

AFRICAN UNION

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4th ANNUAL AFRICAN UNION
MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM-SIZED
ENTERPRISES FORUM 2025
ABUJA, NIGERIA

CONCEPT NOTE

March 2025

1. Background

In recognition of the pivotal role private sector growth plays in Africa's sustainable economic development, the 20th Ordinary Session of the African Union's Conference of African Ministers

of Industry (CAMI 20) urged Member States to establish environments conducive to the growth of small and medium industries and enterprises (SMEs). The African Union Commission (AUC) developed an SME Development Strategy & Action Plan, which emphasizes empowering SMEs to develop intra-African value chains and bolster regional trade. This strategy aims to foster competitive, diversified, and sustainable economies driven by vibrant entrepreneurial and industrial sectors, with the goal of creating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion. To effectively implement this strategy, the Integrated Program Delivery Framework proposed the creation of an annual African Union Micro, Small, Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSME) Forum. This forum provides a crucial platform for exchanging knowledge on MSME development and facilitating collaboration across Africa.

The AUC MSME Forum has been instrumental in leading initiatives that highlight the current status of MSME development in Africa. The inaugural forum was held in Cairo, Egypt, during the week of June 27, 2022, coinciding with International MSME Day as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly under resolution 71/279. The second forum took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2023. In 2024, the third forum was successfully held in Windhoek, Namibia, in collaboration with the Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board and prominent partners such as the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), ImpactHER, the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

2. Introduction

The AUC MSME Forum has emerged as a pivotal platform for fostering economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development across the continent. Building on the success of previous forums, the upcoming event aims to address the pressing need for enhancing digital transformation and market access for MSMEs in Africa. As the backbone of Africa's economy, MSMEs face unique challenges in leveraging digital technologies and accessing broader markets, which are crucial for their growth and competitiveness.

On June 27th, 2024, the Nigerian Government hosted an event in collaboration with the AUC; *“Call to Action; Access to Single-Digit Loans for MSMEs in Africa”* which laid the foundations for the Federal Nigeria playing host to the upcoming MSME Forum. The forum co-organized by the AUC and the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Office of the Vice President, will serve as an interactive platform where policymakers, investors, and stakeholders from across Africa will convene to address two pivotal areas: enhancing digital transformation and improving market access for MSMEs. The forum will delve into strategies for leveraging digital technologies to boost operational efficiency, market reach, and

competitiveness of MSMEs, including digital literacy and e-commerce integration. Additionally, it will focus on enhancing intra-African trade and access to global markets, utilizing frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), while tackling challenges such as regulatory barriers and access to finance. The event is expected to host between 300 to 400 African delegates, providing a valuable opportunity for networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration to drive sustainable growth and development in the MSME sector.

3. OBJECTIVES

The 4th AU MSME Forum is designed with several key objectives in mind. Firstly, it aims to

- Promote digital transformation by enhancing MSMEs' capacity to leverage digital technologies for operational efficiency, market reach, and competitiveness.
- Improve market access by facilitating MSMEs' entry into intra-African and global markets through frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA),
- Supports sustainable development by empowering MSMEs to drive economic growth and job creation, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship to foster a more inclusive and resilient economy.

4. OUTCOMES

The expected outcomes of the forum are multifaceted.

- MSMEs are expected to gain practical knowledge and skills in digital technologies, enabling them to improve their operational efficiency and market reach.
- To provide evidence-based solutions on how entrepreneurs can access funding among other barriers.
- To showcase investment-ready SMEs to the African entrepreneurial ecosystem.

5. DATES AND VENUE

The forum is expected to take place in Abuja, Nigeria from June 23rd – 27th 2025.

Venues: State House Banquet Hall, Presidential Villa (23&27 June 2025), Abuja Continental Hotel (24-26 June 2025).