Implementing the Digital Trade Protocol of the African Continental Free Trade Area

Expected impacts, early experiences and challenges ahead

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Executive Summary

The AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol (DTP) aims for a unifying regulatory framework for Africa's digital economy. It offers a comprehensive framework designed to harmonise digital trade regulations, foster cross-border data flows, enhance cybersecurity measures, and promote digital inclusion. The expected benefits are significant in ter,s of GDP and investment, increased intra-African trade, job creation, and the expansion of key sectors like e-commerce and fintech.

The provisions in the DTP cover: market access and treatment of digital products (e.g. duties); facilitating digital trade (e.g. electronic trust and authentication, digital identities, digital payments; digital infrastructure); data governance (e.g. cross border data transfers, data protection, location of computers, data innovation) ; business and consumer trust (cyber security, consumer protection); digital trade inclusion (digital inclusion, MSMEs, digital skills); emerging technologies and innovation; institutional arrangements; transparency; technical assistance and capacity building.

Three country experiences show there is progress on implementation, but that there are also challenges. Ghana's Digital Agenda 2018 fosters a robust digital ecosystem for e-commerce and fintech, but gaps remain around the harmonisation of digital regulations and the lack of comprehensive data protection legislation. While Nigeria is one of the leading digital economies in Africa, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, regulatory constraints, and cybersecurity risks pose significant challenges and the lack of alignment with regional digital trade standards and cybersecurity risks remain a concern. In Namibia, inadequate digital infrastructure and low internet penetration rates in rural areas limit the country's ability to fully participate in digital trade.

Realising the benefits of the DTP hinges on addressing significant challenges such as infrastructure deficits, regulatory fragmentation, digital literacy gaps, and cybersecurity concerns. Investments in digital infrastructure—such as broadband expansion and affordable devices—are crucial to bridge the urban-rural digital divide, with public-private partnerships playing a key role.

Harmonising diverse digital trade laws and regulations across Africa is important for seamless cross-border transactions, potentially facilitated by continental regulatory bodies. Enhancing digital literacy through education and vocational training, especially among marginalised groups, will develop a workforce proficient in digital technologies. Robust cybersecurity frameworks and institutions are essential to safeguard businesses and consumers, with international cooperation enhancing these efforts.

The DTP is an opportunity to reshape Africa's economic landscape and Africa's position in the world. By fostering a unified digital market, it has the potential to drive trade, innovation, and inclusive growth. The implementation challenges are significant but not insurmountable. With strategic planning, robust investment, and collaborative effort, African countries can overcome these barriers. The successful implementation of the Protocol will not only transform the continent's digital economy but also contribute to global economic dynamism. All stakeholders should seize this opportunity and work collectively towards a prosperous digital future for Africa.

1 Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents a significant effort to enhance economic integration and trade across Africa. Launched in 2018, it aims to eliminate tariffs on 90% of goods traded between African nations and create a single market for goods, services, and capital. It also includes multiple new trade issues such as investment, competition intellectual property rights, and digital trade. The AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol (DTP), adopted in February 2024 (African Union, 2024) is emerging as a crucial component to unlock the potential of Africa's digital economy (Lemma, 2024a). By facilitating digital trade across the continent, the DTP is expected to enable seamless cross-border digital transactions, enhance competitiveness, and foster economic growth.

Africa's digital economy is expanding rapidly. The rise of mobile money platforms such as M-Pesa and the boom of fintech in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria are driving economic activity. The DTP seeks to support this trend by creating harmonised rules on key issues such as data privacy, cybersecurity, cross-border data flows, and e-commerce (Lemma, 2024a).

The structure of this note is as follows. Section 2 discusses the key areas included in the DTP. Section 3 discusses the expected impact pathways and benefits of DTP implementation. Section 4 reviews early experiences in implementing DTP in Ghana, Nigeria and Namibia, based on studies by ODI's Supporting Trade and Investment in Africa (SITA) programme[2]. Section 5 brings together the experiences into challenges facing the implementation of the DTP. Section 6 concludes listing key issues ahead.

2. The main provisions in the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol

The DTP supports Africa's push towards deeper economic integration through the digital economy. As one aspect of the broader AfCFTA agreement, the DTP aims to harmonise rules and frameworks across the continent, facilitating digital transactions, reducing trade barriers, and fostering a unified digital market for Africa's businesses and consumers.

The DTP is a comprehensive framework that addresses key areas of digital trade, from data governance and cybersecurity to e-commerce and intellectual property rights. By establishing harmonised rules, the Protocol aims to foster a more integrated and dynamic digital economy across Africa.

The provisions in the DTP cover: market access and treatment of digital products (e.g. duties); facilitating digital trade (e.g. electronic trust and authentication, digital identities, digital payments; digital infrastructure); data governance (e.g. cross border data transfers, data protection, location of computers, data innovation) ; business and consumer trust (cyber security, consumer protection); digital trade inclusion (digital inclusion, MSMEs, digital skills); emerging technologies and innovation; institutional arrangements; transparency; technical assistance and capacity building.
We discuss the following provisions in the Protocol (i) cross-border data flows; (ii) cybersecurity and data protection; (iii) digital payments and e-commerce; (iv) intellectual property rights; and (v) digital trade regulations. These provisions are designed to ensure the smooth operation of digital trade across African countries,

[2] The four studies funded by UK FCDO under the SITA project include: Lemma (2024a) on the framework to measure impact of the DTP, Lemma (2024b) on the impact of DTP on Namibia, Chivunga et al (2024) on the impact of DTP on Ghana, and Agarwal et al (2024) on the impact of DTP on Nigeria.

enabling businesses to engage in digital transactions with fewer regulatory hurdles and higher levels of trust and security. We discuss these issues:

2.1 Data Governance and Cross-Border Data Flows

A central component of the DTP is the regulation of cross-border data flows. The ability to move data across borders is critical for digital services such as e-commerce, fintech, and cloud computing. The DTP seeks to establish a continent-wide framework for data localisation and transnational data flows, ensuring businesses can move data across borders while maintaining compliance with national regulations on data protection and privacy (Lemma, 2024a).

This framework is particularly relevant for sectors like e-commerce, where transferring consumer data across borders is essential for services like cross-border payments and logistics. By standardising data governance rules, the Protocol aims to reduce the cost and complexity of complying with different national regulations, making it easier for businesses to operate across multiple African markets (Lemma, 2024a). Simultaneously, the Protocol emphasizes the need to protect personal data, ensuring businesses adhere to high standards of data privacy and security.

2.2 Cybersecurity and Consumer Protection

The DTP addresses cybersecurity as digital trade expands across the continent. The Protocol includes provisions for cybersecurity measures that aim to protect businesses and consumers from cyber threats, including guidelines for implementing secure digital infrastructure, protecting consumer data, and enhancing the security of digital payments (Lemma, 2024a).

Consumer protection is also a central focus. With the rise of e-commerce and digital services, consumers need assurances that their transactions are secure. The Protocol includes commitments to improving consumer protection laws related to digital transactions, such as electronic contracts, digital signatures, and dispute resolution mechanisms (Lemma, 2024a). By addressing these issues, the DTP seeks to build trust in digital trade and encourage more consumers to participate in the digital economy.

2.3 E-commerce and Digital Payments

E-commerce is one of the fastest-growing sectors in Africa, with the potential to transform trade across the continent. The DTP outlines provisions related to the regulation and facilitation of e-commerce, including the recognition of electronic documents, harmonization of e-commerce laws, and the establishment of rules for digital contracts and signatures (Lemma, 2024a). These measures aim to create a more predictable and secure environment for businesses engaging in e-commerce.

Digital payments in Africa generated around $24 billion in revenue in 2020. Experts suggest Africa’s domestic e payments sector could grow by 20% annually, reaching over $40 billion by 2025 (Ndwaru, 2023). The Protocol places a strong emphasis on digital payments. Efficient and secure payment systems are essential for enabling digital trade, especially for SMEs that rely on digital platforms to reach customers in other African countries. The DTP encourages the adoption of continent-wide digital payment systems, which facilitates real-time cross-border payments in local currencies, reducing transaction costs and enhancing trade efficiency (Lemma, 2024b).

2.4 Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation

Protecting intellectual property is crucial for fostering innovation in the digital economy. The DTP includes provisions aimed at protecting intellectual property rights in the digital space, including the enforcement of copyrights, trademarks, and patents for digital products and services. By creating a robust IPR framework, the Protocol seeks to encourage innovation and investment in Africa’s digital economy (Lemma, 2024b).

The DTP also highlights the importance of promoting innovation and supporting SMEs in the digital space. The Protocol encourages member states to provide support for digital start-ups and SMEs through policies that facilitate access to digital infrastructure, funding, and training. This focus on innovation is important given Africa’s youthful population and the potential for digital entrepreneurship to drive job creation and economic growth (Agarweal et al., 2024).

2.5 Harmonisation of Digital Trade Regulations

An overarching goal of the DTP is the harmonisation of digital trade regulations, such as data protection and cybersecurity, across Africa. Currently, regulations vary widely between countries, creating barriers to cross-border trade. The Protocol aims to harmonise these regulations, making it easier for businesses to comply with legal requirements in multiple jurisdictions (Chivunga et al., 2024).

By aligning regulations on data privacy, cybersecurity, and e-commerce, the DTP seeks to create a more integrated and efficient digital trade environment. This harmonisation is expected to reduce the cost of doing business across borders and encourage greater participation in digital trade, particularly among SMEs that may struggle with the complexity of navigating multiple regulatory regimes (Chivunga et al., 2024).

3 Expected Benefits of the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol

Implementing the DTP is set to drive deeper economic integration across Africa by fostering a unified digital market. By reducing trade barriers and creating a cohesive framework for digital transactions, the DTP enables the seamless flow of digital goods, services, and data across borders. This integration unlocks multiple pathways to economic growth, positioning Africa's economies to better compete in the global digital marketplace.

There are several major channels through which the DTP is expected to promote growth.

- **Lower tariffs on digital goods** (or market access) facilitate increased imports of digital products and services, thereby stimulating economic growth through enhanced productivity and innovation. The impact of using digital good will depend on complementary factors alongside the adoption of imported digital goods.

- **Data governance.** Rules and regulations governing cross-border data flows (data protection, absence of data location, data transfer). The Protocol provides a unified framework for data governance and cross-border data flows, reducing compliance costs and enhancing data-driven operations, leading to increased investment and service exports. The ability to attract more investment will also depend on complementary factors such as skills or physical transport and energy infrastructure.
- **Facilitating digital trade.** A number of provisions in the DTP such as on digital payments, identities and infrastructure help to reduce transaction costs, boost investments in digital infrastructure and expand trade and growth.
- **Enhancing consumer and business security.** Implementing the DTP should lead to strengthened consumer protection and measures to tack cybersecurity across the continent, which in turn could encourage inward investment. If businesses feel assured of data privacy and security compliance, particularly with guidelines like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Africa will attract more foreign direct investments (FDI) in digital sectors. More consumer protection through better cybersecurity frameworks helps foster consumer trust in digital payments and e-commerce, which could lead to increased consumer participation and market expansion.

By standardising policies across the continent, the DTP harmonises data governance, streamlines e-commerce frameworks, and promotes inclusive participation in digital trade. Strengthened data protection and cybersecurity encourage inward investment and foster consumer trust in digital payments and e-commerce. The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) facilitates cross-border payments, boosting e-commerce activities, particularly for SMEs. The Protocol also emphasises digital inclusion, focusing on empowering women, youth, and SMEs to participate in the digital economy, encouraging job creation and innovation.

To maximise the impact of the DTP, it is crucial to ensure adequate digital infrastructure, enhance digital literacy and skills among the workforce, and secure political commitment with effective governance; together, these elements provide the necessary foundation for widespread participation in the digital economy, empower businesses and individuals to engage effectively in digital trade, and drive the successful implementation of the Protocol through coordinated efforts and resource allocation.

An appropriately implemented DTP could be expected to lead to significant benefits for Africa's digital economy. These benefits may differ across countries due to varying levels of infrastructure and digital maturity, but overall, the Protocol is expected to drive economic growth, enhance competitiveness, and foster job creation across the continent. This section provides some initial estimates of these expected benefits, drawing on data from Ghana, Nigeria, and Namibia.

Currently, little is known about quantifiable impacts of the DTP, especially in the context of Africa, and even less than e.g. other phase II protocols such as the Protocol on Investment (Ayele et al, 2023). To examine the possible quantitative impact of the DTP we borrow from studies on other continents; this makes the estimations weaker, but they are the best so far given available data. These quantitative studies suggest that (i) joining an RTA with digital trade provision raises trade, but exactly how in Africa requires much further in depth research and (ii) more (digital) trade leads to growth, which helps to create jobs.

For example, research by the OECD finds that reducing domestic digital trade restrictions (e.g. by joining a digital free trade agreement) could boost exports significantly. Estimates shows that a 0.1-point decrease in the OECD's Digital Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (DSTRI) results in a 145% increase in total exports. This effect is most pronounced in digitally deliverable services (a 277% increase) and other services (206% increase) but also significantly affects agriculture and food (a 176% increase) and manufacturing (a 117% increase)

The inclusion of e-commerce chapters in RTAs significantly boosts trade for both high-income and emerging economies. High-income countries see a 10.3% increase in exports with such agreements, nearly doubling the impact compared with agreements without e-commerce provisions. Emerging economies experience an even higher boost, with a 16.9% increase in exports (OECD, 2023). Furthermore, a study of 53 African countries between 2000 and 2018 suggests that a 1% increase in digital economy trade would also lead to an approximate 1% increase in GDP per capita (Abendin and Duan, 2021). Other work on African economies finds that a 1% increase in in exports increases GDP per capita by 0.78% (Were, 2021).

3.1 GDP and Trade Expansion

A primary expected benefit of the DTP is a boost in GDP and trade expansion. The Protocol aims to eliminate key barriers to digital trade, making it easier for African countries to engage in cross-border digital transactions. Lemma (2024a) suggests that successful implementation could increase intra-African trade by over 50%, contributing significantly to increases in GDP of state parties.

There could be a one-off shift in Ghana's GDP by 5.5% following full implementation, with exports rising around $22 billion (Chivunga et al., 2024). Nigeria's GDP could increase by some 12.8%, primarily driven by the expansion of its digital services and fintech sectors (Agarwal et al., 2024).

Causal chain analysis in Namibia suggests that a 15% increase in exports due to the Protocol could lead to a GDP increase of approximately $13.2. Exports are expected to increase by 17% (Lemma, 2024b).

3.2 Job Creation and Digital Inclusion

The DTP is expected to be a key driver of job creation, particularly in digital sectors such as e-commerce, fintech, and digital content creation. By facilitating the expansion of these sectors, the Protocol is likely to create millions of new jobs, especially for young people and women.

In Nigeria, the expected rise in digital trade is projected to support up to 2.7 million jobs across the economy by 2040 (Agarwal et al., 2024). Namibia could support approximately 127,000 jobs due to increased exports and GDP growth facilitated by the DTP (Lemma, 2024b).

Digital inclusion is another area where the Protocol is expected to have a transformative impact. By promoting policies that support SMEs and marginalised groups, including women and rural populations, the DTP will help foster inclusive economic growth. A large percentage of Africa's e-commerce platforms are led by women, and the Protocol's focus on digital inclusion will help expand these opportunities further (Agarwal et al., 2024).

3.3 Reduction in Trade Costs

Implementation of the DTP is expected to lead to a reduction in trade costs, which currently pose significant barriers to cross-border digital transactions. Estimates suggest the Protocol could reduce trade costs by up to 25%, primarily through improvements in digital payment systems and regulatory harmonisation (Lemma, 2024a).

The introduction of PAPSS is expected to be a key driver of this cost reduction. PAPSS allows businesses to conduct cross-border payments in local currencies, eliminating the need for foreign exchange transactions and reducing transaction fees. This is particularly beneficial for SMEs, which often face high costs when engaging in cross-border trade. In Nigeria, SMEs are expected to see transaction costs fall by up to 15%, making it easier for them to engage in regional trade (Agarwal et al., 2024).

3.4 Growth of the E-Commerce Sector

E-commerce is one of the fastest-growing sectors in Africa's digital economy, and the DTP is expected to accelerate its expansion. By simplifying digital trade regulations and improving digital payment systems, the Protocol will enable more businesses to engage in cross-border e-commerce.

In Ghana, the e-commerce sector is expected to expand by 15%, driven by increased internet penetration and the growth of digital platforms (Chivunga et al., 2024). Nigeria's e-commerce market is projected to grow by 20% following full implementation, with platforms like Jumia and Konga expected to benefit from regulatory harmonization and improved digital infrastructure (Agarwal et al., 2024).

3.5 Innovation and Technological Development

The DTP is expected to drive innovation and technological development across the continent. By promoting intellectual property rights and supporting emerging technologies, the Protocol will create a favourable environment for innovation. In Namibia, the Protocol is expected to foster the growth of fintech and digital payment solutions, driving innovation in areas like mobile banking and digital wallets (Lemma, 2024b).

3.6 Boost to Intra-African Trade and Regional Cooperation

Finally, the DTP will strengthen regional cooperation and boost intra-African trade by creating a unified framework for digital transactions. The Protocol's focus on harmonising regulations, improving digital infrastructure, and facilitating cross-border data flows will reduce barriers and enhance cooperation between member states.

Estimates suggest intra-African trade, of both goods and services, is expected to increase by over 50% following full implementation (Lemma, 2024a). This increase will be driven by improvements in digital payment systems, regulatory harmonisation, and reduced trade costs. Namibia is expected to see a 15% increase in trade with other African countries, particularly within the Southern African Development Community (Lemma, 2024b).

4 Recent developments in implementing AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol

Significant progress has been made towards implementing digital trade protocols under AfCFTA, despite varying levels of digital maturity across African countries. There is also progress at continental level. The development of PAPSS, designed to facilitate seamless payments between countries, is a key milestone underpinning the AfCFTA's digital trade ambitions. Countries like Ghana and Nigeria are already part of the system (PAPPS, 2024). PAPSS enhances the efficiency of cross-border payments and lowers transaction costs, often cited as barriers to intra-African trade (Lemma, 2024b). It is expected to also reduce transaction costs by approximately US$ 5 billion a year (UN, 2021). Namibia has made strides in digital payments but still faces challenges in integrating with continental platforms such as PAPSS (Lemma, 2024b).

Ghana has taken deliberate steps to align their digital economies with the DTP's objectives. Ghana's Digital Agenda 2018 and the Ghana Beyond Aid Charter are national policies aimed at fostering a robust digital ecosystem that supports e-commerce and fintech. However, gaps remain, particularly around the harmonisation of digital regulations and the lack of comprehensive data protection legislation (Chivunga et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, the digital economy has experienced fast growth, driven largely by mobile money and fintech innovations. While Nigeria is one of the leading digital economies in Africa, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, regulatory constraints, and cybersecurity risks pose significant barriers to realising the full potential of digital trade (Agarwal et al., 2024).

Despite progress, the implementation of the DTP faces challenges. In Namibia, inadequate digital infrastructure and low internet penetration rates in rural areas limit the country's ability to fully participate in digital trade (Lemma, 2024b). Ghana faces regulatory complexities and infrastructure gaps that hinder its integration with the broader African digital economy (Chivunga et al., 2024). In Nigeria, the lack of alignment with regional digital trade standards and cybersecurity risks remains a concern (Agarwal et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, the Protocol offers substantial opportunities for countries to harness the potential of the digital economy. By aligning national laws with AfCFTA standards, countries can improve competitiveness in digital trade, attract investment, and stimulate innovation across sectors. The Protocol's focus on digital inclusion and support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) could transform economic growth and job creation across Africa (Lemma, 2024a).

In conclusion, while challenges persist, the implementation of the DTP presents an opportunity to reshape Africa's digital economy. Its comprehensive framework, encompassing data governance, cybersecurity, and digital payments, will be crucial to creating a unified digital market that fosters innovation, trade, and inclusive growth across the continent.

5 Key Barriers to Full Implementation of the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol

Despite its potential, the DTP faces several barriers to successful implementation. These obstacles stem from the diverse economic and technological contexts of African countries and varying levels of readiness to embrace a unified digital market.

5.1 Infrastructure Deficits

A critical barrier is the lack of adequate digital infrastructure. While some countries have progressed in expanding broadband access and mobile connectivity, others lag due to infrastructure gaps, especially in rural areas. Namibia, for instance, has improved digital infrastructure, but six regions still fall short of 4G coverage targets, leading to unequal access to digital services. High mobile data costs and limited availability of digital devices further exacerbate these challenges (Lemma, 2024b). Addressing infrastructure deficits requires substantial investment and innovative models like public-private partnerships.

Ghana faces similar challenges with internet penetration and infrastructure development, particularly in northern regions where access is significantly lower. The lack of infrastructure for digital trade limits Ghana's ability to engage fully in cross-border digital transactions under the AfCFTA (Chivunga et al., 2024).

5.2 Regulatory Fragmentation

Regulatory fragmentation across African countries is another significant barrier. Many countries have yet to align their national laws with the Protocol's standards, creating legal discrepancies that complicate cross-border digital transactions. In Nigeria, regulatory constraints like inconsistent enforcement of digital trade laws and complex tax systems hinder digital trade development (Agarwal et al., 2024). Data localisation laws and restrictions on data flows further impede cross-border digital trade by increasing operational costs.

Ghana faces similar regulatory challenges. Although steps have been taken to advance its digital trade framework, lack of alignment with international and regional standards creates barriers to integration within the AfCFTA framework. Harmonising regulations with the DTP is crucial for enabling smoother digital transactions (Lemma, 2024a).

5.3 Digital Literacy and Skills Gaps

The success of the DTP also depends on the digital literacy and skills of the workforce. Without necessary skills, many businesses and individuals cannot fully participate in digital trade. Namibia struggles with building a digitally skilled workforce, particularly in sectors reliant on digital trade (Lemma, 2024b). Low digital literacy rates limit businesses' ability to leverage digital tools effectively.

Nigeria has a youthful population with potential for digital innovation, but many lack access to training and resources to develop digital skills. While policies like the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy exist, implementation has been uneven (Agarwal et al., 2024). Building digital capacity across member states is essential for the DTP's long-term success.

5.4 Cybersecurity and Data Protection Concerns

As Africa’s digital economy expands, cybersecurity and data protection concerns become more pressing. Ensuring secure digital transactions is critical to building trust among businesses and consumers. In Ghana, weak enforcement of data protection frameworks creates vulnerabilities in the digital ecosystem (Chivunga et al., 2024). Nigeria faces significant cybersecurity risks, with inconsistent enforcement of regulations and gaps in data protection laws exposing businesses and consumers to threats (Agarwal et al., 2024).

Strengthening cybersecurity frameworks and ensuring compliance with data protection standards are crucial for building trust and ensuring safe implementation of the DTP.

5.5 Policy Implementation and Coordination Issues

Policy coordination among member states is a challenge. The Protocol’s success depends on effective cooperation between governments, regulatory bodies, and the private sector. In many countries, policy implementation is hampered by institutional fragmentation. Namibia lacks a cohesive authority overseeing digital trade policies, slowing reforms (Lemma, 2024b). Ghana's lack of a coordinated policy approach limits its ability to integrate fully with DTP (Chivunga et al., 2024).

Addressing coordination issues requires stronger collaboration between national and regional bodies and clear implementation roadmaps outlining stakeholder responsibilities

6 Key Issues Going Forward

The success of the DTP will depend on addressing key issues to fully realise its benefits.

AfCFTA related trade provisions

Regulatory harmonisation remains critical. Countries must align their national laws with the Protocol’s standards to eliminate barriers to cross-border trade. Prioritising the harmonisation of data governance, e-commerce laws, and cybersecurity measures will ensure a smooth and secure digital trading environment.

Enhancing cybersecurity and data protection will become vital for building trust. Countries must invest in robust cybersecurity infrastructure and capacity to monitor and respond to threats. This includes training personnel, improving public awareness, and implementing stringent penalties for cybercrimes.

General enabling policies: infrastructure and skills

Accelerating digital infrastructure development is crucial. Ensuring access to high-speed internet and reliable networks is essential for participation in the digital economy. Investment in broadband infrastructure, particularly through public-private partnerships, will be vital (Lemma, 2024b). Mobile infrastructure must also be expanded to reach rural areas.

Building digital literacy and capacity among the population is essential. Countries should focus on improving access to digital education and skills training, integrating digital skills into education systems, and offering vocational training aligned with the digital economy's needs. Enhancing digital literacy will foster inclusion and empower marginalised groups to participate in the digital economy.

Institutional

Finally, **effective policy coordination and stakeholder engagement are necessary**. Establishing inter-agency task forces to oversee implementation and engaging with the private sector will ensure policies are responsive to business needs. Regular dialogue between public and private sectors will help address challenges and facilitate cross-border digital trade.

Effective policy implementation requires clear responsibilities, adequate funding, progress monitoring, and active engagement with the private sector to ensure practical and growth-conducive regulations. Looking ahead, proactive policymaking, embracing emerging technologies, strategic investments, and international partnerships are essential to propel Africa to the forefront of the global digital economy and align the continent's digital transformation with long-term development goals.

In addition, there is a need to address the unique challenges and leverage the specific strengths of individual countries. For instance, Nigeria's burgeoning fintech sector presents opportunities for regional leadership in digital finance, while Ghana's policies like the Digital Agenda 2018 can serve as models for other nations. Namibia's strides in digital payments highlight the potential for innovation even in countries with smaller economies. By recognising and building upon these national contexts, the AfCFTA DTP can be tailored to maximize impact across diverse environments.

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