

This year's symposium will address this question with a specific focus on the East African Community (EAC) region, which serves as a microcosm for regional integration efforts. The symposium seeks to examine:

- **The role of the government:** What specific policy interventions, regulatory harmonization, and institutional reforms are required at the regional and national levels to create a unified and predictable operating environment?
- **The role of the private sector:** What investments, innovations, and standards must the private sector drive to operationalize the DSM, and what market barriers must be removed?
- **How collaboration can achieve integration:** How can government and the private sector effectively collaborate (crowd-in investment and innovation) while distinguishing between areas that require regulatory oversight and those best left to the market?

Expected Output

The output of the symposium will be a policy paper reflecting private-sector perspectives on what is required to build an integrated digital market in East Africa. It will provide a clear roadmap for policymakers and regulatory bodies on the essential steps required to accelerate the building of the Digital Single Market.

Program:

Day One: The Legal and Regulatory Foundations of a Digital Single Market

Time	Session Type	Topic
8:30 am - 9:00 am	Registration & networking	
9:00 am -9:20 am	Opening remarks	Background and expectations for the event
9:20 am – 9:30 am	Keynote Speech	**Building Africa's Digital Single Market: Aspirations of the EAC and How we Can Achieve Regional Integration**
9:30 am- 10: 30 am	Panel Discussion	**Regional Policy Instruments as a Conduit for Unlocking Digital Trade** This session will examine the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol and the EAC E-Commerce Strategy as policy tools, what went into making them, where the gaps are, and how the private sector can and must be involved in their implementation.

10:30 am -11:00 am	**Networking Break**	
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Panel Discussion	**Avoiding Regulatory Overload: Harmonising Without Stifling the Market** The session will entail a practical examination of what a 'minimum viable' regulatory standard for the EAC Digital Single Market looks like and how to achieve alignment without stifling the businesses carrying out digital trade.
12:00 pm- 1:00 pm	Panel Discussion	**Consumer Protection in a Transboundary Digital Market** This session maps the existing legal frameworks, what the AfCFTA protocol says about consumer protection, what national laws cover, and where the gaps are. It examines online dispute resolution mechanisms, cross-border regulatory cooperation frameworks, and trust-building infrastructure (e-trust marks and verified seller schemes) that can provide de facto consumer protection even before full legal harmonisation is achieved.
1:00 pm- 2:00 pm	**Lunch Break**	

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Break out sessions	**Breakout Session 1: Taxing Digital Trade: Harmonising VAT, DST, and Customs in the EAC** A deep dive into the most commercially contested aspect of digital trade regulation: how digital services, platforms, and cross-border transactions should be taxed and how to build a harmonised regime that is equitable, enforceable, and conducive to growth **Breakout Session 2: Modernising Logistics & Postal Services: The Backbone of Digital Trade** This panel examines the challenges that logistics and postal companies face – from the regulatory environment to the operational realities. Panelists will also discuss how to modernise the postal sector to facilitate digital trade.
3:00 pm - 3:30 pm	Plenary	

3: 30 pm - 4: 30 pm	Sector Deep Dives	**Workshops:** • **Workshop A:** Intellectual Property in the Era of Digital Trade • **Workshop B:** E-Transactions: Validity of Contracts, Enforceability of Rights and Harmonization of Laws • **Workshop C:** Cross-Border Data Transfers: Navigating Transfer Rules, Localisation Requirements, and the Free Flow Debate
4:30 pm - 4:40 pm	Plenary	
4:40 pm – 5:00 pm	Closing remarks	
7: 30 pm	Networking Dinner: Retailers, Marketplaces and Policymakers	Hosted by Sponsor (Open to invited guests)

Day Two: Strategy, Investment, and Implementation

Time	**Session Type**	**Topic**
8:00 am - 9:00 am	Registration and Networking	
9:00 am - 9:10 am	Speech	Recap of day one
9: 10 am- 9: 20 am	Keynote Address	**The Trillion-Dollar Opportunity: Quantifying Africa's Digital Single Market**

9:20 am: 9:40 am	Presentation	**Rethinking Africa's Approach to the Digital Economy**
9:40 am – 10:00 am	Sympo Bingo	
10:00 am – 11: 00 am	Panel Session 1	**Financing Connectivity: Crowding In Private Sector Investment for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** This panel examines how to design the right combination of regulatory incentives, blended finance structures, and public-private partnership models to crowd in the investment needed to finance DPI.
11: 00 am – 11: 15 am	Networking Break	
11: 15 am – 12:15 am	Panel Session	**Integrating Payment Systems: Enabling Seamless Cross-Border FinTech** The session will examine the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), its current coverage, limitations, and the regulatory prerequisites for broader

		adoption, alongside the EAC's own financial integration programme. It will explore what 'seamless' cross-border payments mean in operational terms.
12: 15 pm- 1: 00 pm	Policy Labs	Parallel: **Lab A: E-Commerce as a Tool to Bring MSMEs into the Formal Economy** **Lab C: Institutional Capacity Policy Lab: Why do Good Digital Policies Fail, and What Can We do Better?**
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Lunch	
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Panel Session	**The Private Sector Perspective: Scaling Across Borders in a Continent-Wide Market** Governments make policy. Companies make markets. This panel gives the floor to digital business operators who are actively building the continent-wide market that the AfCFTA and the DSM agenda envision and who experience regulatory friction, investment barriers, and market fragmentation as daily operational realities

3:00 pm- 3: 30 pm	Interactive Networking Session	• **Meet the Founders**: A facilitated 1-to-1 speed networking session • **Trivia Challenge**
3: 30 pm- 4:30 pm	World Café Session	• Table 1: Who should lead Africa's digital integration? • Table 2: Harmonisation vs sovereignty: How much national control should be sacrificed for regional integration? • Table 3: What makes a digital market 'African'? Is the goal to adapt global platform infrastructure to the African context, or to build something genuinely new? • Table 4- What would make Africa's digital single market genuinely investor-worthy?
4:30 pm - 4:40 pm	Closing remarks	