



EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

For Immediate Release

EALA WOMEN CAUCUS MEMBERS JOINS THE LAUNCH OF THE EAC 2026 DIGITAL FOR DEVELOPMENT FORUM (D4D) TO FAST-TRACK REGIONAL DIGITAL INTEGRATION IN ARUSHA

Arusha, Tanzania | 24 June 2026-The East African Legislative Assembly members led by the **Hon. Amb. Fatuma Ndongiza**, the chairperson of the EALA women Caucus joined stakeholders in the launch of the East African Community (EAC) Digital for Development Forum organized by the Secretariate in conjunction with the development partners. The attendance of the EALA members added to the historic weight of the Forum's opening, the East African Legislative Assembly Women's Caucus were joined by their male colleagues known as the *"He for She"* champions in a unified delegation to the Forum. Their presence underscored the critical role that parliamentarians play in advancing digital transformation through legislative oversight, budget appropriation, and the harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks across Partner States.

Amb.Ndongiza empathized the need for Digital inclusion to reduce or eliminate the digital divide between rural and urban women traders and those in the informal sector. The digital space must cater for people with disabilities and must be relevant to the livelihoods to the people, provide solutions in agriculture and enhance access to market, basic health information, including reproductive health and improve cross border trade.

The D4D Forum acknowledged the role of parliamentary representatives 's legislative function as an essential driver of regional digital integration. Through their oversight functions, EALA members are positioned to ensure that the digital strategies and commitments emerging from the Forum translate into binding legal instruments, appropriate budget allocations, and accountable implementation timelines across the Community.

The 2026 Digital for Development (D4D) forum is aimed at intensifying efforts to accelerate regional digital integration. It is a high-level platform aimed at translating regional digital strategies into concrete actions, investments, and partnerships that will benefit citizens and businesses across East Africa.

The Forum brought together senior policymakers, regulators, parliamentarians, central banks, private sector leaders, civil society, and development partners to advance implementation of the

region's digital transformation agenda under the theme: *“From Strategy to Implementation: Building the Digital Single Market.”*

Advancing Regional Digital Frameworks

The Forum comes at a critical time as the EAC advances implementation of key regional digital frameworks, including:

- The **EAC Digital Transformation Strategy**
- The **Cross-Border Payment System Master Plan**
- The **E-Commerce Strategy**

Together, these frameworks provide a roadmap for developing a secure, inclusive, and interoperable digital ecosystem that supports the EAC Customs Union, Common Market, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Addressing Barriers

Despite progress, challenges remain: digital systems are not yet fully interoperable, cross-border payments remain costly, e-government platforms often operate in isolation, and private sector innovations face uneven regulatory environments. The Forum serves as a working platform to address these issues, align priorities, and unlock the potential of a Digital Single Market serving more than **330 million citizens across eight Partner States**.

Launch of the EU–EAC DEEP Program

The Forum also marked the commencement of the **EU–EAC Digital Economy, E-Commerce, E-Payments and Public E-Services (EU–EAC DEEP) Program**, funded by the European Union and Team Europe partners Germany, France, and Estonia, and implemented by GIZ, ESTDEV, and Expertise France. DEEP supports implementation of EAC digital policy agreements with a strong focus on e-commerce, e-payments, e-governance, and cybersecurity.

Speaking at the opening session, **Hon. Annette Ssemuwemba**, EAC Deputy Secretary General responsible for Customs, Trade and Monetary Affairs, emphasized: *“Digital transformation is no longer an option; it is a necessity for accelerating regional integration and expanding trade opportunities. Our focus now is implementation and ensuring that citizens and businesses experience the benefits of a connected digital market.”*

Ms. Paola Trevisan, Acting Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Tanzania and the EAC, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to a long-term digital partnership anchored in the EU's Global Gateway strategy and EU Tech Offer, bringing European expertise, standards, and investment to support partner regions.

Building Bankable Digital Projects

In line with the Program's **Digital Public Infrastructure Acceleration Mechanism** and the EU's Global Gateway investment approach, the Forum is serving as a platform to identify and structure a pipeline of bankable regional digital projects. These include interoperable payment systems,

regional e-government platforms, cross-border digital public services, and secure data-sharing infrastructure.

Participants are working to align priority projects with financing instruments from Global Gateway, European and African development finance institutions, commercial banks, and private investors, moving from pilot initiatives to scalable solutions.

Expected Outcomes

The Forum is expected to contribute to the development of interoperable payment systems, digital public services, and e-commerce ecosystems that will:

- Facilitate cross-border trade
- Reduce transaction costs
- Improve access to services
- Create new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation, especially for women and youth

By the close of the Forum, participants are expected to agree on practical recommendations, partnership commitments, and investment-ready initiatives to accelerate implementation of the EAC Digital Transformation Agenda and bring East Africa closer to a secure, inclusive, and interoperable **Digital Single Market**.

About the EU-EAC DEEP PROGRAMME

The EU–EAC Digital Economy, E-Commerce, E-Payments and Public E-Services (DEEP) Program is a regional initiative supporting the East African Community (EAC) in advancing integrated, inclusive, and competitive digital markets. Co-financed by the European Union, Germany, Estonia, and France, the program focuses on digital transformation, e-commerce, digital payments, cybersecurity, and e-government services to accelerate regional integration, digital trade, and economic growth across East Africa.

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