



Joint Press Release

ECA and Japan Launch First-Ever Joint Project to Boost Intra-African Trade Through Digitalization

Addis Ababa, 13 May 2025 - The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Government of Japan represented by the Mission of Japan to the African Union have officially launched their first joint initiative to support Africa's economic integration process through support to the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The project, supported through a USD \$1 million grant from the Supplementary Budget for JFY 2025, was formally launched at a meeting held at ECA in Addis Ababa on 13 May 2025.

This collaboration marks the first opportunity that Japan has provided direct financial support to ECA's work championing African integration, thereby underscoring a shared commitment to digital innovation, inclusive trade, and regional value chain development on the African continent.

The project, titled "Boosting Intra-African Trade through Leveraging Digitalization for Effective and Inclusive AfCFTA Implementation," will be implemented over 12 months and aims to support AfCFTA State Parties in supporting their efforts to implement the AfCFTA, enhancing accessibility of relevant trade information, strengthening digital ecosystems, and empowering women-led MSMEs in AU countries, in particular Namibia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Tanzania.

ECA's Director of the Regional Integration and Trade Division, Mr. Stephen Karingi, welcomed the collaboration, stating:

"This first-of-its-kind partnership with Japan reflects our shared vision for a digitally empowered and economically integrated Africa. It will unlock new opportunities for SMEs, especially women-led businesses, and deepen Japan-Africa cooperation on trade and technology."

Mr. SUGIO Toru, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Mission of Japan to the African Union, delivering opening remarks on behalf of Ambassador NAKAGAWA Tsutomu, emphasized the significance of this new partnership:

"Let this project not just be a set of deliverables, but a catalyst for real change—a change that enables African businesses to thrive, regional value chains to flourish, and the promise of the AfCFTA to be fully realized."

Key deliverables of the project include:

- National digital trade portals
- A continental database on raw materials and production inputs in the textiles and apparel sector.
- Step-by-step guides for trading under the AfCFTA, and
- A capacity development programme with targeted training for government officials and women entrepreneurs

The kick-off meeting was attended by representatives of the Mission of Japan to the AU, ECA's Regional Integration and Trade Division, and ECA Sub-Regional Offices. The project will also engage with national governments, the AfCFTA Secretariat, Regional Economic Communities, and private sector actors, including Japanese SMEs.

The launch comes ahead of the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD9), to be held in August this year in Yokohama, where this project is expected to be showcased as a model of digital partnership between Japan and Africa.

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Mission of Japan to the African Union and

Regional Integration and Trade Division (RITD), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on 13 May 2025