

Let's develop industrial policies to empower women, youth —Veep urges African leaders ...as she addresses fourth APD 2026

BY KINGSLEY ASARE

THE Vice President, Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyeman, has called for the implementation of targeted industrial strategies to strengthen businesses owned by women and young people across the continent.

She said women and the youth continued to face persistent barriers to finance, market access and cross-border participation, limiting their ability to fully benefit from Africa's growing single market.

Prof. Opoku-Agyeman was speaking at the fourth edition of the Africa Prosperity Dialogue (APD 2026) currently underway in Accra, under the theme: "Empowering SMEs, Women and Youth in Africa's Single Market through Innovation, Collaboration and Trade."

The three-day forum, organised by the Africa Prosperity Network, in partnership with the Government of Ghana, African Continental Free Trade Area, African Union Development Agency and African Development Bank, brought together African leaders, policy-

makers, development partners, financial institutions, private sector players and young entrepreneurs to chart a practical pathway for inclusive continental growth under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The Vice President said it was time to create an enabling environment that would allow entrepreneurs and manufacturers, whether

in Accra, Kigali or elsewhere, to see Africa not as fragmented economies but as one connected market with vast opportunities.

She noted that advocacy platforms such as the Africa Prosperity Dialogue complemented the work of the AfCFTA Secretariat, headquartered in Accra, by championing inter-African trade, deepening economic cooperation and pro-



• Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyeman

moting mobility across borders.

Prof. Opoku-Agyeman recalled President John Dramani Mahama's recent statement at the United Nations that Africa would shape its own future, stressing that such a future could not exclude women, young people and small enterprises.

"A future that excludes the youth, women and SMEs is not one Africa can afford," she said, adding that the country's reset agenda sought to move Africa from dependency to self-reliance, from fragmentation to integration and from exporting potential to building prosperity at home.

She described Africa's borders as connectors rather than barriers and highlighted Ghana's longstanding efforts to promote Pan-Africanism through initiatives such as the Pan-African Festival of Arts and Culture, the Year of Return and the Diaspora Summit.

Touching on the AfCFTA, the Vice President said it represented a historic opportunity as the world's largest free trade area by number of participating countries, with a market of over 1.3 billion

people.

The First Lady of Angola, Mrs Ana Afonso Dias Lourenço, in her address, said empowering women with the right tools in entrepreneurship, leadership, mental health and personal finance led to profound and lasting transformation within communities.

Former Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, underscored the need for inclusive growth through simplified trade regimes, digital platforms and transparent financial support for women- and youth-led businesses.

The Commissioner for the Africa Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development of the African Union Commission, Amma Twum-Amoah commended the organiser's of the programme.

The Second Deputy Governor of the Bank of Ghana, Mrs Matilda Asante-Asiedu, emphasised the importance of efficient cross-border payment systems, noting that payments were critical trade infrastructure necessary for unlocking Africa's single market.