



CONCEPT NOTE

TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Theme: *Strengthening the Role of Parliaments in Advancing Regional Trade Integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*

Background

Connecting 1.4 billion people across 55 African countries with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) exceeding US \$3 trillion, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents the world's largest free trade area and presents an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate intra-African trade, drive industrialization, and promote sustainable economic development across the continent. According to United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), full implementation of the AfCFTA by 2045 could enable the continent to increase its GDP by \$141 billion and intra-African trade by \$276 billion, compared to the baseline situation without the AfCFTA.¹ UNECA analysis also indicates a net intra-African trade gain of \$3 trillion (\$1.4 trillion for GDP) between 2021 and 2024. Furthermore, in the context of heightened geopolitical tensions and subsequent rise in international tariffs, the AfCFTA can help promote the resilience of African industries by facilitating their shift toward alternative regional markets.

As the implementation of AfCFTA advances, parliaments have a critical role to play in ensuring that continental trade commitments translate into concrete development outcomes for citizens. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to provide oversight, ensure accountability, promote inclusive policy design, and align continental and regional commitments with national development priorities.

¹ ERA 2025: [With effective implementation, the AfCFTA can open alternative markets to sectors affected by the global tariff wars](#) | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

However, fulfilling this requires targeted capacity building, particularly in areas such as trade policy formulation, the reduction of non-trade barriers, digital trade, investment facilitation, and gender-responsive oversight.

This training programme is designed to equip parliamentarians with the knowledge and tools to engage in AfCFTA implementation, revise or shape legislation in response to the shifting economic dynamics and advocate for development amongst the member states. The initiative aligns with the forum's commitment to hastening the pace of economic cooperation, development, and integration on the basis of equity and mutual benefit.

Objectives

The overall objective of the initiative is to strengthen the capacity of SADC parliamentarians to effectively participate in and monitor the implementation of the SADC protocols and AfCFTA, ensuring that regional trade integration promotes inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Specifically, by the end of the training, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the legal, institutional, and operational framework of AfCFTA, including its protocols on trade in goods and services, investment, digital trade, and dispute settlement, and how they relate with the SADC protocols.
2. Recognize the strategic importance of parliaments in promoting sustainable economic development and regional integration through AfCFTA.
3. Deepen their knowledge of priority thematic areas for the SADC region, such as non-tariff barriers, digital trade and e-commerce, and gender-responsive trade policy, and understand the critical roles parliamentarians can play in addressing them.
4. Apply strategic tools and frameworks to monitor trade commitments, align domestic legislation with regional obligations and commitments, and effectively engage with national and regional stakeholders.
5. Analyze case studies and best practices from within the SADC region and other African countries to inform national legislative strategies.
6. Develop action plans to enhance parliamentary engagement in the AfCFTA implementation at national and regional levels.

Format:

The training will be delivered virtually, led by experts from UNCTAD and partner agencies. Each session will be no more than 2.5 hours and will be delivered between November 2025 and April 2026.

