African Union

2ND EGUMENI DIALOGUE

CONTINENTAL NETWORK OF WOMEN'S BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS IN AFRICA
CONWOBAA

Leading with Purpose

Inaugural Continental Leadership Masterclass for Women Business Associations

Strengthening Women Business Associations to Drive Africa's Economic Transformation

21 OCTOBER 2026

AUC Headquarters
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

01

Background

“Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its development trajectory.”

Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its development trajectory. With the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the operationalization of Agenda 2063, the accelerating digital transformation of economies, and growing efforts to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economic systems, the continent has unprecedented opportunities to unlock the productive potential of its people. Central to this transformation is the full and meaningful participation of women in economic development, entrepreneurship, trade, innovation and leadership.

According to World Bank, women account for nearly half of Africa's labour force and own a significant share of the continent's micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). They play a vital role in agriculture, manufacturing, services, technology, creative industries, tourism and cross-border trade, contributing to employment, poverty reduction, innovation and economic growth. Despite their contributions, women entrepreneurs continue to face structural barriers, including limited access to finance, markets, technology, productive resources, business development services and decision-making platforms, which constrain the growth and competitiveness of their enterprises.

The African Union (AU) has prioritized women's economic empowerment through key continental frameworks, including Agenda 2063, the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018–2028), the African Decade for Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion (AWD-FEI 2020–2030), the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Maputo Protocol). Together, these frameworks recognize that strengthening women's entrepreneurship, leadership and participation in trade is essential for achieving sustainable development and inclusive economic transformation.

Women Business Associations (WBAs) have emerged as strategic institutions that organize and represent women entrepreneurs, facilitate access to markets, finance, business development services, mentorship, and networks, while advocating for gender-responsive policies and improved business environments. They also serve as critical partners in advancing national and continental development priorities, including the implementation of the AfCFTA and the formalization and competitiveness of women-owned enterprises. However, many WBAs face institutional challenges that limit their effectiveness, including weak governance systems, inadequate financial sustainability, limited digital capacity, insufficient research and advocacy capabilities, and constrained leadership succession. As Africa's economic landscape becomes more dynamic, WBA leaders require stronger strategic, institutional, and adaptive leadership skills to navigate emerging opportunities in trade, digital transformation, climate resilience and regional integration.

Recognizing this need, the Continental Network of Women Business Associations in Africa (CONWOBAA), in partnership with the African Union Commission Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (AUC-WGYD), seeks to convene the Inaugural Continental Leadership Masterclass for Women Business Associations. The Masterclass is conceived as a flagship executive learning platform that seeks to equip association leaders and members with practical leadership competencies required to strengthen their institutions and contribute meaningfully to Africa's economic transformation.



Planned to be convened on the margins of the 2nd Egumeni Dialogue, the inaugural Masterclass will be a high-level platform for selected leaders of CONWOBAA's affiliated women business associations to strengthen executive leadership, institutional resilience, strategic partnerships and peer learning.

By investing in the leadership capacity of institutions that represent **millions of women entrepreneurs across Africa**, the Masterclass aims to strengthen organizational performance, amplify policy influence, and advance women's economic empowerment in support of Agenda 2063 and Africa's broader development aspirations.

02

Rationale

“There is an urgent need for a new generation of visionary, adaptive, and strategic leaders.”

Women Business Associations are critical enablers of inclusive economic growth and women's economic empowermentacross Africa. Theyserveas strategic intermediariesbetween governments, development partners, financial institutions, the private sector, and women entrepreneurs by advocating for gender-responsive policies, facilitating access to finance and markets, strengthening business networks, promoting enterprise development, and enhancing women's participation in national and regional economic processes. Their role is becoming increasingly important as AU Member States implement the AfCFTA and pursue the aspirations of Agenda 2063. As Africa navigates digital transformation, climate change, demographic shifts, and deeper regional integration, there is an urgent need for a new generation of visionary, adaptive, and strategic leaders capable of strengthening institutional resilience and positioning WBAs as influential actors in Africa's economic transformation.

The Inaugural Continental Leadership Masterclass for Women Business Associations responds to this need by providing a high-level platform for enhanced coordination, executive learning, peer exchange, strategic dialogue, and partnership building among leaders of WBAs across the continent. The Masterclass will strengthen leadership competencies, improve institutional governance, foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, deepen engagement with African Union institutions, and build a continental community of practice that amplifies the collective voice of women entrepreneurs.

By investing in the leadership capacity of Women Business Associations, the Masterclass will contribute to stronger institutions that are better equipped to support women-owned enterprises, influence policy, leverage opportunities under the AfCFTA, and advance Africa's agenda for inclusive, sustainable, and people-centered economic development. It is envisioned as a flagship annual initiative that will drive leadership excellence and institutional transformation across the continent.

A contribution to the Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion (WYFEI) 2030 Initiative

The Continental Leadership Masterclass is also conceived as a strategic contribution to the implementation of the WYFEI 2030 Initiative as the implementation framework of the AWD-FEI. The Initiative seeks to accelerate women and youth participation in Africa's economic transformation through strengthened institutions, leadership, enterprise development, financial inclusion and policy engagement. Within this framework, Women Business Associations serve as critical ecosystem actors that connect entrepreneurs to markets, finance, knowledge, and policy processes. By strengthening the leadership and institutional capacities of these associations, the Masterclass will support the realization of WYFEI's objectives while advancing Agenda 2063, the AU Gender Strategy, and the implementation of the AfCFTA.

03 Objectives

The over arching objective is to equip members of CONWOBAA's affiliated WBAs with the knowledge, skills and networks needed to effectively advocate for women's economic inclusion and drive enterprise growth in their respective contexts.

Specifically, the Masterclass seeks to:

- Deepen understanding of continental policy frameworks and integration processes.
- Strengthen governance, accountability and institutional effectiveness among WBAs across Africa's six regions.
- Provide a platform to inaugurate the Continental Leadership Training as an annual CONWOBAA initiative under the WYFEI 2030 framework.
- Enhance transformational leadership competencies among leaders of WBAs.
- Facilitate peer learning among continental leaders.
- Strengthen partnerships and institutional coordination mechanisms among Women Business Associations, African Union institutions, and development partners to advance women's economic empowerment.
- Inspire collective action for advancing women's economic empowerment and influencing policies.

04 Expected Outcomes

01 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Participants will:

- Strengthen executive leadership and strategic decision-making capabilities.
- Enhance governance, institutional management, and leadership competencies.
- Deepen their understanding of African Union frameworks, Agenda 2063, and the AfCFTA.
- Expand professional networks and strategic partnerships across the continent.

02 INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Participating Women Business Associations will be better positioned to:

- Strengthen governance, institutional effectiveness, and organizational sustainability.
- Increase their influence in policy dialogue and advocacy for women entrepreneurs.
- Enhance member value through improved services and resource mobilization.
- Leverage digital transformation and innovation to improve organizational performance.

03 CONTINENTAL LEVEL

The Masterclass will contribute to:

- Stronger collaboration and knowledge sharing among Women Business Associations across Africa.
- Increased visibility and influence of women business leaders in continental development. Stronger engagement between Women Business Associations and African Union institutions.
- The Continental Leadership Masterclass is officially inaugurated as CONWOBAA's flagship annual executive learning programme under the WYFEI 2030 Framework, establishing a sustainable platform for leadership development, institutional strengthening, and peer learning among Women Business Associations across Africa.

05 Format and Methodology

The Master class will employ a **hybrid format** combining in-person and virtual participation to maximize engagement across Africa's six regions. The format is designed to be interactive, practical, and experience-centered, moving beyond information-sharing toward skills application and peer learning.

1

Leadership Reflection Lab

Participants willidentifythekeyinstitutionalchallenges facing their associations.

2

Leadership Case Clinic

Participants willpresent real governanceorleadership challenges for collective problem-solving.

3

Innovation Sprints

Small groupsfocused ongovernance, financial sustainability, digital readiness, partnerships, and succession planning, with each group presenting concrete recommendations.

4

Personal Leadership Commitment

Eachparticipantleaveswithone ortwomeasurableactions to implement within **90 days**.

06 Target Audience and Participation

The session is targeted at **20 members of women business associations** (Executive Leaders, Board Members, Committee Leaders,Secretariat officials and emerging leaders) affiliated to CONWOBAAacross Africa's six regions: Eastern, Western, Central, Northern, Indian Ocean and Southern Africa.

Participants will be strategically selected to ensure balanced regional representation and youth inclusion.

07 Funding

The Masterclass willbeconvened on the margins of the 2nd Egumeni Dialogue. A selected number of in-person participants will be supported within the context of the main Dialogue by AUC-WGYD and its partners. Due to limited resources, self-sponsored participants are encouraged to participate in the Masterclass.

08 Language

In alignment with thebroader Egumeni Dialogue, the session will be conducted in two working languages of the African Union, English and French, with simultaneous interpretation provided.

Proposed Agenda

Time	Activity	Responsibility
08:00am-8-30am	Arrival and Registration	Secretariat
08:30am-08:45am	**Opening Ceremony** • Welcome Remarks by AUC-WGYD • Opening Remarks by CONWOBAA Chairperson	CONWOBAA Vice Chair
08:45am-9:00am	**Keynote Speech** Shaping Africa's Economic Future through Leadership and Influence of Women in Business Speaker: XXXX	CONWOBAA Vice Chair
09:00am-09:45am	**Executive Leadership Masterclass** Lead the institution: governance, capacity building and leadership	Facilitator / **Barbara Banda**
09:45am-10:30am	Fund the mission: resource mobilization and financial sustainability	Facilitator / **Laura Akunga**
10:30am-10:45am	**Networking Break**	Secretariat
10:45am-11:55am	**Lead the institution: governance, capacity building and leadership**	Facilitator / **Barbara Banda**
11:15am-12:00pm	**Shape the market: advocacy, AfCFTA and digital, with the Egumeni harvest**	Facilitators / **Dr. Blessing Irabor-O**za
12:00pm-12:30pm	**Personal Leadership Commitment: My Next 90 Days** Participants identify one or two measurable actions they will implement within 90 days	Facilitator / Dr. **Nigest Haile**
12:30pm-13:00pm	**Leadership Commitment Ceremony** Presentation of individual commitments and Adoption of The Addis Ababa Leadership Commitment for Women Business Associations	Facilitator / Participants
13:00pm	**Closing and Networking Lunch**	Secretariat

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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