

Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS)

Conference

CONCEPT NOTE



About the AYGS Conference

The Africa Young Graduates and Scholars (AYGS) conference is a platform that was conceived by the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA) in the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Organised annually, young scholars, policymakers, and practitioners attend this event to produce and share research-based knowledge about the development challenges facing Africa. In March 2024, the HSRC will host the 18th AYGS Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, together with the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and other strategic partners in the region. The gathering will allow emerging scholars from across Africa to share their research and experiences on how the continent can achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development through implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). To ensure inclusivity, applicants from Francophone Africa are highly encouraged to submit their abstracts.

A series of masterclass lectures led by experts from each subtheme of the forum will precede the conference. These masterclass lectures will be held online to give emerging scholars a deeper understanding of the subject matter and practical skills and techniques they can apply in their research work towards preparing for the conference.

Conference theme and call for abstracts:

ACCELERATION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) IMPLEMENTATION: Towards Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development in Africa

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was launched in March 2018 to create a single market for goods and services across 54 African countries with a combined population of 1.2 billion people and a total GDP of \$2.5 trillion. The agreement aims to boost intra-African trade and create jobs, ultimately driving economic growth on the continent. Since its launch, the implementation of the AfCFTA has been slow due to various challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure, bureaucratic hurdles, and political disagreements among member states. Nevertheless, some positive developments have occurred, such as the AfCFTA Secretariat launch and the signing of the Protocol on Trade in Services. As of April 2023, 54 of 55 African Union (AU) member states have signed the AfCFTA agreement, with forty-six countries depositing their instrument of ratification. However, only four State Parties have ratified the Protocol on the Movement of People, namely Rwanda, Niger, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Mali. At least 15 ratifications are needed for this Protocol to enter into force. Hence, the AU has declared the year 2023 as the “Year of AfCFTA” to generate more significant political commitment and accelerate the effective implementation of the AfCFTA to benefit the African citizenry fully.

The potential of AfCFTA in driving inclusive growth and sustainable development in Africa is enormous, and its successful implementation may help Africa to realise the aspirations and goals of the AU Agenda 2063 and UN Agenda 2030.

Therefore, more research informed pieces are needed to provide evidence-based insights and recommendations to inform decisions and policies to accelerate the continent-wide implementation of AfCFTA. Researchers must identify and analyse key issues related to implementing AfCFTA, such as challenges and opportunities for different sectors and countries, legal and regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure needs. This can help policymakers and stakeholders to understand the implications of AfCFTA better and to develop effective strategies to address them. In addition, comprehensive research is essential to provide evidence-based insights to inform policy decisions related to trade policy, investment policies, and rules of origin. This can help policymakers make informed decisions likely to have positive outcomes and minimise unintended consequences. Research is also essential to monitor and evaluate the implementation of AfCFTA by assessing the trade agreement's impact over time to help identify areas that need improvement and to make adjustments as necessary.

To contribute to this endeavour, the HSRC is organising its 18th Africa Young Graduates and Scholars Conference (AYGS 2024) in line with the 'Implementation of the AfCFTA' initiative. Young African scholars are invited to write and present scientific papers that explore the AfCFTA challenges and opportunities from various academic standpoints. The forum will focus on the participants' scholarly awareness of and ability to engage with current developmental discourse; ability to conceptualise researchable topics, choose and deploy appropriate research methodologies and methods; ability to translate research results into publishable knowledge products; and ability to initiate and implement projects successfully. Prospective participants are invited to submit an abstract on the conference sub-topics demonstrating a reasonable theoretical appreciation of the subject matter and the possibility of using available empirical data to subsequently develop a full paper that will be presented during the conference.

Conference sub-topics:

(1) Governance, peace, and security in the implementation of AfCFTA

The implementation of AfCFTA requires good governance, peace, and security in order to be successful. A strong governance framework is essential for AfCFTA to function effectively. Countries need to have transparent, accountable and efficient systems to manage their trade policies and regulations. This helps prevent corruption, promote fair competition, and ensure that trade benefits are shared equitably. Conflict and instability can seriously hinder trade and economic growth. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that peace and security are maintained throughout the implementation of AfCFTA. This can be achieved through effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and security infrastructure and resources investments. Submissions in this session are expected to articulate how African countries can strengthen democratic institutions, promote the rule of law, build effective governance structures, invest in conflict resolution, and enhance regional cooperation and partnership.

(2) Agriculture and food system transformation

Agriculture and food systems transformation is crucial in accelerating the benefits of AfCFTA. Agriculture is the backbone of most African economies and a sector that has the potential to drive economic growth and alleviate poverty. With the AfCFTA agreement, African countries can leverage their comparative advantage in agriculture to produce more and better-quality food products at lower costs and trade them within the continent. This will create employment opportunities, boost incomes for farmers and businesses, and increase food security. Transforming food systems is also essential to ensure that the benefits of AfCFTA are widely distributed and sustainable. This includes investing in research and development, supporting smallholder farmers, promoting value addition, and improving food safety standards. Papers in this session will be expected to use empirical and/ theoretical underpinnings to articulate several actions that are required to achieve agriculture and food system transformation, including (i) improving productivity; (ii) enhancing market access; (iii) promoting value addition; (iv) improving nutrition; and (v) strengthening institutions.

(3) Role of science, technology, and innovation in the implementation of AfCFTA

Science, technology, and innovation (STI) can play a key role in implementing AfCFTA by driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving the competitiveness of African countries.

For instance, STI can help improve productivity in agriculture, manufacturing, and other sectors, by developing new technologies, processes, and products that can reduce costs, increase efficiency, and improve the quality of goods and services. Therefore, submissions in this session should address how STI can drive Africa's inclusive growth and sustainable development by providing innovative solutions to the continent's most pressing challenges and creating opportunities for marginalised individuals and communities.

(4) The role of AfCFTA in catalysing climate action, green economy, and just transition in Africa

Implementing AfCFTA can catalyse the growth of the green economy by creating a larger market for renewable energy and other environmentally friendly products and services. Furthermore, a just transition to a green economy is essential to ensure that the most vulnerable individuals and communities are not left behind. This transition must be inclusive, ensuring that those most affected are part of the process and benefit from the new economy. In this context, the submissions in this area should address how AfCFTA would promote trade in sustainable goods and services, such as renewable energy and eco-tourism while addressing trade liberalisation's social and environmental impacts.

Submission guidelines for AYGS 2024

AYGS 2024 invites contributions from emerging scholars and African postgraduate students interested in and concerned with the imperatives for driving inclusive growth and sustainable development on the African continent. "Emerging" refers to candidates enrolled for either master's level or PhD-equivalent degree. Submissions should contribute to developing new thinking and fresh debate on Africa's effort to implement AfCFTA effectively.

All abstract submissions should have the following format:

Abstract: Maximum of 300 words
Keywords: 5 keywords

Provide affiliation information of presenting author, including correspondence email address. Conditions for participating at the conference:

- Selected candidates will be required to submit their full peer-reviewed manuscript (6 000 words max) before attending the conference.
- Masterclasses will be delivered virtually, to assist with the paper content addressing the sub-themes of the conference. It is therefore expected that shortlisted candidates will attend 90% of the classes before submitting the final draft manuscript.
- Submitted and reviewed manuscripts should have received a provisional acceptance letter as proof and confirmation of peer-review satisfaction.
- Candidates should be willing to travel to participate physically at the conference, therefore, travel details should be communicated as soon as practical to allow for efficient planning. Virtual participation will only be considered under compelling circumstances.

Please submit your abstracts to
<https://hsrc.ac.za/AYGS-2024-conference-call.php>

Important dates and deadlines

Deadline for submission of abstracts:

15 August 2023, 17:00 SAST

Notification of accepted abstracts:

31 August 2023

Submission of full draft manuscripts:

15 December 2023

Conference dates:

March 2023

Selection and editing process

All submissions are peer-reviewed through a double-blind peer-review process coordinated by the Scientific Committee at AISA. Successful and unsuccessful submissions will be notified as soon as the reviewers complete the reviews.

The authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to participate in the online masterclasses with prominent policymakers and scholars towards shaping up the manuscript, and they will be interacting with experts who have the ground experience.