

CONCEPT NOTE

**11th Edition of the Report on Assessing Regional  
Integration in Africa (ARIA XI)**

**On the theme**

**Delivering on the African Economic Community: Towards  
a Continental Customs Union and Common Market**

**Expert Group Meeting**

20, 21 and 22 June 2024

Douala, Cameroon

## I. Background

Regional integration has been a cornerstone of Africa's development since its independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Over the years, the continent has experimented with various forms of regional integration and cooperation, aiming to overcome the constraints of small, fragmented, and uncompetitive markets inherited from its colonial past (ARIA I to X; Hartzenberg, 2011; Yang and Gupta, 2005; Hailu, 2014).

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was adopted in 2018, as the first flagship project of Agenda 2063, falls within the category of initiatives intended to accelerate Africa's economic integration in the backdrop of the slow progress towards attaining the goal of establishing the African Economic Community envisioned in the Abuja Treaty. Admittedly, the Abuja Treaty never expressly contemplated the establishment of a continent-wide Free Trade Area, rather, it envisioned RECs-level FTAs and CUs Union (Stage 3 of Abuja roadmap), which were to converge to a Continental Customs Union with a common external tariff (stage 4 of the Abuja roadmap) and subsequently a Continental Common Market. However, while the establishment of the AfCFTA represents a significant departure away from the Abuja Treaty's roadmap and introduces important new dynamics in Africa's integration, it neither negates nor renders it redundant, rather, it sets out to facilitate the realization of its core objectives. Understandably, the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA properly references the Abuja Treaty and the AfCFTA is rightly recognized as representing a critical step in Africa's integration journey towards the African Economic Community envisioned in the Abuja Treaty.

With the implementation of the AfCFTA already underway, the next step in Africa's integration project, as outlined in the Abuja Treaty and other continental integration legal instruments, is the launch of the Customs Union and, subsequently, the African Common Market. Generally, free trade areas are often vital building blocks and important experimentation labs for deeper integration (De Melo et al., 2017; Crowley, 2006), and the AfCFTA is no exception. As a matter of fact, there are some AfCFTA Provisions, as well as the AfCFTA implementation processes themselves, that support or lay the foundations for deeper integration at both the levels of a continental Customs Union and a Common Market. With regards to specific provisions, Article I(J) of the AfCFTA Agreement clearly defines what a Customs Union is, and Article 3 (d) expressly states that one of the objectives of the agreement is to "lay the foundation for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage". Deeper integration through a continental Customs Union and Common Market, would result in the expansion of value chains and herald further economic efficiencies, as well as stimulate investments, competitiveness, and innovation. It has the potential to facilitate the concretization of the other freedoms envisioned in the Abuja Treaty – such as the free movement of all factors of production. Moreover, available literature suggests that under most circumstances, Customs Unions are more efficient and allow for greater market integration even as they require greater coordination and tighter constraints on individual member policies and sovereignty (World Bank, 2020; Ovadek and Willemys, 2019; Clausing, 2000). The transition to a Customs Union and Common Market, would remove some of the operational complexities of FTAs arising from Rules of Origin and risks of trade deflection (UNCTAD, 2019). Additionally, considering that the eventual establishment of a continental Customs Union and Common Market would have to be accompanied by the establishment of common external tariffs, as well as the harmonization of broader economic policies for African

countries, it is envisaged that it would also render trade negotiations between the continent and other regions or blocs much easier (Lejarraga, 2022).

Against this background, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in partnership with the African Union Commission, and the African Development Bank is having the eleventh edition of the flagship report on Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA XI) focused on the theme: **“Delivering on the African Economic Community: Towards a Continental Customs Union and Common Market”**. The ARIA series offers deep insights based on empirically and theoretically grounded research into themes of considerable significance to African policymakers, trade negotiators, academia, and development stakeholders. The eleventh edition of the ARIA report focuses on assessing the progress made in Africa’s integration journey, especially since the advent of the AfCFTA, and the preparedness of Africa to take the next critical step in this journey as envisioned both in the Abuja Treaty and the AfCFTA Agreement – the establishment of a Continental Customs Union and subsequently, a continental Common Market. ARIA XI will interrogate the extent to which the conditions for the establishment of the continental customs union and common market set out in the Abuja Treaty and other instruments such as the AfCFTA Agreement have been satisfied or, alternatively, actions that need to be taken to bring about these conditions. Critically also, and in recognition of the uneven progress recorded by different RECs in the formation of sub-regional customs unions and common markets, ARIA XI explores the extent to which RECs experiences offer a foundation for the continental Customs Union and the African Common Market as envisaged by the Abuja Treaty and as provided for in the AfCFTA Agreement. Integration experience from outside the continent would also be leveraged in this study.

## **II. Meeting objectives**

The Expert Group Meeting is convened to carefully review the draft chapters of the report and to gather valuable insights from experts and practitioners towards further enriching the draft report and facilitating its finalization and subsequent publication. More specifically, the meeting is expected to:

1. Review each of the chapters of ARIA XI towards enhancing coherence, methodological and analytical soundness, as well as the robustness of the data used and the pertinence of emerging recommendations and conclusions.
2. Serve as a platform for consultations and exchanges with RECs and other relevant stakeholders on the report's content and emerging findings and recommendations.
3. Gather further valuable inputs, including pertinent information, data, and feedback, from RECs, regional institutions, and participants to enhance and finalize the study.

## **III. Outcomes**

The expected outcomes from this meeting are as follows:

1. A careful and detailed review of the draft chapters of ARIA XI, that significantly contributes to strengthening its content, enhancing its coherence, robustness and the pertinence of its findings and recommendations.
2. Contribute in making the emerging findings and recommendations in the draft ARIA XI report more practical and implementable and more capable of significantly contributing to advancing the implementation of the AfCFTA and clarifying possible pathways towards the next phases in Africa's integration - establishing a continental Customs Union and Common Market.

#### **IV. Participants**

Participants at the meeting will be drawn from Regional Economic Communities, the African Union Commission, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Afreximbank, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as well as from academia, civil society, and the private sector.

#### **V. Date and Venue**

This in-person meeting will take place in Douala, Cameroon, on June 20, 21, and 22, 2024.

#### **VI. Working Languages**

The meeting will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous interpretation in both languages.

#### **VII. Contacts**

For further information and/or to confirm your attendance, please contact ECA staff Ms. Zewditu Befekadu ([befekaduz@un.org](mailto:befekaduz@un.org)), Ms. Aline Nakaima ([aline.kamenakaima@un.org](mailto:aline.kamenakaima@un.org)) and Ms. Ndinaye Sekwi Charumbira ([ndinaye.sekwi@un.org](mailto:ndinaye.sekwi@un.org)) and copying Mr. Francis Ikome ([ikome@un.org](mailto:ikome@un.org))

## VIII. Tentative Agenda

**Day 1 - Douala, 20 June 2024 – 8:30 to 5:00 pm – Moderator: Mr. Stephen Karingi**

Time	Topic	Speaker
08:30-09:00	Arrival of guests and registration	
09:00-09:30	Welcoming remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ECA</li> <li>- AUC</li> <li>- AfDB</li> </ul>	Mr. Stephen Karingi (ECA) TDB (AUC) TBD (AfDB)
09:30-09:45	Overview of ARIA XI	Mr. Francis Ikome
09:45-11:00	Presentation of Chapter 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (15 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Ms. Jane Karonga
11:00-11:30	Morning break	
11:30-13:00	Presentation of Chapter 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (30 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Mr. Gift Mugano
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:30	Presentation of Chapter 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (30 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Mr. Abiodun Bankole
15:30-16:00	Afternoon break	
16:00-16:30	Summary of key takeaways and recommendations for Chapters 1, 2 and 3	Ms. Jane Karonga

**Day 2 - Douala, 21 June 2024 – 8:30 to 5:00 pm – Moderator: Mr. Francis Ikome**

Time	Topic	Speaker
08:30-09:00	Recap of Day 1	Ms. Jane Karonga
09:00-10:30	Presentation of Chapter 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (30 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Ms. Dede Gafa
10:30-11:00	Morning break	
11:00-13:00	Presentation of Chapter 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (30 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Mr. Mundia Kabinga
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:30	Presentation of Chapter 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation (30 minutes)</li> <li>- Discussion (60 minutes)</li> </ul>	Mr. Caesar Cheelo
15:30-16:00	Afternoon break	
16:00-16:30	Summary of key takeaways and recommendations for Chapters 4, 5 and 6	Ms. Ndinaye Charumbira

**Day 3 - Douala, 22 June 2024 – 8:30 to 5:00 pm – Moderator: Ms. Jane Karonga**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Speaker</b>
08:30-09:00	Recap of Day 2	Ms. Ndinaye Charumbira
09:00-10:30	Presentation of Chapter 7 - Presentation (30 minutes) - Discussion (60 minutes)	Mr. Gift Mugano
10:30-11:00	Morning break	
11:00-13:00	Presentation of Chapter 8 - Presentation (30 minutes) - Discussion (60 minutes)	Mr. Francis Mangeni
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:00	Summary of key takeaways and recommendations	Mr. Francis Ikome
15:00-15:30	Closing remarks - ECA - AUC - AfDB	Mr. Stephen Karingi (ECA) TBD (AUC) TBD (AfDB)