

INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent of hope and promise, blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources and possessing myriad unique cultures, customs and traditions. Africa, as a crucible for innovation and growth in business, trade and development, has the potential to be at the forefront of a paradigm shift – business models that provide a solid return on investments, sustainably, while safeguarding our planet and people, upholding human dignity, and respecting the rule of law.

In 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), entered into force. AfCFTA is playing an important role in transforming how Africa does business, internally and internationally, and builds confidence amongst foreign investors and trading partners. However, regardless of the opportunities, wealth, and other economic and other benefits that AfCFTA will bring, AfCFTA will be a moral failure if these benefits are not shared equitably with women and girls.

Women, who constitute a major part of the informal economy, are burdened by systematic and patriarchal norms, including the inability to own or inherit land, or to access financial and other resources. Women and girls continue to face physical and other threats to their health, safety, and mental and bodily wellbeing and autonomy. These have all severely impaired their ability to achieve economic independence and empowerment.

Therefore, as intercontinental and intracontinental commerce develops through AfCFTA, it is imperative to ensure that women are not left behind. Women must have real representation and voice in its implementation, and must not be unfairly burdened in reaping its benefits.

Next year will mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which promises that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” As the implementation of AfCFTA unfolds, we must seize this opportunity to ensure that the dignity, freedom and equality promised to women and girls are not just their stated rights, but rather their actual realities. If properly implemented, AfCFTA has the potential to be a vector for achieving a better, more equitable world, for all.

AGENDA

Africa Open for Business is a forum which provides an opportunity to explore how business should be done and labor opportunities should be created in Africa, including its diaspora, and for diverse stakeholders to share perspectives. This includes the ideas, the experiences and initiatives of the private sector, high level representatives from international organizations, governments, civil society, art and culture, and academia. Additionally, with the African diaspora as the sixth region of Africa, the Summit serves as an enabling environment for discourse between those inside and outside the continent.

Building on the Women of the Diaspora Summit Series, initiated in 2020 by ARDN, in collaboration with the Republic of Costa Rica, UNFPA and UN Women, the theme of this year’s Africa Open for Business is *Economic Empowerment of Women through AfCFTA*, and will consider the impediments facing, and strategies for advancing, the economic empowerment of women in Africa and the Diaspora, in the context of AfCFTA opportunities.

This Summit further falls within the framework of ARDN’s Red Card Campaign to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, which is part of ARDN’s Pathway Solutions Initiative, and will focus particularly on the following Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs):



Sustainable Development Goal #5
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



Sustainable Development Goal #8
Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



Sustainable Development Goal #9
Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation



Sustainable Development Goal #17
Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The format of the Summit will be divided into four distinct sections:

- Addresses and interventions by high level representatives from international organizations, government, and the private sector.
- Activities to increase public commitments towards the objectives of, and awareness for, the Red Card Campaign.
- Intervention by in-person participants.
- Recognition of selected champions whose efforts have served to advance the achievement of the SDGs in Africa and the diaspora.

OBJECTIVES

- Showcase the potential and promise of Africa, and highlight the positive narrative of the continent.
- Illustrate how investment and trade opportunities through AfCFTA can empower women and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, and how the African diaspora can benefit and be of support.
- Inspire and empower women leadership in the private sector, as well as other sectors of society.
- Explore and develop cross-sector and cross-border partnerships for sustainable business and sustainable development.
- Bring attention to and popularize the SDGs, particularly goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and 17 (Partnership for the Goals), in tandem with Africa Agenda 2063.
- Create and formulate solutions, initiatives and opportunities for achieving a better, more equitable world, through and with the support of business.

OUTCOME

The Summit is intended to serve as the beginning of the dialogue and not the end. It is hoped that the relationships

built and the connections reinforced, amongst participants, through the Summit will lead to the development of opportunities for better business and a better world; and that commitments made at the Summit will encourage stronger representation of women in leadership positions in the private sector and other societal sectors, and equitable economic opportunities for women and girls.

CO-ORGANIZERS AND SPONSORS

Organized by African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN) in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Senegal to the United Nations, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Africa Bureau of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat).

RED CARD CAMPAIGN

Women’s rights are human rights. In the game of football (soccer), a red card symbolizes a significant infraction of the rules. ARDN Red Card Campaign seeks to mobilize individuals from all sectors of society to commit to giving a red card to all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

The Red Card Campaign falls within the framework of the Pathway to Solution’s Initiative, an international, multilateral special project for the United Nations, spearheaded by ARDN, to popularize the SDGs, in collaboration with United Nations system entities, the international community, civil society, the private sector, academia, the world of sport and culture and governments.

To sign the Red Card Pledge:
<https://www.redcardpledge.com>

For more about Pathway to Solutions:
<https://www.ardn.ngo/pathway/>

CONTACT

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