



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Leveraging the ability of sport to support the inclusive implementation of the AfCFTA

A collaboration between Africa Sports Unified and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

OVERVIEW

The United Nations General Assembly has recognised the powerful role of sport in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This recognition led to the call for an updated UN Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace, highlighting sport's potential to promote diplomacy, foster cooperation, and engage underrepresented groups such as youth, women, and people with disabilities.

In line with this, Africa Sports Unified (ASU), led by Gabriel Ajala, partnered with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC), and other stakeholders to explore how sport could be leveraged to support the inclusive implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

APPROACH

The project was designed to use sport as a tool to engage key segments of the African population, particularly youth, women and girls, and people with disabilities, in the AfCFTA agenda. Policymakers, national AfCFTA committees, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were also key stakeholders.

Through research, content development, and stakeholder engagement, ASU developed a strategic approach for how sport can support AfCFTA implementation and foster wider socio-economic impact.

Africa Sports Unified, led by Gabriel Ajala, worked with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), ATPC (African Trade Policy Centre) and partners by leveraging the ability of sport to support inclusive AfCFTA implementation, particularly by reaching youth, women/girls, and those with disabilities. In addition, policymakers and key stakeholders at the national and regional level, including national AfCFTA committees and Regional Economic Communities. We developed a strategy to use sport as an implementation tool for the AfCFTA and identified ways to reach these groups and sectors through extensive research to foster trade.

TACTICS IMPLEMENTED

- 2 Research Projects
- 4 Podcast Episodes
- 2 Online Events
- Bespoke Mentorship Programme
- Comprehensive Policy Recommendations

KEY OUTCOMES

Evidence & Knowledge Generation:

Two in-depth research projects explored:

- How African nations can harness sport as a development tool.
- The role of sport in engaging Gen Z and young entrepreneurs in AfCFTA.

These formed the knowledge base that guided the wider initiative.

Advocacy & Community Engagement:

Hosted two online events with 60% attendance rates and a third of attendees being women. Topics included sports manufacturing and sports advocacy within AfCFTA.

Delivered four podcast episodes, increasing awareness of sport's role in economic development and trade, with an average consumption rate of 47%. Listeners spanned Africa, Europe, and North America.

Capacity Development:

Launched a six-month mentorship programme pairing 14 young African entrepreneurs with 14 senior figures from global sports organisations, including:

- FIFA
- Basketball Africa League
- Toronto Raptors
- Catapult Sports

Key elements of the programme included:

- AfCFTA literacy
- Entrepreneurship & business communication
- Innovation and investment principles



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Impact:

- 100% of mentees found the programme valuable.
- 100% of mentors expressed willingness to participate again.
- Long-lasting relationships formed beyond the official programme duration.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on all project activities, ASU produced a comprehensive set of policy recommendations outlining:

- How sport can be embedded in AfCFTA implementation strategies.
- Opportunities to boost intra-Africa trade and develop inclusive value chains.
- Tangible steps for governments, trade bodies, and sports stakeholders to collaborate more effectively.

CONCLUSION

This partnership between ASU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa demonstrated the untapped potential of sport as an instrument of policy implementation, trade expansion, and social inclusion under the AfCFTA.

From research and policy to mentoring and media, ASU's multipronged approach has laid the groundwork for a new paradigm: **sport not just as entertainment or competition, but as a strategic driver for Africa's economic integration.**