



AFRICA  
ECONOMIC  
ZONES  
ORGANIZATION

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) are presently encountering a challenging period characterized by decreasing inflows and a confluence of crises that dampen investors' enthusiasm for cross-border expansion. The global investment landscape is undergoing rapid transformation, prompting nations to seek their appropriate positions within the evolving global value chains. While this situation presents certain challenges, it also offers significant opportunities. Africa is emerging as a prominent investment destination, with various developments converging to render the current geopolitical shifts a favorable moment for African development.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) play a significant role in attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), particularly as global interest in investing in Africa continues to increase. The recent wave of financial, infrastructural, and political reforms across the continent, driven by its untapped potential in the agribusiness and renewable energy sectors, is enabling the region to accommodate bigger manufacturing capacities and technological advancements. Furthermore, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is enhancing market value by improving intra-regional connectivity and creating new trade and investment opportunities.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) serve as a pivotal catalyst for economic transformation in Africa, embodying an emerging vision of prosperity, resilience, and sustainable development for the continent. Presently, over 220 SEZs have been established across Africa, encompassing an area of 140,000 hectares and mobilizing investments totaling approximately 2.6 trillion dollars.

Consequently, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have garnered significant attention, prompting extensive discussions on optimal strategies for leveraging SEZs to facilitate efficient and sustainable industrialization. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have emerged as a significant instrument for economic transformation throughout Africa. They have acted as catalysts for sustainable industrialization and economic diversification, while also promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development. As the continent endeavors to achieve sustainable industrialization and economic diversification, it is imperative that the advantages of SEZs are accessible to all segments of society.

### Nonetheless, several challenges still hinder the development of African SEZs, namely:

Weak infrastructure and governance models.

Lack of reliable planning and incentive schemes designed to support regional value chain integration.

Lack of expertise and skillsets to adhere to international standards.

Limited and underperforming trade facilitation reforms and digital outreach efforts.

Insufficient development of logistic corridors and industrial competitiveness.

Restrained access to relevant information that translates market intelligence into business opportunities for SEZs operators.

High demand for digitalization, particularly for remote working arrangements and lack of one-stop-shop services.

Poor governance and policy inconsistencies.

The highlighted need for SEZs to address infrastructure gaps and drive economic development cements AEZO's commitment as a strong Pan-African determination supporting SEZ development with a focus on industrial activities and intra-regional trade.

According to recent statistics from UNCTAD, intra-African trade remains stagnant at only 15% of the continent's total trade, compared to 67% in Europe. While the AfCFTA is a tremendous opportunity to create a continental market of 1.3 billion people and accelerate the continent's commercial integration, some constraints must be addressed to capitalize on this opportunity:

**Infrastructure** – An annual investment of \$150 to \$170 billion is needed to bridge the infrastructure gap, without which logistic costs will continue to hinder intra-African trade. Adequate, high-quality soft and hard infrastructure is crucial. This approach is essential in addressing the cross-border trade facilitation challenges by establishing one-stop border posts.

In this sense, African SEZs should focus on incorporating sustainable principles into the design and planning of SEZs to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. In current affairs, sustainable economic development is not merely an aspiration but an imperative.

**Industrialization** – The African manufacturing sector contributes only 10% to the GDP compared to 20% in Asia. The heterogeneity of African economies and national priorities must be reconciled within a framework of industrial complementarity. Accelerated backward and forward interlinkages with the surrounding economic fabric at all levels are also a necessary factor.

**Business climate and removing non-tariff barriers** – This would enable the reduction of transit times and simplify administrative customs and payment procedures. Removing non-tariff barriers is a prime example of how digitization and new technologies can significantly strengthen African SEZs and facilitate trade operations.

“ We must incorporate sustainable principles into the design and planning of SEZs to protect the environment and conserve our natural resources. Sustainable economic development is not merely an aspiration but an imperative ”



*H.E. Ambassador Albert Muchanga  
Commissioner for Trade and Industry,  
African Union Commission*



**Human Capital** – Africa boasts a youthful and active population that should be trained and nurtured to attract higher value capacities, encourage entrepreneurial projects, and limit brain drain. This holds particular importance for women and youth, as an understated sub-population that can draw success in an increasingly competitive economic environment. The challenge, therefore, is to use African SEZs as an enabler to nurture education and capacity building, especially in high-value sectors such as NICT, Engineering, Renewable Energies, Construction, Supply Chain, etc.

**Economic Transformation** – Among the traditional industries, African SEZs should work on supporting critical launchpads to industrialization, including agro-processing, manufacturing (particularly pharmaceutical products), pathways to green transition, and mineral development. Advancing alternative industrialization pathways, including Blue Economy Industries and tradable services such as tourism and ICT, have also gained increasing momentum in Africa.

On a more global dimension, the FDI landscape in which African zones are competing for investment has seen significant change in the past few years. Global FDI flows declined in 2022 to \$1.3 trillion, down 12%, while announced greenfield project numbers in Africa remain below peak levels achieved in 2019. However, manufacturing investment activity showed an encouraging uptick in 2022. On the same note, the first half of 2023 continued the downward trend with a 10% decrease in FDI and reduced announcements of greenfield projects and international project finance.

The macroeconomic and geopolitical backdrop of our post-COVID-19 world, with the eruption of a series of conflicts globally, contributed to challenges, causing fragmentation and a shift in the restructuring of international production; Investors adopted a waiting attitude amid uncertainties. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) investment trends showcased positive sectors such as infrastructure and renewables, while agrifoods experienced a slight downturn.

“ It is a pivotal moment to promote a shared vision and clear and implementable roadmap through SEZs as a catalyst for a prosperous, equitable, and resilient Africa, in alignment with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. ”



H.E. Nardos Bekele-Thomas  
CEO, AUDA-NEPAD



Paradoxically, UNCTAD expressed that the number of SEZs worldwide is growing, despite the decline in FDI, which calls for caution in how much upfront capital is expended. Zones therefore should be aware of the high levels of competition and how it can impact their financial performance. In this sense, investment from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a growth opportunity for zones and should be given more support from SEZ authorities, private investors, and governmental policymakers.

All factors point to Africa as the next economic powerhouse of the world. Africa is at the cusp of the upcoming Industrial Revolution, driven by green industrialization and digitalization, powered by impactful investments. Despite the progress recorded, African SEZs must confront the challenges that hinder the full realization of their potential to support this vision. As such, underscoring the integration of sustainable principles in SEZ design, outlining steps for sustainable industrialization, engaging MSMEs, and addressing challenges such as access to finance and regulatory hurdles are key to adopting better practices.

The isolated nature of some SEZs, coupled with the race to attract foreign investment, often leaves African nations competing without a sustainable framework tailored to the continent's unique context. There is a growing demand for sustainability measures. As such, African countries should advocate for, and adhere to, a green growth agenda for the development of SEZs, in order to attract green investment, foster economic growth, and achieve sustainability goals.

African SEZs should move beyond mere competition and focus on building a collaborative framework that fosters knowledge transfer, peer-to-peer learning, and technical cooperation in the design and implementation of sustainable SEZ projects.

“ UNCTAD considers Special Economic Zones in Africa as an important tool for investment facilitation contributing to economic growth, industrial diversification, and regional integration(..) For the upcoming years, there is true opportunity for development in African SEZs, namely in terms of SDG Model Zones, with high levels of ESG performance and attracting sustainable investments. ”



*Richard Bolwijn  
Director, Investment Research  
Branch, UNCTAD*





## INDUSTRY: WHAT LIES NEXT FOR SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES?

2023 was a year of celebration and acknowledgment, as we look back on the work achieved in Africa in terms of encouraging industrialization, fostering capacity building, and developing comprehensive approaches aligned with SDG.

Across the past five years, African SEZs have paved the way to adopting a uniquely African economic model, which will set a viable backdrop to face upcoming industrially related challenges. The model is based on:



The present context underscores the need to enhance Africa's economic independence and industrial fabric. All stakeholders are engaged in efforts to bolster domestic capacities through reforms aimed at fostering a more favorable investment landscape.

It is imperative to prioritize the support of environmentally friendly industries, the utilization of Africa's natural resources for renewable energy, the implementation of circular economy practices, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) should integrate financial

mechanisms with sustainability initiatives to incentivize private sector engagement. Furthermore, SEZs ought to establish explicit sustainability goals, prioritize smart infrastructure, and collaborate with established institutions to obtain technical assistance.

Industrialization, economic diversification, and sustainability must be integrated to foster a pathway toward green and sustainable industrialization, all while keeping in mind competitiveness. This holistic approach ensures that industrial growth supports environmental stewardship and economic resilience.

To achieve this integration, governments need to develop supportive policies, provide incentives for clean technologies, and invest in renewable energy. Aligning industrial models with market demands ensures industries remain competitive and adaptable to global trends, ultimately paving the way for a sustainable industrial future.

### AFRICAN SEZs EXPERIENCE



Drawing lessons from **Senegal's** experience, it is important to rethink the regulatory texts mandating SEZ activities, which require a level of flexibility to accommodate all types of structures established in and around SEZs.



In **Nigeria**, the authority's main focus for the past few years has been promoting, and securing sustainable investments within free zones, addressing regulatory concerns, ensuring community stability, and improving infrastructure.

## PERFORMANT LOGISTICS: CATALYST FOR COMPETITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SEZs DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Efficient logistics hold a transformative power over the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across the continent. Well-developed logistics, particularly near deep sea ports, can significantly impact the overall development of activity zones, as the synergy among zones, ports, and connecting infrastructure is crucial for achieving industrial competitiveness and ensuring successful market reach.

Efficient logistics transcend geographical barriers, transforming SEZs into hubs of global trade, especially for locally crafted products in regional African markets. However, transitioning from infrastructure development to business operations is challenging for many developing countries, hence the need for conducive conditions encouraging of foreign direct investment (FDI). It is vital to not only build infrastructure but also promote and manage regional platforms to attract investors and foster business operations. It is important to integrate the private sector as a new generation of SEZs shifts focus from exports to local and green development. SEZ authorities must scale up their zones using private operators.

While transportation is essential for infrastructure development, knowledge exchange is crucial for attracting FDI and fostering economic growth in Africa. Regional agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offer opportunities to enhance the export market. A strong regional value chain can drive economic growth, utilize untapped resources, and improve maritime connections. The success of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) depends on efficient logistics infrastructure—ports, transportation, warehousing, and distribution networks—to deliver products to African markets effectively and timely.

It is essential to develop intra-African trade today, amid the realignment of international governance frameworks globally. However, this must take into mind the harmonization of trade rules and regulations across the continent to facilitate smooth trade operations. Rules of origin, tariff concessions, the elimination of non-tariff barriers, and simplified conditions for SMEs are some key elements to reconsider and adopt collectively if the AfCFTA is to realize its potential.

### AFRICAN SEZs EXPERIENCE



In **Ghana**, authorities focus on projects like building a fiber optic belt throughout the continent as a means of enhancing connectivity and technological infrastructure, with prospects of shifting to renewable energy.



On the other side, the LAPSSET Corridor Project aims to create a transportation and economic corridor that connects the countries of **Kenya**, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. LAPSSET supports SEZs in attracting businesses, while advocating for standardized laws governing SEZs to facilitate the free movement of goods and services within Africa.



## DIGITIZATION: ROADMAP FOR AFRICAN SEZs

There is a pressing need in Africa for a strategic and collaborative approach to digitalize operations, align technology solutions with business needs, and leverage innovation as a tool to drive economic growth in special economic zones, at a time when data accessibility and time constraints are a great challenge.

In this sense, the smart zones model focuses on principles such as collaboration, ethics, proactiveness, and risk-taking. Many examples of smart zones worldwide showcase innovative technologies like smart infrastructure, green energy, and digital monitoring, which can serve African SEZs to improve efficiency, competitiveness, and overall business operations.

The relatively new concept of “Smart Zones” can be a revolutionary point of transformation for Africa. Smart Zones drive goal achievement, fostering sustainable value creation via intelligence, digital technology, data, and innovation. They fuel economic and social development, propelling progress across the continuum.

Zones as connected, efficient, and digital spaces require an agile and iterative approach to digitalization, focusing on business processes, cyber security, and simplicity in project development. A few examples of smart technology practices that should be included in day-to-day SEZ management include smart energy, smart engagement, smart administration, sustainable mobility, smart buildings, and smart construction. To enhance competitiveness and efficiency, SEZs must reduce delivery time. Recognizing the importance of the digital revolution, authorities should leverage data and extract useful cases to drive development.

In terms of specialization, approximately half of the AIOs/STPs are generalists, while 34% are specialists, and the remaining fall into the semi-specialist category. The top 5 technology sectors are ICT, biotechnology, software engineering, energy, and AI.

### AFRICAN SEZs EXPERIENCE



In **Egypt**, Suez Canal Economic Zone emphasized the importance of a one-stop shop for investors. SCZone prioritizes digitization, aiming to go live with its fully digitized One-Stop Shop in the upcoming year. Collaboration with international logistics companies is also a key strategy that they aspire to implement and maintain in the upcoming years.



**MozParks**, on the other hand, is focusing its efforts on integrating smart technologies into industrial parks. Key initiatives include establishing the first data center in **Mozambique**, and implementing an electronic single window for customs processes, with ongoing projects like the SME village to support this shift.

## SUSTAINABLE FACILITY MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE

From a global perspective, the importance of eco-industrial park frameworks in promoting sustainability is unmistakable. These frameworks are essential in addressing the environmental challenges posed by industrial activities while fostering economic growth and social development. Recognizing the critical need for sustainable industrialization, international institutions have united to implement robust sustainability measures in industrial operations worldwide.

A significant milestone in this effort is the creation of the Eco-Industrial Parks (EIP) Certification System. This certification system focuses on four key pillars that are integral to achieving sustainability: Park Management, Environmental Performance, Social Performance, and Economic Performance.

However, the successful implementation of the Eco-Industrial Park (EIP) framework in Africa requires careful adaptation to the local context. This involves understanding and addressing specific regional challenges and opportunities. For instance, infrastructure development must consider local environmental conditions and resource availability. Energy efficiency measures should be tailored to the existing energy landscape, which in many parts of Africa includes a mix of traditional and renewable energy sources. Digitalization efforts need to account for the varying levels of technological infrastructure and literacy across different regions.

Moreover, engaging local communities and stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the benefits of sustainable industrial practices are widely shared. This includes creating job opportunities, improving living standards, and fostering social

inclusion. By aligning the EIP framework with local needs and priorities, African SEZs can enhance their effectiveness in promoting sustainability and contribute significantly to the broader goals of sustainable development.

### AFRICAN SEZs EXPERIENCE



**Bole Lemi Industrial Park** promotes environmental excellence through incorporating social infrastructure and prioritizing sustainability. Efforts in waste management, renewable energy, and job creation within the industrial parks are also major areas of action for **Ethiopia**.



**Tanzania** Export Processing Zones Authority has also prioritized integrating sustainability into zone design, by implementing tailor-made mitigation measures. The value of sustainable practices for long-term success and environmental stewardship is highly detrimental to reaching environmental excellence.

## GO TO MARKET BUSINESS VALUE PROPOSITIONS FOR SEZs

Attracting High-value Investments is an intricate process that requires a robust business model and a deep understanding of both international demand and the specific requirements of the industry. In this sense, Marketing can be a smart tool to promote African Zones in a regional and national context.

Marketing Special Economic Zones rests on emphasizing the need to sell not only real estate but an entire country, encompassing its business culture, labor force, and infrastructure. This is based on a hybrid approach akin to city or country branding, coupled with a robust business model. Providing clarity and information on incentives, processes, and company setup reduces barriers for potential investors. Attracting investment requires support from multiple actors. Transparency, clear marketing strategies, and addressing language/cultural barriers are crucial.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are also detrimental to the growth of African SEZs. There is a need for active SME participation within SEZs, as they share common objectives that have evolved beyond export-focused strategies to encompass profit generation and employment creation.

By aligning growth sectors for SMEs with SEZ objectives, administrators and public authorities can avoid overreliance on tax incentives and create attractive packages for Special Economic Zones. SEZs must use local resources in local policies, and ensure a robust support ecosystem, including the presence of incubators and accelerators within and outside of SEZs. Diversifying financial benefits for SMEs, which includes non-monetary support such as skills development (Technical and Vocational Education and Training as well as Excellence Centers), is also crucial for providing holistic, less-disruptive financial support.

When it comes to addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by economic zones in the current economic and geopolitical landscape, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for SEZs, hence the importance of understanding market segments, competitive positioning, and unique factors influencing each zone to reach global standards and implement innovative solutions.

As such, administrators must strike the balance between service land, service premises, and build-to-suit models focused on tech sectors. As platforms for implementing ESG initiatives, SEZs should focus on monetizing services beyond real estate, environmental considerations, governance, and ESG factors in an institutional capacity.

### AFRICAN SEZs EXPERIENCE



In **Angola**, Luanda-Bengo SEZ has put in place a comprehensive master plan, coupled with key infrastructure elements, and an integrated ecosystem contributing to the attractiveness of its value proposition offer. The zone's global accessibility through the Investor Support Office fosters collaboration for mutual economic development.



In **Kenya**, zones are developed following the growth trajectory of major cities. Location is the first value proposition that can upgrade a zone, the second being a close collaboration with local governments to lobby for mutually beneficial policies on environmental and employability issues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

In summary, African Economic Zones play a key role in promoting industrialization, economic diversification, and structural transformation across the continent. They improve domestic linkages and reinforce the industrialization of economically viable sectors such as agriculture, automotive, technology, and pharmaceutical sectors. However, there is still much to reconsider when it comes to SEZ operations, facility management, investments, and Go-to-market business propositions. While 2022 focused on enhancing resilience and speeding up change to achieve sustainable economic welfare benefits in a world steadily recuperating from post-COVID-19 effects, 2023 focused on improving the quality of services provided by SEZ authorities, incorporating sustainable measures, and implementing digitalized practices to support economic diversification.

Building off the great achievements realized by the African SEZ community over the last decade, a collective paradigm shift towards aligning incentives, fostering collaboration, and addressing key challenges for sustainable economic development and sustainable industrialization in Africa should dominate in 2024.

In this sense, the African SEZs Annual Meeting 2023 was an opportune moment to elaborate a road map for a wholesome and structured development towards a more diverse, resilient, and industrially robust Africa. To achieve this vision, AEZO has elaborated the African SEZs Roadmap towards sustainable industrialization and economic diversification, which capitalizes on the main conclusions provided by key experts and participants during the SEZs Annual Meeting 2024:

**1**  
**HARNESS THE POWERS OF A  
HOMEGROWN AFRICAN SEZ MODEL**

**2**  
**FAST TRACK DIGITALIZATION AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMART  
ZONES**

**3**  
**MOBILISE  
ENVIRONMENTALLY-RESPONSIBLE  
ZONES TO MEET SDGS**

**4**  
**LINK INDUSTRIAL PLATFORMS  
INTO PERFORMANT LOGISTICS  
NETWORKS**

**5**  
**ENABLE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT  
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR SMEs  
AND ENTREPRENEURS**

**6**  
**FURTHER CONTINENTAL  
INTEGRATION AND HARMONIZATION  
THROUGH THE AFCFTA**

**7**  
**FOSTER A COMPETITIVE AND  
COMPREHENSIVE BUSINESS VALUE  
PROPOSITION**

## AEZO ACHIEVEMENTS 2023

### AEZO NEW MEMBERS

Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) was created in 2015 to enhance and sustain relationships between African Economic Zones and Government institutions. This gathering of African Economic Zones aims to facilitate cooperation to achieve strategic objectives and will contribute to the socio-economic development of African Economic Zones in all their shapes and forms.

**85** members      **45** countries




Autorité de Développement et d'Administration des Zones Economiques Spéciales (ADAZZ)  
**GUINEA**



Agence d'Aménagement et de Promotion de Sites Industriels (APROSI)  
**SENEGAL**



Snake Island Integrated Free Zone (SIIFZ)  
**Nigeria**

### AUC REPORT

#### POLICY FOR ESTABLISHING A VIABLE SME BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM IN AFRICA

The African Union's Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, Industry, Minerals Department (ETTIM) held a workshop to validate a draft study on creating a sustainable ecosystem for MSMEs in Africa within Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and to develop a framework for formalizing a strategy for artisanal small-scale mining. Key stakeholders, including zone directors and pan-African organizations, attended the event at Tanger Med's Headquarters during the African SEZs Annual Meeting.

The resulting report, supervised by the African Union Commission (ETTIM) with AEZO and APN, focuses on "Building a Robust SME Ecosystem in Africa." It offers a roadmap for integrating SMEs into SEZs to drive sustainable growth, enhance

local economies, promote job creation, and address Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) concerns. The document draws from best practices across 10 African countries, with insights into how SEZs can become engines for inclusive growth.

By leveraging support from international agencies, development finance, and private capital, African SMEs in SEZs can benefit from financial support, capacity building, market access, technology transfer, and policy advocacy, helping to create a vibrant SME ecosystem in Africa. This document comes as the AfCFTA Council adopts regulations on goods produced in SEZs, presenting new opportunities for SME investment in the continental market.



# POLICY PAPER

## STATEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF AEZO'S TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON THE AfCFTA REGULATIONS ON SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES

In reference to the decision of the Association's General Assembly on December 2nd 2022, and in response to the AfCFTA secretariat's request to provide recommendations on the draft regulations on Special Economic Zones (SEZs), AEZO members established a dedicated technical committee tasked with reviewing and providing comments on the draft regulations report and its content, namely:

The outcomes were included in the secretariat's information note and dossier of documents as a policy paper that was shared with AU member states, for the ministerial consultation session, during which present AU member states voted unanimously for the motion. This is considered to be a significant milestone for the African SEZs community, as it supports the development of a resilient and mature network of Economic Zones, public administrations, private investors, and local companies across the African continent.

The payment of duties and taxes on non-originating inputs used in the manufacture of SEZ products.

The possibility of introducing exemption provisions for countries that do not intend to grant preferential access to SEZ products.

The revision of the definition of SEZs in Annex 2 (Rules of Origin) of the Protocol on Trade in Goods



# UNCTAD-AEZO REPORT

## PROMOTING MSMEs DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AND AROUND SEZs IN AFRICA : A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

UNCTAD, in partnership with Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO), has joined efforts to elaborate a comprehensive guide for practitioners on "Promoting MSMEs Development and Entrepreneurship in and around SEZs in Africa."

The objective of the guide is to offer practical guidance to policymakers, SEZ authorities, management companies, and other institutions and stakeholders engaged in MSME support, for the development of policies, initiatives, and facilities serving the effective promotion of entrepreneurship in and around SEZs.

Divided into 4 sections, the guide offers step-by-step guidelines on how best to integrate entrepreneurship into African SEZs models:



### Section 1

Explores the different ways in which SEZs can contribute to promoting entrepreneurship and MSMEs, develops a typology of interventions, and provides international examples of similar initiatives.

### Section 2

Maps the current initiatives in African Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that are focused on supporting entrepreneurship and fostering business development.

### Section 3

Follows with an in-depth description of nine model African SEZs in integrating MSMEs and entrepreneurs within their ecosystem.

### Section 4

Summarizes the lessons learned from various case studies and experiences, providing a comprehensive and practical guide for policymakers to implement effective strategies and policies.

# GASEZ SDG MODEL ZONES

The Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones (GASEZ) elaborated a new project entitled “SDG Model Zones” through an open call for participation. The objective of this project is to create a network of SEZs that will share best practices in any one or all of the following areas:

- Attracting investment towards sectors related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Adopting environmental, social and governance standards (ESG)
- Promoting linkages between SEZs and the local economy.

The GASEZ SDG Model Zone initiative seeks to achieve three main objectives:

Raise awareness of the contributions of SEZs to sustainable development

Recognize the efforts of zones that are leading the way in this space

Share best practices by SEZs that can serve as an inspiration and be replicable by other zones

Eight AEZO members have achieved distinction by being recognized among the top 50 Global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Model Zones. This recognition was conferred by the Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones, following a rigorous evaluation of 200 global contenders.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Model Zones serve as pivotal sources of research and inspiration. Acknowledged during the UNCTAD World Investment Forum, these zones stand at the forefront of innovation, epitomizing a steadfast commitment to sustainable development, the promotion of SDG-focused investments, and the rigorous adherence to high standards in social, environmental, and governance practices.

AEZO's inclusion among the chosen 50 SDG Model Zones stands as a testament to its unwavering commitment to SDGs. The selection process emphasized criteria including a strategic focus on attracting investment in “SDG-relevant” sectors and activities, reporting on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) targets and indicators, and the promotion of inclusive growth, including programs for women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs.



# EVENT HIGHLIGHT: AFRICAN SEZs ANNUAL MEETING 2023



**+300**

Delegates



**+85**

Participating SEZs



**+45**

Countries



**30**

Experts

AEZO, in partnership with the African Union and this year's host member, Tanger Med, provided a privileged platform to include different stakeholders in finding potential solutions to common problems and establishing a sustainable course of action. This is perfectly underlined in the theme of this edition: "Fostering Sustainable Industrialization & Economic Diversification: A Roadmap For African Special Economic Zones".

The event featured discussions on global FDI trends, SDG-aligned investments, industry 4.0, and the SDG model zones as a viable management model. Success stories from SEZs across the continent highlighted their contributions to FDI attraction and economic growth.



The African SEZs Annual Meeting 2023 addressed the following points:

- 01 African SEZs: Driving Sustainable Economic Development
- 02 Industry: What lies ahead for African SEZs
- 03 Performant Logistics: Catalyst For Competitive and Sustainable SEZs Development
- 04 Digitalization: Roadmap for African SEZs
- 05 Sustainable Facility Management & Environmental Excellence
- 06 Go to markets business value proposition for SEZs
- 07 AfCFTA Ministerial Regulation on SEZs
- 08 Sustainable SME Business Ecosystem in Africa





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# REVIEW KEY MOMENTS FROM THE EVENT:



AFRICAN SEZs  
ANNUAL MEETING  
TANGIER - MOROCCO  
23 - 24 NOVEMBER 2023



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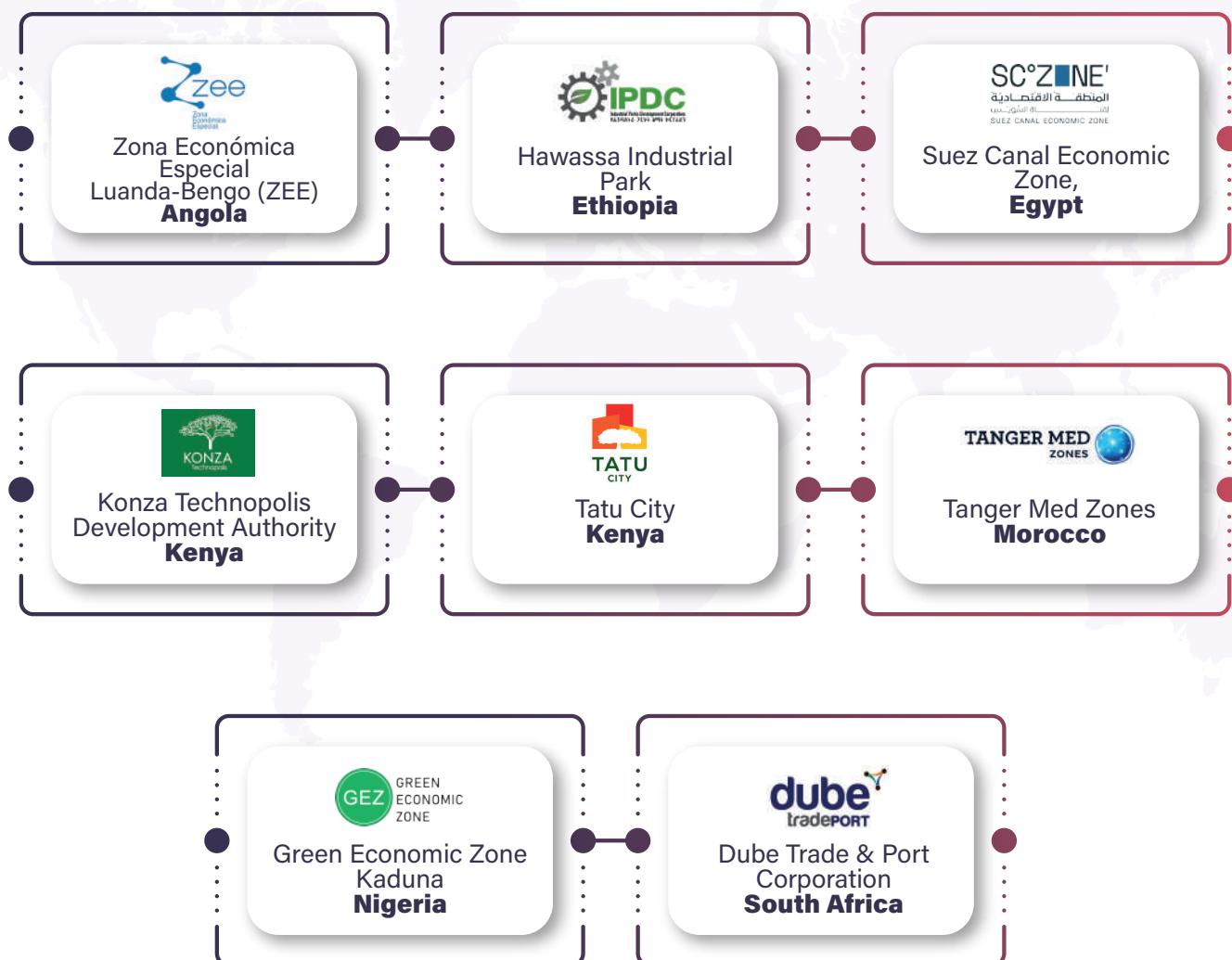


# AEZO AWARDS 2023

AEZO was honored to commemorate the efforts and engagement proved by its members, stakeholders, and partners for the year 2023. An Awards Ceremony was held during the African SEZs Annual Meeting 2023 Gala Dinner. The

recipients of the awards represented some of AEZO's most diligent supporters. The honorees were selected by AEZO's steering committee for their role in advancing African SEZ development:

## AEZO MEMBERS RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR ADVANCEMENT IN THE GASEZ SDG MODEL ZONE LIST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:



## PERFORMANT AFRICAN SEZ AWARD:



## SPECIAL MENTIONS, FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND SUPPORT TO AFRICAN SEZs DEVELOPMENT:



H.E. Albert Muchanga,  
Commissioner for  
Economic Development,  
Trade, Industry and  
Mining of African Union  
Commission



H.E. Wemkele Mene,  
Secretary General, African  
Continental Free Trade  
Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat



Hon. Abubakar Hassan  
Abubakar, State  
Department for Investment  
Promotion, Ministry of  
Investment Trade and  
Industry, Kenya



H.E. Nardos  
Bekele-Thomas, CEO,  
AUDA-NEPAD



Dr Richard Bolwijn,  
Director, Investment  
Research Branch, UNCTAD



Mrs Ebba Lund, Chief  
Executive Officer,  
International Association of  
Science Parks and Areas of  
Innovation



Dr Dorssaf Labidi, Head  
of the Industrial  
Development, Trade and  
Investment Climate  
Division, AfDB



Mrs. Josielle Rafidy, CEO,  
Economic Development  
Board of Madagascar



Dr. Samir Hamrouni,  
CEO, World Free Zones  
Organization



Amb. Mike Oquaye Jr,  
CEO, Ghana Free Zones  
Authority

# AEZO STEERING COMMITTEE

Following the Association's General Assembly which took place on November 24th in Tangier Morocco, participating members have unanimously voted for the elaboration of a wholesome, and comprehensive action plan that

would capitalize on the key recommendation provided by world-renowned experts during the African SEZs Annual Meeting. The action plan will be developed and overseen by the AEZO steering committee members.



**GABON**



Autorité Administrative  
Zone Economique Spéciale  
de Nkok

**GHANA**



GHANA FREE ZONES AUTHORITY  
CRAFTING TO SELF SERVICE

**MOROCCO**



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