KTA ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM 20 26

Building Africa's Digital Single Market

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

22nd – 23rd **October**

Format: **Hybrid**

INDEPENDENCE MONUMENT

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.

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[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

Audience: Lawyers, Legal Practitioners, Regulatory Bodies, Compliance Officers, Legal Academia

Time	Session Type	Topic
08:30 - 09:00	Registration & Coffee	
9:00 - 9:10	Opening Remarks	
9:10 - 9:20		
09:20 - 09:30	Keynote Address	**Building the Legal Architecture for a Digital Single Market: Lessons from the European Union** An overview of the legal intricacies needed to establish a digital single market and what this looks like in practice.
09:30 - 10:45	Panel 1: Data Governance, Trust, and Cross-Border Flows	**Harmonizing Data Protection and Cybersecurity in the EAC** • Navigating cross-border transfer of data • Assessing legal instruments for secure and free data flows (addressing data localization requirements v. transfer of data). • Cybersecurity and E-Evidence: Legal frameworks for incident response, breach notification, and mutual legal assistance across EAC jurisdictions.
10:45 - 11:00	Networking break	
11:00 - 12:15	Panel 2: Regulating the Digital Marketplace	**Regulating Competition in a Transboundary Digital Economy: How Can African Countries Regulate Competition in a Digital Market that Transcends Borders?** This session focuses on the legal tools needed to govern digital platforms and maintain a fair online marketplace. • Validity and Enforceability: Legal status of electronic contracts and digital signatures across borders. • Platform Liability: Defining the legal responsibility of online platforms for content, competition, and consumer harm. • Harmonizing Digital Taxation: Legal mechanisms for a unified approach to VAT/ digital service tax (DST) to prevent double taxation and ensure ease of compliance.
12:15 - 13:00	Workshops	**Sector Deep Dives (Parallel):** • Regulating the invisible: AI and Algorithmic governance • Dispute resolution in the digital economy • Navigating regulatory divergence and risk

Day Two: Strategy, Investment, and Implementation

Audience: Policymakers, Government Officials, Tech Sector Industry Players, Entrepreneurs (SMEs), Civil Society, Academia

Time	Session Type	Topic
09:00 - 09:30	Opening Keynote	The Trillion Dollar Opportunity: Quantifying the Economic Impact of an African DSM A data-driven analysis of how the DSM accelerates GDP growth, job creation, and intra-African trade
09:30 - 10:45	Panel 1: Infrastructure and Digital Public Goods	**Financing Connectivity: Crowding In Private Investment in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** - Digital Identity (ID) & Interoperability: Building trusted, regional ID systems - Last-Mile Connectivity: Strategies (e.g., regulatory incentives, infrastructure sharing) to close the rural/urban digital divide. - The Role of Sovereign Data Centers and Cloud Computing in enhancing data sovereignty and service delivery.
10:45 - 11:00	Networking break	
11:00 - 12:00	Panel 2: Operationalizing Digital Trade & Payments	**From Policy to Practice: Enabling Seamless E-commerce and Cross-Border FinTech** - Identifying the regulatory barriers hindering cross-border e-commerce scale (e.g., customs clearance, logistics). - Interoperable Digital Payments: Leveraging PAPSS and regional financial integration programs (e.g., EAC efforts) to reduce transaction costs. - Supply Chain Digitalization: Utilizing tech (blockchain, IoT) for transparency and efficiency in regional logistics.
12:00 - 13:00	Workshops: The African Digital Market Policy Labs	Parallel: - AfCFTA digital trade protocol workshop: What does the protocol mean in practice? - Future Tech Policy Workshop: How to avoid widening the digital divide. - Institutional Capacity Policy Lab: Why do good digital policies fail and what can we do better?
13:00- 14:00	Networking lunch	
14:00 - 14:45	Panel 3: The Private Sector Perspective	**Opportunities in a Continent-Wide Digital Single Market** - Digital entrepreneurship under AfCFTA - Scaling across borders - Removing regulatory and logistical barriers - Financing innovation in a harmonized market

14:45 - 16:30	World Cafe Session	**Parallel:**
		- Who should lead Africa's digital integration? State, market, or regional institutions
		- Harmonisation verses sovereignity: How much national control should be sacrificed for regional integration?
		- What makes a digital market "African"? Local innovation or global platform
		- What would make Africa digital single market investor worthy?
15:30 - 16:00	Closing Remarks	**Charting the Next Steps: From Symposium to Implementation**
		A structured session to synthesize the day's discussions and finalize the key recommendations for the policy paper.