

The 3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL AFRICAN UNION  
MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES  
FORUM 2024  
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

**Windhoek Country Club**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

## 1. Background

In recognition of the importance of private sector-led growth towards the sustainable economic development of Africa, the 20th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Conference of African Ministers of Industry (CAMI 20) directed Member States to foster enabling environments for small and medium industries and enterprises (SMEs). The AU Commission developed an SME Development Strategy & Action Plan which prioritises the economic empowerment and inclusion of SMEs as the basis for developing intra-African value-chains and bolstering regional trade. The strategy aims to “develop competitive, diversified and sustainable economies underpinned by dynamic, entrepreneurial and industrial sectors that generate employment, reduce poverty and foster social inclusion”. As such, the Integrated Program Delivery Framework for the implementation of the AU SME strategy proposed the creation of the annual African Union Micro, Small, Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSME) Forum as an important platform for knowledge sharing on the status of MSME development and collaboration in Africa.

The AU MSME Forum has played a key role in spearheading programs that reflect the current state of MSME development on the continent. The first annual MSME Forum was held in Cairo, Egypt during the week of 27 June 2022 which was designated as International MSME Day at the United National General Assembly under resolution 71/279, in partnership with the Africa Business Council (AfBC) and the All-Africa Association for Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (AAASME). The second MSME forum took place in 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in partnership with the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO), ImpactHer, African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The Third AU MSME Forum will be hosted in Windhoek, Namibia in partnership with the Namibian Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

For Namibia, this marks an important milestone in the roadmap towards the country’s objectives to build a favourable Startup and MSME ecosystem while creating linkages with thriving African ecosystems. His Excellency, late President Hage G. Geingob in the 2023 State of Nation Address alluded to the need to foster broad-based economic growth across all sectors of the economy. In this regard, it guarantees the government to continue to expedite the implementation of supportive supply-side policies to lessen constraints on economic activities and facilitate the ease of doing business.



Through this highly interactive forum, policymakers, investors, and various stakeholders from all African countries will address the funding constraints and explore opportunities for MSMEs, ultimately contributing to economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development of the continent. The forum is expected to host a total of 300-400 African delegates.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small and medium-sized enterprises are the growth engines that the global and domestic economies need to recover from the ongoing recession. It is known that MSMEs account for 70% of employment worldwide and in most countries over 90% of all enterprises can be classified as MSMEs of which the majority are micro-firms. Unfortunately, access to funding remains a persistent challenge for this important economic segment. Chief among the reasons for this plight are capacity limitations within enterprises as well as perceptions concerning the risk of MSME lending.

Under the overarching theme of ***"Fostering Financial Empowerment and Educational Innovation for African Startups & MSMEs"*** the AU MSME Forum 2024 emerges as a beacon of opportunity and collaboration for entrepreneurs across the African continent. Supported by key stakeholders who share a vested interest in nurturing the growth and sustainability of MSMEs, this forum represents a convergence of minds, resources, and expertise aimed at driving tangible impact and transformation.

It is imperative to recognize the critical importance of financial empowerment and educational innovation in unlocking the full potential of African startups and MSMEs. By equipping entrepreneurs with access to capital, financial literacy, and cutting-edge educational resources, they are empowered to overcome barriers, seize opportunities, and thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape. Through a diverse array of panel discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities, the AU MSME Forum 2024 aims to catalyze actionable insights, foster cross-border collaboration, and induce sustainable growth within the MSME ecosystem. By harnessing the collective wisdom, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit of the continent, Africa has the power to drive meaningful change and unlock a future of prosperity for all.

In addition to the weeklong capacity building and training programs, the forum will launch the inaugural Enterprise Africa Network (EAN) Fellowship focusing on adapting businesses to the current economic climate in Africa. This cohort-based program will span over 12 months from October 2024, offering selected MSMEs intensive training courses and mentorship sessions to enhance their strategies and accelerate growth by helping them pivot or adjust their strategies to meet market demand under the implementation for the EAN. The EAN is aimed at developing a pool of competitive MSMEs that will be



able to supply the integrated African Market ushered in by the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and beyond. The Cohort will be divided into quarterly periods with specific defined courses offered by strategic partners. The desired outcome of this program is to produce equipped MSMEs capable of running successful businesses, pitching to investors, and securing deals at the fourth Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) scheduled to take place in Algeria in 2025. The cohort will focus on the following priority areas, Agriculture, Manufacturing, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Critical Mineral Sector, and Creative Industries.

### 3. OBJECTIVES

**The objectives of hosting the AU MSME Forum are:**

The forum will provide an extensive guide for MSMEs to understand the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), it will also provide masterclasses and information sessions that will equip MSMEs with the information and skills to trade and boost intra-African trade under the AfCFTA. The MSME forum emphasizes the importance of creating tailored trade capacity-building programs to enhance exporter readiness.

- Educating entrepreneurs in Africa on the diverse range of financial products available to them
- Highlighting the essential infrastructure necessary to facilitate access to funding
- Facilitating knowledge exchange and sharing best practices for unlocking funding opportunities
- Enabling SMEs to access finance and investment opportunities through participation in educational initiatives and pitch events

### 4. OUTCOMES

**The forum is expected to achieve the following outcomes:**

- Documentation of financial products and the stages of business at which they can be accessed
- To devise practical **policy** recommendations and solutions that enable the environment to ease access to funding
- To provide evidence-based solutions on how entrepreneurs can access **funding**
- To showcase **investment**-ready SMEs to the African entrepreneurial ecosystem

### 5. PARTICIPANTS

Key enabling institutions will include public and private entities responsible for MSME and Entrepreneurship development across Africa. Such as Digital Innovation Hubs, selected MSMEs, Startups, Development Partner Institutions, Finance Institutions, Tax regulatory bodies, relevant Representatives of the AU, RECs, Member States, MSME associations and professional associations, Business Leaders, Academia, and Civil Society.

## 6. EVENT BREAKDOWN FORMAT OF THE FORUM

The event will focus on a series of workshops, panel discussions, and presentations from the above-mentioned participating guests.

### **Day 1: Hello Namibia, Thank You Africa!**

Official welcoming and opening with speakers from the Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB), the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade in Namibia, the AU Secretariat and AU Stakeholders. There will be two Panel discussions and an interactive session to set the foundation for the AU MSME Forum by looking at the status quo. The day will include an exhibition of the continents best MSMEs and a networking dinner.

### **Day 2: This Is Africa At Her Best**

Day 2 is dedicated to promoting information sharing on key topics; the ultimate dream of financing innovative ideas in Africa by Africa while highlighting strategies that can bring the African dream to a reality. The day will also include Chelete Cage, a pitching platform. Chelete means *Money* in one of the Namibian languages (Silozi) and this platform aims to support investment-ready entrepreneurs to a pool of financiers and organisations who are exploring investing in entrepreneurs.

### **Day 3: What Now For Africa**

Day 3 will conclude all the engagements and define clear next steps in terms of strengthening collaboration to solve the challenges identified and support the solutions derived from the sessions. The day will come to an exciting close with a Closing Banquet and a exciting Awards Ceremony.

### **Day 4 – Day 5: Explore Namibia, Africa’s Best-Kept Secret (Optional)**

Day 4 and Day 5 allows participants to experience the tourism sector of Namibia and also participate in the exhibition program. Participants will have the opportunity to visit tourist attractions in Namibia. Travel options will be available to showcase Namibia and its majestic sceneries. For anyone who did not get a chance to attend the MSME exhibition, this also signifies the conclusion of the program. Be sure to visit the MSMEs and explore their products and services.

## 7. DATES AND VENUE

The forum is expected to take place at the Windhoek Country Club in Windhoek, Namibia from September 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> 2024.



## 9. CONTACT INFORMATION

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