

Gulf–Africa economic cooperation: what has changed and what comes next?

A high-level dialogue of the Gulf–Africa
Strategic Partnership Initiative (GASPI)

Wednesday, 22 July 2026
Sheraton Addis, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



With support from



Welcome message from the convenors

On behalf of ODI Global Advisory, Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory and the Institute of Foreign Affairs, we are delighted to welcome you to Addis Ababa for this high-level dialogue on Gulf–Africa economic cooperation.

This gathering marks the first Africa regional convening of the Gulf–Africa Strategic Partnership Initiative (GASPI), leading towards the inaugural Summit to be held in Abidjan in March 2027. At a moment of shifting geoeconomic realities, deepening South–South engagement and renewed emphasis on economic transformation, the relationship between Africa and the Gulf is entering a new and consequential phase.

Investment flows are expanding. Strategic interests are converging. Yet the central question remains: how can this growing engagement translate into durable, mutually beneficial outcomes – supporting economic transformation, industrial development and long-term resilience across African economies, while advancing the diversification ambitions of Gulf partners?

Today's dialogue brings together policymakers, investors, practitioners and thought leaders to examine both the distinctive nature of Gulf investment and the institutional reforms required to turn commitments into executed projects. Our objective is practical and forward-looking: to identify a clear set of priorities that can be advanced before the March 2027 Abidjan Summit.

We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in London for its valued support in facilitating this convening, which reflects a shared commitment to constructive interregional engagement.

We thank you for your participation and for contributing your expertise to what we hope will become a sustained and impactful interregional partnership.

We look forward to candid, solutions-oriented discussions.

ODI Global Advisory
Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory
The Institute of Foreign Affairs

The road to Abidjan

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



July 2026

South Africa



Morocco



About this dialogue

Africa is emerging as one of the most dynamic economic regions globally, projected to host seven of the world's 15 fastest-growing economies by 2027 and increasingly integrated through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade area by membership. At the same time, the Gulf States are deepening their international economic engagement, deploying substantial capital in pursuit of long-term diversification strategies – strategies in which African markets, resource endowments and industrial potential are becoming central rather than peripheral.

7 of the world's 15 fastest-growing economies by 2027

The Gulf–Africa economic relationship has evolved well beyond a simple narrative of capital seeking opportunity. It now spans trade, infrastructure, food security, energy transition, financial integration and strategic logistics corridors. For both regions, the relationship is becoming structurally significant. Gulf economies increasingly view Africa as a partner in future growth and supply chain resilience, while African governments see Gulf capital, logistics networks and long-horizon sovereign investment as potential accelerators of industrialisation and regional integration.

Yet an important question remains: is the institutional architecture that connects the two regions sufficiently robust to translate growing ambition into executed, transformation-enhancing outcomes?

This dialogue forms part of the Gulf–Africa Strategic Partnership Initiative (GASPI), a high-level platform designed to strengthen structured economic, political and strategic cooperation between the two regions. Conceived by Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory, the inaugural GASPI Summit will take place in Abidjan in March 2027, in partnership with the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, bringing together leaders from across Africa and the Gulf to establish a biennial interregional dialogue.

In the lead-up to the Summit, ODI Global Advisory – as knowledge partner to GASPI – is convening four high-level regional dialogues across Africa: in Ethiopia, South Africa, Morocco, and Ghana, to gather strategic insights and policy perspectives that will shape the Abidjan agenda.

Held in Addis Ababa, the diplomatic capital of Africa and seat of the African Union, this first convening focuses on two core themes:

- The distinctive nature of Gulf investment models, including the role of sovereign wealth funds and state-linked enterprises; and
- The policy, institutional and financing mechanisms required to move from investment pledges to structured, bankable and deliverable projects.

Co-convened with the Institute of Foreign Affairs, the Addis dialogue serves as the first formal opportunity to define a set of practical priorities to be advanced before the March 2027 Abidjan Summit – with the aim of strengthening delivery, enhancing credibility and supporting sustainable, mutually beneficial Gulf–Africa cooperation in the years ahead.

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
GASPI Summit

Ghana



March 2027

Agenda

08:30 – 09:00 **Registration and welcome coffee**

09:00 – 09:15 **Opening plenary: Gulf-Africa economic cooperation – what has changed and what comes next?**

Master of ceremonies: Meron Damtew, Project and Partnership Officer, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ethiopia

Welcoming remarks

H.E Jafar Bedru Geletu, Executive Director, Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopia

Ansoumane Camara, Founder and Chief Executive, Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory

Sasha Kapadia, Director, ODI Global Advisory

09:15 – 09:30 **Keynote address**

H.E. Ambassador Hadera Abera Admassu, State Minister for Political and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

09:30 – 10:00 **Keynote presentation: Where is the Gulf-Africa relationship today? Evidence, trends and strategic choices ahead**

Dr Max Mendez-Parra, Principal Research Fellow, ODI Global

10:00 – 10:30 **Networking coffee break**

10:30 – 11:30 **Panel I: The distinctive nature of Gulf investment models – implications for structural transformation**

This panel examines what differentiates Gulf investment in Africa from other external partners – and what those differences mean for African economic transformation. With sovereign wealth funds and state-linked enterprises playing a central role, Gulf capital often operates with longer time horizons and strategic objectives that extend beyond commercial returns.

The discussion will explore a central question: What do Gulf investors need to see, and what do African economies need to build, for Gulf capital to support structural transformation, job creation and value addition at scale?

Samuel Gizaw, AfCFTA Coordination Head, Representing the State Minister, Ministry of Trade & Regional Integration

Maddalena Procopio, Senior Policy Fellow – Africa, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

Duncan Onyango, CEO, Trade Catalyst Africa (TCA)

Moderator: Calum Hill, Strategic Planning and Policy Lead, Invest Africa

11:30 – 11:45 **Networking coffee break**

11:45 – 12:45

Panel II: Translating investment pledges into executed projects – towards a new era of delivery

Building on Panel I, this session shifts from the nature of capital to the mechanics of execution. While headline investment announcements have grown in scale, delivery remains uneven. The panel will examine where in the project lifecycle investments most frequently stall – and what institutional, financial and regulatory reforms are required to close the execution gap.

Core question: Turning pledges into action – what must governments, sovereign funds and development finance institutions contribute to translate commitments into structured, bankable and deliverable partnerships?

Liban Obsiye, Head of the Secretariat for the Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI)

Rose Mwaura, Chairperson of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) Public Finance Sector Board

Agnes Gitau, Managing Partner, GBS Africa, and Executive Director (EU & UK) of the Eastern Africa Association

Moderator: Damon Bristow, Senior Research Associate, ODI Global

12:45 – 13:15

Panel III: In conversation - what comes next, and priorities for Abidjan

This reflection session will synthesise insights from both panels and identify 3–5 concrete priorities to be advanced before the March 2027 Abidjan Summit. The focus will be on institutional mechanisms, policy signals and practical next steps required to move from dialogue to delivery.

Lubna Qassim, Governor, Helsinki Geoeconomics Society, International Lawyer and Former Senior Multilateral Diplomat (UAE)

Dr Max Mendez-Parra, Principal Research Fellow, ODI Global

Dr Gizachew Asrat, Chief of Staff and Diplomatic Core Think Tank Director General, Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopia

Moderator: Sasha Kapadia, Director, ODI Global Advisory

13:15 – 13:30

Closing remarks

Ansoumane Camara, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Gravitas

Ambassador Zerihun Abebe, Director General, African Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

13:30 – 15:00

Networking lunch

End of conference

Biographies



H.E. Ambassador Hadera Abera Admassu is the State Minister for Political and Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



H.E. Jafar Bedru Geletu is the Executive Director of Ethiopia's Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), a national foreign policy and security think tank under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He leads research, training and policy advisory work on Ethiopia's external relations, national security and Red Sea–Horn of Africa strategic issues. A foreign policy analyst by background, he has been a public voice on maritime access, the geopolitical significance of the Red Sea and the evolving role of the Global South in the international system, including commentary on the international monetary order and the use of reserve currencies as instruments of power. In his leadership role at IFA, he engages diplomatic counterparts, visiting delegations and regional partners, positioning the Institute as a hub for evidence-based policy dialogue. He frequently delivers keynote remarks and media commentary articulating Ethiopia's perspectives on regional integration, shared borders and cooperative security frameworks.



Ambassador Zerihun Abebe is the Director General for African Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



Gizachew Asrat is Chief of Staff and Director General for Projects and Partnerships, and Senior Researcher on the Horn of Africa at the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ethiopia. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Punjabi University, India, and M.A. in Regional and Local Development Studies from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. His research and publications focus on political transitions in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia's political economy, regional geopolitics, armed non-state actors, and border governance. Earlier in his career, he served as an Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations at more than three public universities in Ethiopia, and as a guest lecturer in the security sector. He has published more than seven articles in internationally reputable journals, alongside numerous policy briefs in national and international outlets, and has successfully led as a principal researcher AfCFTA research projects with UNDP and Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration, co-led border governance research with GIZ as co-principal researcher, and chaired the Horn Dialogue for three consecutive years.



Damon Bristow is a Senior Research Associate at ODI Global, focusing on international economic development and global policy analysis. He also holds several strategic advisory roles, including with ASI, and serves on the Board of Gargaara, Somalia's apex financial institution. Damon has held a number of senior positions within the UK Government, including Vice-Chair of the TradeMark Africa Council, Development Director and Head of DFID Somalia, and Deputy Director for Free Trade Agreements (East Asia) at the former Department for International Trade, where he led negotiations on the UK-Korea Free Trade Agreement. He has worked extensively across Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and with partners in the Gulf region.



Ansoumane Camara is the Founder and Chief Executive of Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory. He advises governments and multilateral institutions on economic strategy, public finance and institutional reform, and has supported sovereign negotiations, fiscal policy development and the design of large-scale governmental and diplomatic initiatives. He has worked across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and North America, advising heads of state, ministers and senior officials on complex economic and political challenges. A graduate of Sciences Po, the London School of Economics, Harvard Kennedy School and the University of Oxford, he brings a multidisciplinary approach that bridges diplomacy, economic policy and global public affairs.



Agnes Gitau is Managing Partner at GBS Africa, a trade, investment and political risk advisory firm, and Executive Director (EU & UK) of the Eastern Africa Association. She advises boards, investors and governments on capital deployment in East Africa, with expertise in regulatory and political risk assessment, deal structuring and sovereign debt. She is Conference Director of the East Africa Islamic Finance Summit and has contributed to regional policy discussions on Islamic finance, banking regulation and economic governance. She was a curator of the inaugural ALSF/IADRU Sovereign Debt Programme and co-authored *Beyond the Brink*, which examines approaches to resolving Africa's debt challenges. Agnes has previously served as an external research consultant to UNECA, a member of the WTO Gender Research Hub, and a committee member of the East Africa International Arbitration Conference.



Samuel Gizaw is the Programme Head for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) at Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration. He leads initiatives related to AfCFTA implementation, trade policy coordination, regional economic integration and stakeholder engagement, supporting Ethiopia's efforts to maximize the opportunities offered by the continental free trade agreement.



Calum Hill is the Strategic Planning and Policy Lead at Invest Africa, where he is responsible for shaping government engagement strategy and leading policy development for Invest Africa and its network of members and partners. Previously, he was the Director for EMEA at the Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU) in Washington, DC. In this role, he led the trade association's portfolios across the three regions, supporting members to engage with government stakeholders. Prior to this, he led BCIU's Africa programme and helped develop commercial diplomacy strategies to support engagement with the U.S. government and African governments.



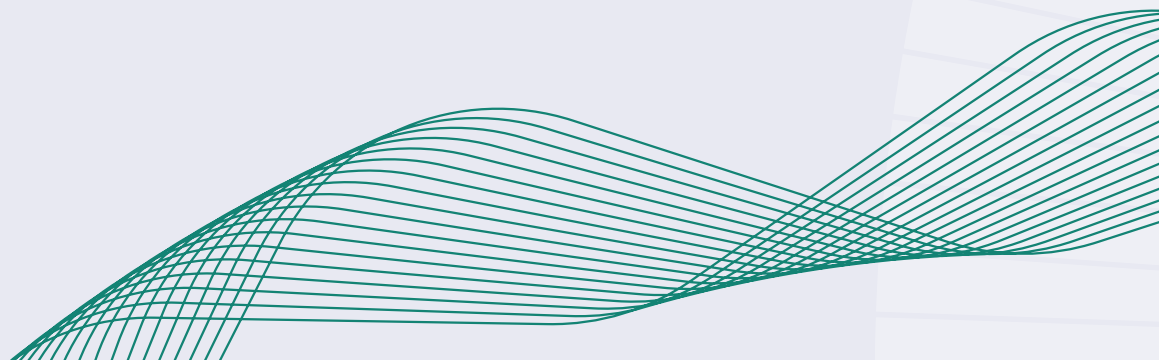
Sasha Kapadia is the Director of ODI Global Advisory and the Head of the ODI Fellowship Scheme. She previously spent nearly a decade at Mastercard, forging partnerships with humanitarian and development organisations to deliver commercially sustainable social impact programmes. Earlier in her career, she held roles at the U.S. Department of State in the Office of Afghanistan Affairs and at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. A graduate of the Fletcher School at Tufts University and New York University, she brings experience across public, private and philanthropic sectors.



Max Mendez-Parra is a Principal Research Fellow in the International Economic Development Group at ODI Global and Senior Technical Adviser to the UK Government-funded Supporting Investment and Trade in Africa (SITA) programme, which supports AfCFTA negotiations and implementation. A trade economist and former agriculture trade official in Argentina, he has more than 20 years of experience analysing multilateral and regional trade policy. His work has supported WTO negotiations, including during the Doha Development Round, and examined the effects of trade agreements on market access, food security, poverty and income distribution. He has advised organisations including the European Commission, FAO, UNCTAD and GIZ, and holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Sussex.



Rose Mwaura is Chairperson of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) Public Finance Sector Board and a business leader with over 30 years of experience in financial advisory and governance across East Africa and internationally. She has extensive experience in public policy engagement and stakeholder management. As Chair of the KEPSA Public Finance Sector Board, she leads private sector engagement with key economic and fiscal institutions, including Parliament, the National Treasury, the Kenya Revenue Authority and the Central Bank of Kenya. She is also the CEO of Rockville Consulting Limited and serves as an independent non-executive director on several financial services and non-profit boards. Rose is a past Chairperson of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Kenya (ICPAK) and a registered Certified Public Accountant.





Liban Obsiye is the Head of the Secretariat for the Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI), where he leads regional coordination efforts under the current Somali Chairmanship. He also serves as Executive Director of Somalia's National Climate Fund. Previously, Liban headed the Strategic Economic Unit at the Ministry of Finance, where he played a central role in Somalia's debt relief process for over eight years, contributing to the country's successful progress toward debt restructuring and economic reform.



Duncan Onyango is CEO of Trade Catalyst Africa (TCA). With more than 30 years of leadership experience across East Africa's private, public and development sectors, he has mobilised significant capital for infrastructure and trade-enabling investments. He previously led Pharo Ventures East Africa and the UK-funded Sustainable Urban Economic Development (SUED) programme, and served as East Africa Director at Acumen, managing a \$40 million portfolio of social enterprises. He has also held senior roles in public-private partnerships and transport infrastructure and serves on the boards of the Kenya Innovative Finance Facility for Water (KIFFWA) and the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund (AECF).



Maddalena Procopio is Senior Policy Fellow in the Africa Programme at European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Her main research interests are Africa's geopolitics and international relations, in particular relations with Europe, China, Gulf and emerging middle powers, the energy transition. She is also an Associate Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI). From 2018 to 2023, she worked as Senior Political Analyst on sub-Saharan Africa at Eni, focusing on geopolitical risk and policy developments across the continent. Maddalena has conducted research at institutions including the University of Nairobi, Peking University and the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), and has taught at LSE, the University of Cape Town and the University of Warwick. She holds a PhD in International Relations from LSE, where her research examined Kenyan negotiation strategies vis-à-vis China.



Lubna Qassim is the Governor of the Helsinki Geoeconomics Society, an international lawyer and a Distinguished Fellow at UCLA. She previously served as a Senior Multilateral Diplomat at the United Nations in Geneva. Her work focuses on international governance, diplomacy and the evolving architecture of global order, particularly how multilateral institutions must adapt to geoeconomic competition, fragmentation and shifting North-South dynamics.

Conveners

About ODI Global Advisory



ODI Global Advisory is a strategic consultancy offering global affairs advisory and research services to public and private sector clients. Backed by more than 60 years of expertise in advancing sustainable development and social impact through its parent organisation, ODI Global, we provide evidence-driven insights to help translate ideas into action.

ODI Global is an independent global affairs think tank. As its social enterprise arm, ODI Global Advisory builds on research spanning climate and sustainability, development finance, gender equity, humanitarian policy and more. With a strong foundation in history and a forward-looking approach, we help clients understand complex challenges and offer tangible, practical solutions.

Learn more: globaladvisory.odi.org

About Gravitas Sovereign & Strategic Advisory



GRAVITAS is a strategic advisory firm dedicated to empowering governments, public institutions and private organisations to navigate complex challenges in the public sector. By blending visionary insights with practical action, the firm designs and executes strategies that drive sustainable economic progress and strengthen financial resilience.

Operating at the intersection of policy and global markets, Gravitas supports clients in shaping transformative outcomes and long-term strategic positioning.

Learn more: gravitas-advisory.com

About the Institute of Foreign Affairs



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Established in 2021 through the merger of the Institute of Strategic Affairs and the Ethiopian Foreign Relations Training Institute, the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) serves as a leading policy research and training institution within Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

IFA provides evidence-based policy analysis and strategic guidance on foreign relations, while cultivating the next generation of diplomatic professionals through specialised training programmes. As a prominent think tank within the Ministry, IFA plays a vital role in shaping Ethiopia's foreign policy discourse and international engagement.

Learn more: www.ifa.gov.et

Supporting partner

Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, London



This dialogue is convened with the support of the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in London, whose engagement has been instrumental in facilitating this discussion in Addis Ababa.

Learn more: ethioembassy.org.uk



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ODI Global Advisory is a strategic consultancy offering global affairs advisory and research services to public and private sector clients. Backed by 60 years of experience advancing social impact via our parent charity, ODI Global, we provide expertise-driven insights to translate ideas into action.

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