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Supporting Investment & Trade in Africa

Report

Supporting AfCFTA National Implementation Committees

What are we learning?

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The note reflects on the capacity-building events for AfCFTA National Implementation Committees (NICs) in six countries that SITA has organised in collaboration with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat and State Parties.

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Contents

Acknowledgements 3
Executive summary 6
1 Introduction 8
2 Progress so far in establishing NICs 10
3 The role of SITA in supporting NICs 12
4 Best practices on NIC forms and functions 15
4.1 Best practice NIC forms and functions 15
4.2 Comparing AfCFTA NIC functions across African countries 19
4.3 Issues emerging in discussions with NICs 20
5 Conclusions 23
References 25
Appendix 1 Functions of six African NICs 26

Abbreviations and acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AFTS	Agreements and Foreign Trade Sector
AU	African Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MSMEs	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NIC	National Implementation Committee
NTB	non-tariff barrier
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
SITA	Supporting Trade & Investment in Africa
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
ToR	terms of reference
TWG	technical working group
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has moved from negotiation to implementation, and is placing increasing emphasis on national institutions that can translate continental commitments into practical outcomes. This report reflects on lessons learned from supporting AfCFTA National Implementation Committees (NICs) through the Supporting Investment & Trade in Africa (SITA) programme, implemented in partnership with the AfCFTA Secretariat and six African countries: Egypt, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique and The Gambia.

The report argues that the success of the AfCFTA depends not only on the Agreement itself but also on the ability of countries to coordinate implementation domestically. The mandate for the establishment of NICs follows an African Union decision in 2018 that NICs should serve as the primary mechanism for coordinating AfCFTA implementation, aligning government ministries, agencies, private sector actors and other stakeholders.

Significant progress has been made. By September 2025, 37 State Parties had formally established NICs, and in 2023 the AfCFTA Council of Ministers created a Committee of NIC Focal Points to promote peer learning and coordination. However, while institutional establishment has advanced rapidly, operational effectiveness remains uneven. Many NICs continue to function mainly as periodic coordination fora rather than as active implementation platforms.

ODI Global, through the SITA programme, has supported the AfCFTA Secretariat's NIC work programme by developing joint guidance for the formation and operation of NICs, providing technical assistance and facilitating peer learning. Support has included helping Rwanda convene its NIC for the first time, assisting Tanzania in finalising its AfCFTA implementation strategy, supporting Mozambique's preparations for AfCFTA trading and strengthening institutional arrangements in Egypt and other countries. Peer learning exercises have also enabled countries to draw on the experiences of those further ahead in implementing the AfCFTA, particularly Ghana's National AfCFTA Coordination Office.

The report identifies 10 best practice functions for NICs: coordinating implementation; monitoring and evaluating progress; reporting on activities; raising awareness; coordinating capacity-building; developing implementation strategies; engaging the private sector;

ensuring inclusiveness; supporting trade negotiations; and serving as the national interface with the AfCFTA Secretariat.

Comparison across State Parties reveals strong convergence around a core set of functions. All countries place heavy emphasis on coordinating implementation, advising on policy reforms, supporting trade facilitation and raising awareness among stakeholders. Stakeholder coordination and communication with the AfCFTA Secretariat are also widely recognised responsibilities.

However, several functions remain comparatively weak. Monitoring and evaluation systems are generally underdeveloped, with few countries operating robust results frameworks. Reporting on NIC performance remains limited. Many NICs lack dedicated approaches to coordinating donor support and mobilising resources. They also lack mechanisms for systematically engaging women; youth; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; and civil society organisations. Private sector engagement is recognised as important but is often still conducted on an ad hoc basis.

The report highlights several institutional lessons. First, effective NICs require clear legal mandates focused on implementation, rather than the assignment of broad or ambiguous responsibilities. Second, they need dedicated resources, including a permanent secretariat led by a senior coordinator capable of working across government institutions. Third, they require outcome-focused performance frameworks that track issues such as utilisation of preferences, reduction of non-tariff barriers and improvements in trade facilitation, rather than simply counting meetings and activities. Fourth, structured private sector engagement should be treated as a central implementation function rather than an optional add-on.

Experience across countries also suggests that form matters less than function. Some countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, have created dedicated AfCFTA institutions; others have adapted existing trade facilitation committees. What matters is whether the coordination mechanism has political backing, adequate capacity, strong stakeholder engagement and a clear focus on delivery.

The report concludes that effective NICs are becoming the most important domestic institutions for AfCFTA implementation. Countries that combine strong mandates, modest but reliable resources, meaningful private sector participation and robust monitoring systems are better able to transform continental commitments into concrete trade and development outcomes. As the AfCFTA agenda expands into areas such as investment, digital trade, competition policy and support for women and youth, strengthening NICs will be essential for ensuring that the promise of continental integration translates into tangible economic benefits across Africa

1 Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is the most ambitious trade and economic integration project undertaken on the continent since the establishment of the African Union (AU). It brings together 54 African countries into a single market for goods and services, with provisions covering trade liberalisation, investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, digital trade, and women and youth. At its core, the AfCFTA seeks to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, simplify customs procedures and create more predictable rules for cross-border commerce. The Agreement entered into force in 2019 and trading in 2021, marking a shift from negotiation to implementation.

Beyond market access, the AfCFTA is explicitly framed as a development instrument. It is intended to support structural transformation by encouraging industrialisation, regional value chain development and productivity growth. By expanding the effective size of domestic markets, the Agreement aims to make it commercially viable for firms to invest, scale up production and move into higher-value-added activities.

Crucially, the AfCFTA comprises not a single, static agreement but an evolving framework. While tariff liberalisation under trade in goods and commitments on services form its foundation, subsequent phases address issues such as investment, competition, intellectual property and e-commerce. The success of the AfCFTA therefore depends less on the text of the Agreement itself and more on how effectively it is implemented at the national level. Its success therefore rests heavily on how well countries organise domestically, align regulations and work with the private sector. For participating countries, the AfCFTA represents both an opportunity and a test: an opportunity to reshape trade patterns in favour of the continent and a test of whether national institutions can translate a continental vision into tangible economic outcomes.

The breadth of the AfCFTA agenda – spanning trade in goods and services, investment, competition and digital trade, as well as implementation instruments such as the AfCFTA adjustment fund and the e-tariff book – demands a coordination mechanism capable of aligning policies across ministries, agencies and stakeholders.

Recognising this, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, at its 31st Ordinary Session in Nouakchott in July 2018, called on State Parties to establish National Implementation

Committees (NICs) as the primary vehicles for domestic coordination. NICs are intended to bridge the gap between continental commitments and national action, ensuring obligations undertaken at the AfCFTA level are understood, prioritised and acted upon within existing policy and institutional frameworks.

The AfCFTA Secretariat has established a support unit to enhance the capacity of NICs and coordinate implementation. ODI Global has supported this unit by jointly developing knowledge products on best practices for NIC functions and helping organise capacity-building events for NICs. These events have explored whether and how different types of NIC are performing these functions. This report reflects on these experiences.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 presents progress so far in establishing NICs. Section 3 discusses the role of SITA in supporting the AfCFTA work programme on NICs. Section 4 looks at lessons on the functions of NICs in the countries in which capacity-building events have been organised. Sections 5 concludes.

2 Progress so far in establishing NICs

At its July 2018 Summit in Nouakchott (Assembly/AU/3/(XXXI)), the AU Assembly called for the establishment of NICs to coordinate AfCFTA implementation at the national level, 'to ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders and come up with national AfCFTA and Boosting Intra-African Trade Strategies.' The core function of these committees is to translate State Parties' continental commitments into domestic action by coordinating ministries, agencies and other stakeholders. Between 2021 and 2026, substantial progress has been made in establishing NICs, but their functionality has developed more unevenly.

From 2021 to 2023, efforts focused on formally establishing NICs. Most countries created or designated a NIC, typically based within the ministry of trade. While this marked an important first step, many NICs were not yet fully operational. Their mandates were sometimes unclear, technical capacity was limited and coordination across government remained inadequate (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2026).

In December 2023, the AfCFTA Council of Ministers established the Committee of NIC Focal Points. This provided the first structured continental platform for coordination, peer learning and progress monitoring, helping connect national processes to a broader implementation architecture (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2026). In 2023, an AfCFTA unit for the coordination of implementation was set up, consisting of three members.

From 2024 onwards, efforts shifted towards operationalisation. Technical support – particularly through the Supporting Trade & Investment in Africa programme – focused on refining terms of reference (ToRs), clarifying institutional roles and strengthening coordination mechanisms. By September 2025, 37 State Parties had established or formally notified a NIC, reflecting widespread institutional uptake. This phase culminated in the refinement of the AfCFTA NIC Guide, based on insights and feedback from State Parties' NIC establishment and operational experiences (AfCFTA Secretariat and ODI Global, 2026).

Despite this progress, NICs often continue to function as periodic coordination meetings rather than as continuous, technically supported platforms capable of driving implementation, resolving challenges and delivering effective results (ODI Global, 2026).

Figure 1 summarises key milestones in the AfCFTA work programme on NICs.

Figure 1 AfCFTA work programme on NICs



Source: Authors' elaboration based on multiple sources

3 The role of SITA in supporting NICs

SITA has supported the shift in the NIC agenda from institutional establishment to operational effectiveness. Its approach has combined analytical work, targeted country support and peer learning to strengthen NICs. The work has been carried out in close collaboration with the AfCFTA Secretariat through support to its work programme.

At the analytical level, the AfCFTA Secretariat and SITA/ODI Global have co-developed the forthcoming Guide on the Formation and Operation of NICs, a non-binding document that brings together cross-country evidence and lessons from technical assistance and provides a structured framework for NIC design and strengthening. The Guide sets out core functions, institutional arrangements and practical steps for operationalisation, and has become an important reference point for policy-makers (AfCFTA Secretariat and ODI Global, 2026). It has been discussed in various fora, including the Committee of NIC Focal Points Meeting.

At the country level, SITA has provided targeted technical assistance to governments, including in Egypt, Mozambique and Tanzania. This support has involved assessing existing coordination mechanisms, identifying institutional and operational gaps and developing tailored recommendations to strengthen NIC effectiveness. In Egypt, for example, the work has focused on enhancing operationalisation, improving resource mobilisation and institutionalising private sector engagement within the NIC framework (Fahmy et al., 2026). These interventions have contributed to clearer mandates, improved coordination structures and stronger alignment between NIC functions and implementation priorities. See Box 1 for further details.

Box 1 AfCFTA Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance Programme (examples of activities supported by ODI Global over 2024/25)

Burundi – capacity-building, meeting for the first time, developing actions on non-tariff barriers, gazetting of tariffs, identifying technical assistance needs relating to the AfCFTA Protocols (e.g. the Protocol on Investment), December 2025

Cameroon – capacity-building with a focus on the private sector and the need for peer review, June 2025

Mozambique – capacity-building on tariff and services offers and discussing forms of the NIC, March 2025; following this, in April 2025, the country started trading under the AfCFTA with a visit of the Secretary-General

Rwanda – convening the first physical meeting, agreeing a ToR, capacity-building of NIC members (March 2024)

Tanzania – concluding the ToR and supporting finalisation of the AfCFTA implementation strategy, launched in July 2025

Uganda – capacity-building for AfCFTA stakeholders, March 2024; this was followed by the launch of the AfCFTA implementation strategy half a year later and actual trading under the AfCFTA

The experiences of Egypt and Mozambique illustrate the importance of tailoring institutional support to national circumstances. In Egypt, where a formal NIC is already in place, the priority has been to strengthen its operational effectiveness, particularly through clearer working arrangements, improved coordination and more systematic private sector engagement. Mozambique, by contrast, has focused on how to adapt an existing trade facilitation framework to accommodate the broader responsibilities associated with AfCFTA implementation. Although the two countries' institutional starting points differ, these cases both highlight the importance of building on existing structures, making responsibilities clearer and ensuring that coordination arrangements complement, rather than duplicate, the work of established institutions.

Peer learning has proved particularly effective. Structured exchanges – such as benchmarking engagements (in February 2026) involving Ghana, The Gambia and Uganda and (in September 2026) involving Cameroon and Gabon – have enabled policy-makers to learn directly from operational NIC models. Ghana's experience illustrates how a coordination mechanism can evolve into an effective implementation platform when supported by a dedicated coordination office, strong institutional linkages and sustained private sector engagement. It also demonstrates the value of using pilot transactions to identify and resolve practical bottlenecks (ODI Global, 2026). National

workshops, including those supported in Mozambique (Zita et al., 2026), have further helped align stakeholders and link AfCFTA commitments to national strategies and sector priorities.

Overall, SITA's contribution has been to support NICs to become more active implementation platforms rather than formal coordination structures without implementation. Across countries, there is growing recognition that effective NICs require dedicated capacity, structured engagement with the private sector and clear systems for monitoring and accountability. SITA's work has strengthened NICs' institutional frameworks, improved coordination between public and private actors and aided in bringing about a stronger focus on delivery. At the continental level, this has reinforced the role of NICs as the central means for AfCFTA implementation.

4 Best practices on NIC forms and functions

Effective participation in the AfCFTA depends less on formal ratification than it does on sustained national coordination around domestication and implementation. Across the continent, NICs have emerged as the principal mechanism for translating AfCFTA commitments into action. However, experience to date shows that the mere existence of an NIC is not sufficient. NICs that are clearly mandated, adequately resourced and embedded within existing institutional ecosystems are far more likely to influence outcomes than those created as standalone or purely symbolic bodies.

Drawing on continental guidance currently being drafted through collaboration between ODI Global and the AfCFTA Secretariat, evidence from ODI Global and AfCFTA analytical work (see Sebahizi et al., 2023) and the experience of early operational NICs, this section sets out the core features that have underpinned effective NICs in practice. Section 4.1 presents best practice forms and functions, arguing that, while institutional forms differ from country to country, a number of institutional functions are crucial for effective implementation. Section 4.2 reviews progress on these functions across six African countries. Section 4.3 focuses on some key aspects of these functions, such as a clear mandate; financial resources; performance frameworks; private sector engagement; and monitoring, evaluation and adaptive learning.

4.1 Best practice NIC forms and functions

In countries where NICs are functioning well, they act as coordination hubs rather than as additional layers of bureaucracy. Their central task is to ensure coherence across ministries, agencies and stakeholders involved in AfCFTA implementation, while avoiding encroachment on the operational mandates of line institutions. This balance has been evident in countries such as Ghana and Rwanda, where NICs focus on alignment, prioritisation and follow-up rather than direct delivery.

The AfCFTA Secretariat's guidance, developed with support from ODI Global, identifies a set of core functions that NICs are expected to perform, ranging from coordinating implementation and monitoring progress to engaging the private sector and serving as the national interface with the Secretariat. In practice, effective NICs tend to concentrate first on a subset of these functions – particularly

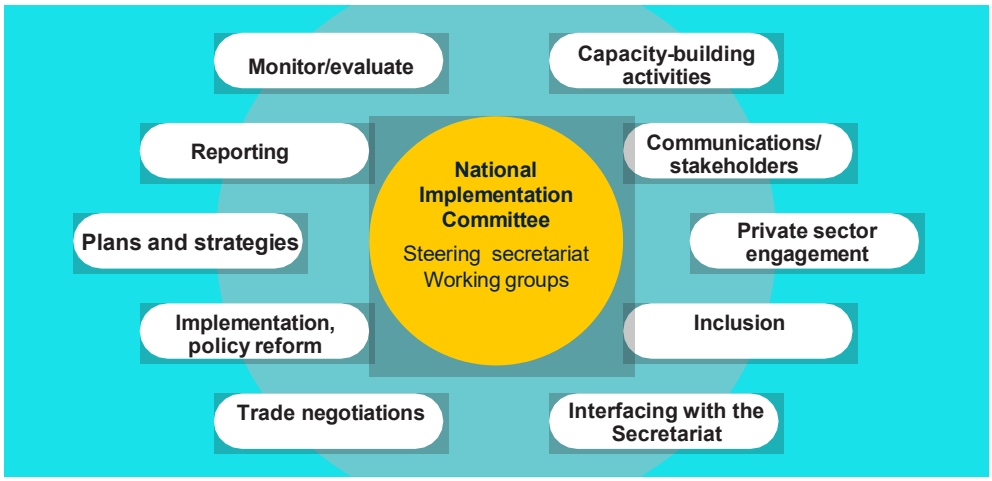
coordination, stakeholder engagement and troubleshooting – before expanding their scope as capacity improves.

Institutional forms are country-specific. While some countries (notably Ghana and Nigeria) have created new AfCFTA-specific bodies to signal political commitment, others have chosen to build on existing coordination platforms, most commonly National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs). This second approach has worked best where the NTFC is already active and where its mandate has been formally broadened to cover the wider AfCFTA agenda beyond border procedures, as seen in The Gambia and Rwanda.

Sebahizi et al. (2023) identify 10 crucial functions for AfCFTA NICs (Figure 2):

1 support the formulation of country positions in trade negotiations and other aspects of the AfCFTA, such as investment (involving coordination across ministries and complementing existing trade and investment negotiation structures)
2 facilitate implementation, and advise and lobby government around policy reforms necessary for proper implementation of the AfCFTA commitments and domestication of the AfCFTA legal instruments (through coordination across ministries) in line with existing structures to implement trade and development policy
3 develop plans and strategies for AfCFTA implementation
4 report on activities and plans and monitor and evaluate the activities of the NIC itself
5 monitor and evaluate policies and projects to support AfCFTA implementation and relevant AU-related objectives such as the trade and development aspirations in AU Agenda 2063
6 coordinate and, where appropriate, implement donor activities and capacity-building events in the area of the AfCFTA and development (covering trade and other instruments) in line with existing implementation structures (and not duplicating existing efforts)
7 raise awareness and collaborate with all stakeholders (communication)
8 enable meaningful collaboration with the private sector (certification, readiness assessments) to ensure effective implementation and economic benefits of the AfCFTA
9 ensure inclusiveness (include mainstream vulnerable groups, gender and youth, and climate considerations) in AfCFTA implementation plans
10 provide an interface between the AfCFTA Secretariat and countries and facilitate the AfCFTA Policy Review Process and monitoring of AfCFTA implementation in line with existing structures.

Figure 2 Ten essential functions of NICs



Source: Sebahizi et al. (2023)

Appendix 1 compares the roles, responsibilities and functions of the AfCFTA NICs of five African countries with the best practice functions in Figure 2. The review covers The Gambia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda using the draft or agreed ToRs of NICs that were developed during AfCFTA–ODI Global technical assistance and capacity-building events in these countries (during 2024–2025). The table also includes Egypt as a reference.

It is notable that there is a good emphasis in all ToRs on coordinating implementation of the AfCFTA. Coverage of some other elements is patchier. For example, not all ToRs cover private sector development or monitoring to the same extent.[1] Most have a good focus on coordination of implementation but only a few focus on outstanding negotiation issues. Few explicitly include liaising with the AfCFTA Secretariat, even though the AfCFTA requires the existence of Focal Points. There is attention to inclusion, such as of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) or women's groups, but not all ToRs have explicit language on this.

While each country will need to decide the institutional form that suits it best, five salient institutional form features emerge:

1 Three types of bodies emerge as important in all cases:

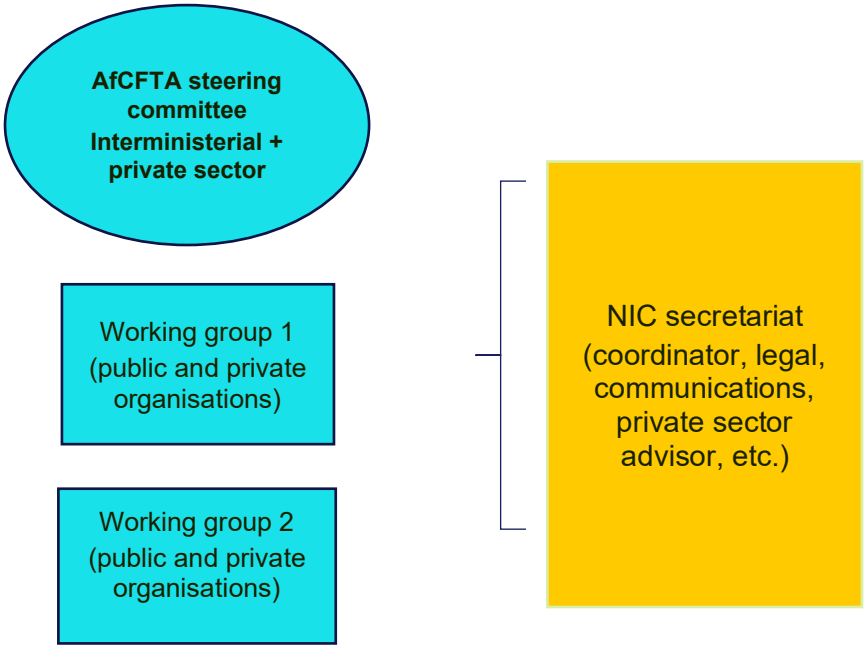
- a high-level steering committee (chaired by the minister of trade or a higher-level official and reporting to the president or prime minister)

[1] Findings from reviewed NICs reveal that formal monitoring plans are still under development in most cases. For example, Ghana and Nigeria are currently designing their monitoring frameworks, and Côte d'Ivoire employs an interim approach, using key performance indicators and performance progress from annual reports (submitted by the NIC and technical working groups (TWGs) to the Steering Committee) as a de facto monitoring mechanism. This suggests a need for standardised, structured monitoring systems to ensure consistent tracking of AfCFTA implementation progress.

- a national technical committee and a secretariat and
- technical working groups (TWGs).

  All these bodies and groups need legal backing. Figure 3 provides a possible institutional form.

Figure 3 NIC institutional form at country level



Source: Sebahizi et al. (2023)

2 The prime minister or president needs to oversee the high-level steering group but does not need to chair the actual group. The minister of trade could also take this role.

3 The secretariat needs a senior, active, experienced and well-connected coordinator or lead, who reports to the steering committee and the permanent secretary (or equivalent) for trade (the main focus is on coordination, avoiding duplication of existing efforts). Other people could include a legal advisor, a strategic communications specialist, a stakeholder engagement specialist, programme officers, enterprise support specialists, information technology officers, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) experts and administrators.

4 The private sector and other stakeholders should be included at steering committee level and in the TWGs.

5 The NIC should engage in visible activities (such as the Guided Trade Initiative; the AfCFTA Policy Review Process; developing a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework; and working with AfCFTA Secretariat staff, including the AfCFTA secretary-general, on visits and other communications).

Several factors, some of them country-specific, will inform the organisational structure of a country's NIC. The sustainability and

efficacy of the NIC hinge on high-level political commitment, evidenced by (i) legal mandates formalising the NIC's authority or mandate and (ii) alignment of the NIC's objectives with the priorities of public agencies and the private sector.

4.2 Comparing AfCFTA NIC functions across African countries

The table in Appendix 1 compares the roles and responsibilities of the AfCFTA NIC in the case of six African countries with best practice functions. The review of (draft) ToRs of NICs includes examples from Egypt, Rwanda, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda and Mozambique that were developed during the AfCFTA–ODI Global technical assistance and capacity-building events in these countries (during 2024–2025).

Almost all countries expect NICs to coordinate the implementation of AfCFTA commitments; promote policy and regulatory reforms; engage stakeholders and raise awareness; serve as a national coordination platform; and support communication with the AfCFTA Secretariat. Functions that remain relatively weak include M&E using measurable indicators; reporting on NIC performance and self-assessment; coordination of donor support and capacity-building programmes; resource mobilisation for implementation; and systematic inclusion of women, youth, MSMEs and civil society.

The country comparison highlights an important distinction between the responsibilities formally assigned to NICs and their capacity to execute them in practice. Although most mandates recognise the value of coordination, stakeholder engagement and policy reform, these functions are not always backed by the institutional arrangements or resources needed for effective implementation. Egypt illustrates this distinction particularly well: while the full NIC does not convene regularly, its secretariat continues to coordinate technical inputs, support negotiations and facilitate communication with the AfCFTA Secretariat. In some of the countries under study, responsibilities set out in draft ToRs have yet to be translated into established working procedures or operational capacity. The lesson is that a well-defined mandate is necessary, but it is the institutional arrangements underpinning such a mandate that crucially determine whether an NIC can fulfil its responsibilities.

There is much emphasis in all ToRs on coordinating implementation of the AfCFTA. However, coverage of some other elements is patchier. For example, not all ToRs cover private sector development or monitoring to the same extent.

While there is attention to monitoring, formal plans are still under development in most cases. For example, Ghana and Nigeria are designing their monitoring frameworks, and Côte d'Ivoire employs an interim approach, using key performance indicators and performance

progress from annual reports (submitted by the NIC and TWGs to the Steering Committee) as a de facto monitoring mechanism.

Most have a good focus on coordination of implementation but only a few focus on outstanding negotiation issues. Few explicitly include liaising with the AfCFTA Secretariat, even though Focal Points are required. There is attention to inclusion, such as of MSMEs and women's groups, but not all ToRs have explicit language.

4.3 Issues emerging in discussions with NICs

Several key issues emerged during discussion with NICs, including around mandates, financial resources, performance frameworks, private sector engagement and learning.

4.3.1 Developing a clear mandate.

There needs to be a strong emphasis on mandate clarity, and country experience confirms why. NICs with vague or overly broad mandates tend to drift, particularly once the initial negotiation phase has concluded. By contrast, NICs whose mandates are clearly anchored in implementation have been better able to sustain relevance. In other cases, the NIC is not performing certain functions because these are not included in the mandate or a detailed ToR does not exist. The mandates need legal backing.

Best practice mandates typically reflect different parts of engagement (see Appendix 1). First, NICs may continue to support ongoing and future negotiations under the AfCFTA, including Phase II Protocols, by coordinating national inputs across ministries. Second, they oversee implementation by aligning domestic policies, regulations and procedures with AfCFTA commitments and by monitoring the operation of tools such as the non-tariff barrier (NTB) mechanism. Third, they play a facilitative role in addressing specific constraints, whether related to standards, certification, customs processes or market access.

Discussions (e.g. in Mozambique) referred to the need to revise the NIC mandate to clarify its coordination role while preserving implementation responsibilities within line ministries.

4.3.2 Financial resources

A consistent finding across countries is that NICs without dedicated resources struggle to operate beyond periodic meetings. Current best practice therefore emphasises the need for a small but permanent secretariat, which could be referred to as a National Coordination Office, to handle day-to-day coordination, documentation and follow-up.

Countries with operational NICs have generally assigned a senior coordinator with sufficient standing to engage across government, supported by a small team. Ghana's National AfCFTA Coordination

Office represents one of the more developed models, though several other countries operate a leaner secretariat embedded within their ministry of trade. What matters less than size is clarity of responsibility and continuity.

Financing arrangements vary across countries, although government budget allocations remain the principal source of funding for NICs, sometimes supplemented by special government funds. Development partner support has played a complementary role, particularly for capacity-building and early implementation. Some NICs, such as Ghana's, have also worked with private sector partners to finance outreach and awareness activities.

A small survey of selected NICs offers further insight into the financing challenges facing national implementation structures. Respondents highlighted delays in disbursement, difficulties in accessing approved resources and uncertainty over future financing. These experiences suggest that securing a budget allocation, while important, does not necessarily guarantee the resources needed for sustained operations. Greater attention must therefore be given to the predictability and accessibility of public funding, alongside stronger financial planning, more coordinated development partner support and opportunities for private sector partnerships.

4.3.3 Performance framework

Current best practice highlights M&E as a core NIC function, yet this remains unevenly implemented across countries. Effective approaches have linked NIC work programmes directly to national AfCFTA strategies and action plans, using a limited set of indicators to track progress. Nigeria, for instance, has developed internal monitoring arrangements to follow implementation milestones. Rwanda integrates AfCFTA monitoring into broader trade and industrial policy reviews.

Crucially, performance frameworks that focus on outcomes – such as utilisation of preferences, resolution of NTBs or reduced clearance times – have proven more useful than those tracking activities alone. Regular review cycles allow NICs to adjust priorities and sequencing as implementation unfolds.

4.3.4 Private sector engagement

Private sector engagement is treated in best practices not as a supporting activity but as a central pillar of implementation. In practice, however, engagement has often been ad hoc, particularly where NICs lack structured consultation mechanisms.

Countries that have made progress have institutionalised engagement through formal representation on committees or TWGs, supplemented by sector-specific consultations. Nigeria's use of business associations during ratification and early implementation

illustrates how structured engagement can help surface practical constraints and build buy-in.

Several NICs have also begun to differentiate engagement channels, recognising that MSMEs, women-led enterprises and informal traders face distinct challenges. This aligns with the AfCFTA's broader inclusivity objectives and has helped ground implementation in commercial realities.

An important lesson from country experience is that private sector representation within NIC structures does not, in itself, guarantee meaningful engagement. Businesses need regular opportunities to raise practical concerns, while NICs must have arrangements in place for referring these concerns to the relevant institutions and following up on their resolution. Ghana's experience demonstrates the value of linking institutional coordination to practical trading activities, including support for businesses seeking to participate in AfCFTA transactions. More broadly, regular consultations, sector-specific working groups and clearer channels for addressing business concerns could help NICs move beyond awareness-raising towards a more sustained role in facilitating trade.

4.3.5 Monitoring, evaluation and adaptive learning

Finally, experience suggests that NICs are most effective when treated as evolving coordination mechanisms rather than fixed institutional designs. Periodic reviews of mandates, structures and work plans – recommended in the Guide's readiness checklist – have helped some countries adjust to changing implementation needs.

In The Gambia and Mozambique, stocktaking exercises have been used to reassess priorities, refine TWG structures and strengthen links with the AfCFTA Secretariat. This iterative approach reflects the reality that AfCFTA implementation is a long-term process requiring learning and adaptation.

Taken together, these experiences point to a clear conclusion: effective NICs are defined less by form than by function. Where mandates are clear, resources modest but reliable, performance tracked and stakeholders meaningfully engaged, NICs have proven capable of turning continental commitments into national action.

5 Conclusions

This report argues that the success of the AfCFTA depends not only on the Agreement itself but also on the ability of countries to coordinate implementation domestically. Significant progress has been made in this regard. By September 2025, 37 State Parties had formally established NICs, and in 2023 the AfCFTA Council of Ministers created a Committee of NIC Focal Points to promote peer learning and coordination. However, while institutional establishment has advanced rapidly, operational effectiveness remains uneven. Many NICs continue to function mainly as periodic coordination fora rather than as active implementation platforms.

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The report identifies 10 best practice functions for NICs, and a comparison across countries reveals strong convergence around a core set of functions. All countries place heavy emphasis on coordinating implementation, advising on policy reforms, supporting trade facilitation and raising awareness among stakeholders. Stakeholder coordination and communication with the AfCFTA Secretariat are also widely recognised responsibilities.

However, several functions remain comparatively weak. M&E systems are generally underdeveloped, with few countries operating robust results frameworks. Reporting on NIC performance remains limited. Many NICs lack dedicated approaches to coordinating donor support or mobilising resources. They also lack approaches to systematically engaging women, youth, MSMEs and civil society organisations. Private sector engagement is recognised as important but is often still conducted on an ad hoc basis.

Lessons from the capacity-building events include that (i) effective NICs require clear legal mandates focused on implementation;(ii) NICs need dedicated resources; (iii) NICs require outcome-focused

performance frameworks; and (iv) structured private sector engagement should be treated as a central implementation function rather than an optional add-on.

Experience across countries also suggests that form matters less than function. Some countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, have created dedicated AfCFTA institutions; others have adapted an existing NTFC. What matters is whether the coordination mechanism has political backing, adequate capacity, strong stakeholder engagement and a clear focus on delivery.

Countries that combine strong mandates, modest but reliable resources, meaningful private sector participation and robust monitoring systems are better able to transform continental commitments into concrete trade and development outcomes. As the AfCFTA agenda expands, strengthening NICs will be essential for ensuring that the promise of continental integration translates into tangible economic benefits across Africa.

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Appendix 1 Functions of six African NICs

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
AfCFTA Secretariat and ODI (Sebahizi et al., 2023)	NIC functions and mandate as outlined in Ministerial Decree. 39 of 2021	Proposed functions in draft NIC ToR 2024	Draft ToR of AfCFTA NIC, August 2023	Proposed functions in draft NIC ToR, December 2023; draft AfCFTA implementation strategy	AfCFTA NIC ToR 2024/25	Proposed revision of Decree creating NTFC (2024), Art. 3 and Art. 6
1. Facilitate implementation, and advise and lobby government around policy reforms necessary for proper implementation of AfCFTA commitments	NIC acts as Egypt's central coordination mechanism for AfCFTA implementation. It oversees compliance with AfCFTA obligations, facilitates trade liberalisation and removal of NTBs and fosters coordinated stakeholder engagement to translate continental commitments into national policies and actions.	Align Rwanda's trade and economic policies with objectives of AfCFTA. Develop and implement measures to simplify customs procedures, reduce trade barriers and enhance trade facilitation mechanisms to promote seamless trade within AfCFTA.	Oversee and coordinate effective implementation of AfCFTA provisions Develop strategies to reduce or eliminate trade barriers to facilitate movement of goods and services within AfCFTA framework. Work with relevant authorities to streamline trade procedures, documentation and customs processes.	Advise on national trade policy implementation priorities. Propose reforms in trade policy regulatory framework in relation to AfCFTA.	Support and advise government to leverage opportunities offered by AfCFTA through projects and programmes. Leverage political will to ensure stakeholder buy-in.	Coordinate and propose necessary actions for implementation of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and establishment of AfCFTA and other relevant activities to make process of import, export and transit of goods more efficient and transparent and less costly. Ensure interinstitutional coordination to guarantee implementation.
2. Monitor and evaluate policies and projects to	NIC has not yet established formal M&E framework to systematically track	Establish robust M&E framework to track progress of	Establish mechanisms for monitoring	Coordinate follow-up on implementation of	Monitor compliance in implementation of	Monitor and supervise compliance with provisions of

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
support AfCFTA implementation	AfCFTA implementation milestones.	implementation, identify challenges and propose corrective measures.	implementation of AfCFTA-related policies and measures. Regularly evaluate impact of AfCFTA implementation on trade volumes, economic growth and job creation. Adjust strategies based on monitoring results to ensure effective implementation and address emerging challenges.	decisions at regional and multilateral levels (in ToR). M&E (in strategy).	AfCFTA Agreement.	TFA and AfCFTA Agreement. Ensure execution of activities necessary to comply with Strategic Plan and NTFC Activity Plan, and implementation and monitoring of AfCFTA National Strategy and its Action Plan, within established deadlines, holding institutions that make up Committee accountable.
3. Report on activities and plans and monitor and evaluate activities of NIC itself	Although NIC is mandated to prepare periodic reports on AfCFTA implementation, in practice it has not adopted a structured approach to reporting on its activities or to evaluating its own performance.	Prepare regular reports on progress of implementation and submit to relevant authorities.	Included only under the eight proposed functions of national steering committee.	Report to NIC on progress on implementation of agreed action plans.	M&E	Provide information to government on process of implementation of TFA and establishment of AfCFTA.
4. Raise awareness (communication)	Despite limited resources, NIC Secretariat (Agreements and Foreign Trade Sector (AFTS) at Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade) has conducted targeted, sector-specific outreach. These have mainly consisted of technically focused virtual workshops and bilateral consultations with export councils, chambers of		Assess level of awareness, develop and implement capacity-building programmes, disseminate information about AfCFTA.	Secretariat to disseminate reports, manage communication and undertake M&E of implementation and all AfCFTA-related technical work.	Support AfCFTA communications and AfCFTA national sensitisation campaign.	Disseminate information on World Trade Organization TFA and AfCFTA in liaison with private sector.

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
	commerce and Federation of Egyptian Industries, in response to private sector requests.					
5. Coordinate and, where appropriate, implement donor activities and capacity-building events	NIC does not currently coordinate or implement donor-funded activities or capacity-building events owing to resource and capacity constraints.	Identify capacity gaps and develop training programmes to enhance skills and knowledge of relevant stakeholders on AfCFTA and its implications. Mobilise internal and external financial resources for implementation of AfCFTA strategy and other related measures/actions.	Included only under the eight proposed functions of national steering committee.	NIC to provide guidance for studies and consultations.	Mobilise resources for AfCFTA Strategy implementation.	Monitor implementation of technical and financial assistance and ensure coordination with other activities aimed at trade facilitation and continental free trade.
6. Develop plans and strategies for AfCFTA implementation	NIC has not developed an official strategy for AfCFTA implementation or for boosting intra-African trade. However, it has played domestic coordination role by identifying products and companies for participation in pilot shipments and ensuring necessary legal instruments, including tariff reductions and customs instructions, are in place. AFTS plays broader strategic role by contributing efforts that expand Egypt's presence in African markets and by ensuring AfCFTA		Harmonise policies, regulations and procedures to facilitate trade, eliminate barriers and promote economic growth and development in line with AfCFTA goals. Identify existing trade policies, regulations and laws that need to be aligned with AfCFTA provisions; roadmap for policy harmonisation.	Develop actions plans in AfCFTA implementation strategy.	Provide support in sector strategy development and implementation.	

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
	opportunities are integrated into national development priorities, including National Export Development Strategy (which targets $145 billion in exports by 2030) and Egypt's Engagement within Africa Strategy.		Propose necessary amendments to policies and regulations to ensure compliance with AfCFTA requirements.			
7. Enable meaningful collaboration with private sector	NIC is tasked with raising private sector awareness and organising national workshops and awareness sessions, often in collaboration with AfCFTA Secretariat. Through AFTS, it also helps private sector address any challenges encountered in trading under AfCFTA. Additionally, NIC serves as official platform for aligning stakeholders on AfCFTA implementation and policy positions.	Engage with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector, civil society and academia, to ensure their active participation and contribution to implementation process.	Engage with private sector organisations and associations to understand their needs, challenges and opportunities under AfCFTA. Develop initiatives to encourage private sector participation in cross-border trade, investment and joint ventures. Facilitate creation of networks and platforms that connect Tanzanian businesses with potential partners across the continent.	Membership of NIC committees includes private sector.		No specific task.
8. Ensure inclusiveness	NIC comprises approximately 24 entities from government stakeholders and business associations representing private sector, ensuring broad representation in	Engage with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector, civil society and academia, to ensure their active participation and	Included only under the eight proposed functions of national steering committee.		Support mainstreaming of gender and youth in trade development.	

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
	implementation of Egypt's AfCFTA obligations. It includes key technical bodies within Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade and specialised regulatory agencies. Additionally, NIC includes representation from MSME Development Agency and National Council for Women. Private sector engagement is ensured through major umbrella business associations, including Federation of Egyptian Industries, Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce and Egyptian Businessmen's Association. While membership is defined by Decree No. 39/2021, additional institutions may be invited to participate on ad hoc basis when specialised or crosscutting expertise is required.	contribution to implementation process.				
9. Support formulation of country positions in trade negotiations	AFTS, as NIC Secretariat and National Focal Point, leads coordination of Egypt's positions across all negotiation phases, covering technical areas including rules of origin,			Act as a consultative body for developing AfCFTA-related negotiating positions (ToR).	Support preparation and participation of The Gambia AfCFTA negotiating team.	Issue opinions within framework of World Trade Organization (WTO) TFA and AfCFTA.

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
	tariff concessions, trade in services and dispute settlement. Prior to formal establishment of NIC in 2021, this coordination was conducted through informal, ad hoc consultations with relevant ministries, regulatory bodies and private sector stakeholders. Following establishment of NIC, these consultative processes were gradually integrated into its framework, even though NIC did not convene frequently as a full committee. AFTS refers technical matters to competent authorities for input, consolidates these inputs, and, in its role as Egypt's Focal Point to AfCFTA Secretariat and as core member of national negotiation team, represents Egypt in high-level institutional forums such Committee of Senior Trade Officials and Council of Ministers.				Partake in negotiations and deliberations and provide technical advice to government on all AfCFTA-related matters.	
10. Provide interface between AfCFTA Secretariat and country	NIC serves as formal interface with AfCFTA Secretariat and AU Commission. It is				Support preparation and submission of relevant AfCFTA	Maintain contact with Secretariats of WTO and AfCFTA on matters relating to

10 best practice functions	Egypt	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda	The Gambia	Mozambique
	empowered to provide substantive updates during official meetings and to maintain continuous communication on implementation and follow-up matters. In this role, Egypt actively participates in AfCFTA NIC Committee of Focal Points meetings organised by AfCFTA Secretariat. A core function of NIC is to coordinate Egypt's preparation for AfCFTA institutional meetings, including of the Council of Ministers, the Committee of Senior Trade Officials and technical committees. Through NIC Secretariat (AFTS), agendas and relevant documents, including draft protocols, are circulated to NIC members, inputs are consolidated and national positions are shaped. Following these meetings, AFTS disseminates outcomes to government entities and business associations, ensuring continuous pre-meeting coordination and post-meeting communication.				notification requirements.	trade facilitation and continental free trade.

Source: AfCFTA Secretariat, N'gage (for Egypt), ODI Global support on NICs 2023–2025 preparatory notes