

VISION130
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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITALISATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AFCFTA):

CONTEXT, REGULATION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW, BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

10-12 September 2025

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MERCANTILE LAW

Conference Overview:

The Mercantile Law Department at the University of the Free State (UFS), in conjunction with the Mercantile and Labour Law Department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), is pleased to announce the **3rd Annual International Conference on Business, Law and Economics (ACBLE)**. The conference will be held in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and will be a hybrid event, allowing for both physical and virtual participation.

This is the third revolving International Conference to be hosted under the activities of the African Society for Business, Law and Economics. The society was founded in January 2023 as an initiative to create a platform where researchers, practitioners and students in law focussing on aspects of business and the economy can frequently converge to discuss topical areas of interest. The particular interest of the Society is around the economic analysis of the law. This field has been around since the 1800s and concentrates on economic conduct in response to legal rules. Thereafter, questions are then posed as to whether the effects of the legal rules are socially desirable. The annual conference seeks to develop research and scholarship within the field of law and economics in South Africa and beyond.

Conference Theme:

The theme for this year's conference is: **Artificial Intelligence and Digitalisation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): Context, Regulation, and Implications for Law, Business and Economics.**

As Africa moves towards deeper economic integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation are transforming trade dynamics, regulatory landscapes, and economic opportunities. AI-driven solutions are reshaping cross-border transactions, supply chains, and e-commerce while raising critical questions about governance, digital sovereignty, and equitable access to technology.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 serves as a key framework for this transformative period, emphasising the need for Africa to harness technology and innovation to achieve sustainable development, economic growth, and integration across the continent. This vision of a united, prosperous, and self-reliant Africa highlights the crucial role technology plays in enhancing trade, governance, and economic diversification. In alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), the AfCFTA provides a platform for driving regional cooperation and ensuring that Africa's digital transformation fosters inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, the 3rd ACBLE conference seeks to explore the legal, economic, and technological dimensions of AI and digitalisation within the AfCFTA.

Call for Abstracts:

We invite abstracts from prospective participants of the conference on any of the following sub-themes:

AI and Digital Transformation in AfCFTA:

- Digital trade infrastructure and AI integration
- Cross-border AI-driven trade facilitation
- E-commerce growth and digital market access
- The role of AI in trade logistics and supply chains

Regulation and Governance of AI in AfCFTA:

- AI governance models in Africa
- Regulatory frameworks for AI and digital trade
- Data protection, privacy, and cybersecurity
- Digital sovereignty and AI policy
- Comparative AI governance: Africa vs. the West

Economic Impact of AI on African Trade:

- AI's contribution to intra-Africa trade growth
- AI in digital finance and financial inclusion
- Transforming African SMEs through digitalisation
- AI's impact on African value chains

Ethical, Human Rights, and Social Implications of AI:

- Human rights in AI-driven policies
- The future of work and AI
- Digital rights and governance
- AI, gender, and trade equity

AI and the AfCFTA Institutional Framework:

- The role of AfCFTA institutions in AI regulation
- Harmonisation of AI policies across African countries
- Public-private partnerships for AI development
- Institutional capacity-building for AI adoption

AI and Africa's Global Trade Position:

- AI's role in enhancing Africa's competitiveness
- Africa's participation in global AI trade agreements
- The impact of global AI trends on AfCFTA
- Lessons from AI regulations in international trade

AI, Innovation, and Sustainable Development:

- Aligning AI with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- AI for sustainable trade and environmental impact
- Innovations in AI for African economic resilience

AI in Business and Regulation:

- AI in competition
- AI in investment
- AI in trade
- AI in regionalisation
- AI in tax
- AI in company operations
- AI in banking
- AI and labour

Participants may also submit papers in any related area of the AfCFTA or in the Member State context.

Publication of Conference Proceedings:

The conference proceedings will be published in a peer-reviewed and accredited journal to be announced.

Conference participants may submit up to two papers for presentation but are allowed to submit only one for publication in the special issue. However, if the second paper has a co-author, the co-author may submit the second paper for potential publication.

The submissions for the conference must be original and must not have been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. It is important to observe that the special issue will only be published once ready. While a team of editors works on it in conjunction with the team from the journal, the peer review process is unpredictable and can extend beyond the period envisaged in the timelines provided.

Registration and Fees:

Due to the fact that the Conference is Hybrid, participants must indicate their intention to participate in the conference either physically or virtually by alerting the conference organisers via email as soon as possible. Registration fees for the conference are R3 000 for those who are attending physically and R1 000 for those attending virtually.

For 2025, members can also pay a subscription fee of R5 000 allowing them access to all conferences and colloquiums organised by the society. Please indicate this expressly in your communication during invoicing.

Participants whose abstracts are accepted for presentation will be provided with banking details for payment of the registration fees.

Important Conference Dates:

- Abstract submission 31 July 2025
- Abstract Feedback 08 August 2025
- Registration deadline 01 September 2025
- Conference dates 10-12 September 2025
- Full papers due date 30 September 2025
- Special Issues March 2026

For any other questions, please email the Conference Organising Committee at:
afrisocconference@gmail.com

We look forward to receiving your abstracts and having you at the Conference. On behalf of the Conference Organising Committee.

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