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Rapid implementation of research and innovation solutions to accelerate economic diversification in Central and East Africa

Hilton Hôtel - Yaoundé, Cameroon
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United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE
FOR CENTRAL AFRICA
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**THIRD JOINT SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF
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October 2024

This annual report presents the objectives achieved by the ECA Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa, during the period from October 2023 to September 2024, and the activities planned for 2025.

The Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICE) is invited to examine this report and provide guidance to improve the implementation of the Office's work programme.

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List of acronyms

AFC:	<i>Africa Finance Corporation</i>
ATPC:	<i>African Trade Policy Centre</i>
ADB:	<i>African Development Bank</i>
BADEA:	<i>Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa</i>
BDEAC:	<i>Development Bank of the Central African States</i>
ILO:	<i>International Labour Office</i>
SRO-ECA:	<i>Sub-Regional Office of the ECA</i>
ECA:	<i>United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</i>
ICE:	<i>Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts</i>
TSA:	<i>Tourism Satellite Accounts</i>
ECOSOC:	<i>United Nations Economic and Social Council</i>
GICAM:	<i>Groupement Interpatronal du Cameroun</i>
EWG:	<i>Economic Working Group</i>
DFI:	<i>Development Financial Institution</i>
IPRT:	<i>Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit</i>
SDG:	<i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>
CSO:	<i>Civil Society Organisation</i>
UNIDO:	<i>United Nations Industrial Development Organisation</i>
WFP:	<i>World Food Programme</i>
PAIRIAC:	<i>Support Programme for Regional Integration and Investment in Central Africa</i>
CTMP-CA:	<i>Central Africa Consensual Transport Master Plan</i>
IEDMP-CA:	<i>Central Africa Sub-Region Industrialisation and Economic Diversification Masterplan</i>
IMP:	<i>Industrialisation Master Plan</i>
SME:	<i>Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises</i>
EEADP:	<i>Environmental Economic Accounting Development Plan</i>
RCO:	<i>Resident Coordinator Office</i>

<i>DRC:</i>	<i>Democratic Republic of the Congo</i>
<i>SEEA:</i>	<i>System of Environmental Economic Accounting</i>
<i>GIS:</i>	<i>Geographic Information System</i>
<i>UNS:</i>	<i>United Nations System</i>
<i>STP:</i>	<i>São Tomé and Príncipe</i>
<i>EU:</i>	<i>European Union</i>
<i>UNCT:</i>	<i>United Nations Country Team</i>
<i>UNSDCF:</i>	<i>United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework</i>
<i>SEZ:</i>	<i>Special Economic Zone</i>
<i>AfCFTA:</i>	<i>African Continental Free Trade Area</i>

Introduction

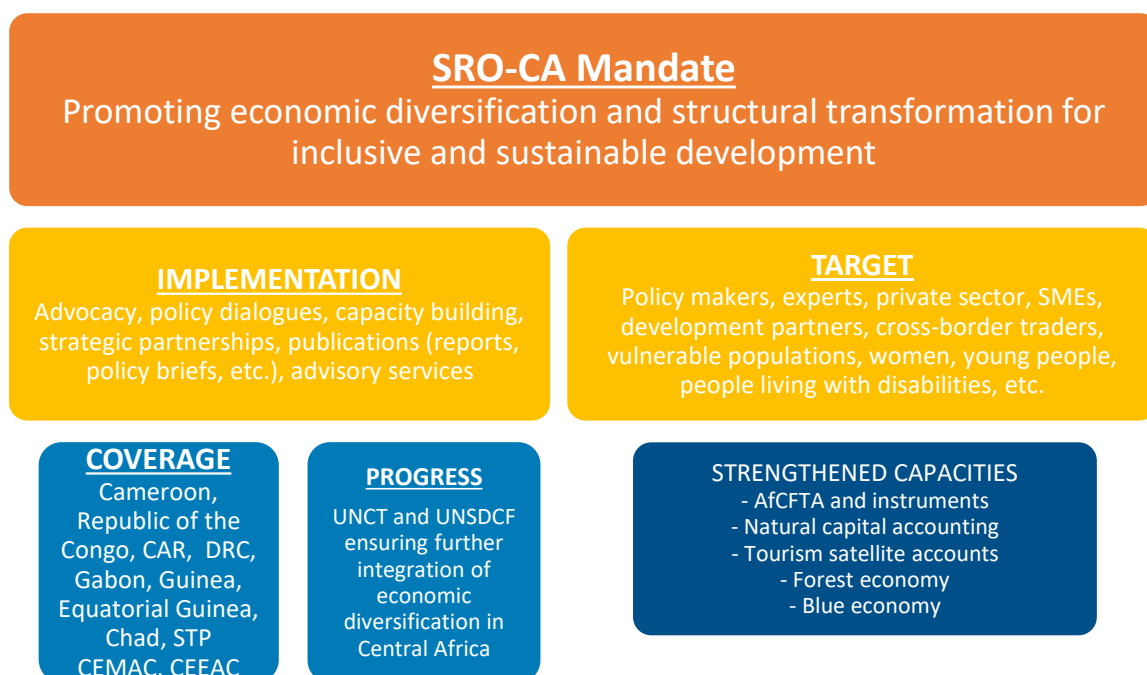
1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), established in 1958 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is one of the UN's five regional commissions. Its strategic mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its 54 African member states, encourage intra-regional integration and foster international cooperation for the development of the continent.
2. The ECA is committed to promoting a self-reliant, inclusive, transformed and prosperous Africa, by integrating the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the African Union's Agenda 2063. Through this approach, the ECA is seeking to establish a coherent framework to guide the continent's efforts at transformation. The objective is to act as a catalyst for socio-economic progress while addressing the contemporary challenges facing Africa.
3. To ensure a better response to the priorities of Africa and its sub-regions, the ECA relies on a decentralised structure with eight (8) organic divisions categorised by domain and five (5) sub-regional offices, based in Yaoundé (covering Central Africa), Kigali (East Africa), Rabat (North Africa), Lusaka (Southern Africa) and Niamey (West Africa), as well as its technical arm in terms of bolstering the continent's human resource capacities, namely the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), based in Dakar, Senegal.
4. The implementation of the ECA's strategic objectives relies on several key areas, including research for knowledge generation, advocacy and consensus-building activities, as well as advisory services and technical cooperation. The Commission's work is structured around three major essential functions: acting as a think tank, mobilising strategic partnerships and operationalising the continent's development policies and strategies. This integrated approach aims to enhance the impact of ECA's initiatives and foster sustainable and inclusive development in Africa.
5. Strategic partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, Regional Economic Communities, the United Nations System, academia, think tanks, the private sector and civil society is essential for the effective implementation of the ECA programme, enabling a holistic, integrated and coordinated approach to effectively address the continent's development challenges.
6. In Central Africa, the mandate of the ECA Sub-Regional Office (SRO-CA) is to promote economic diversification and structural transformation for inclusive and sustainable development.
7. The SRO-CA covers eight (8) Member States of the Sub-Region, namely Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe and Chad. In addition, the SRO-CA supports the two main economic communities in the region, namely the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC). As part of its activities, the SRO-CA works closely

with the Steering Committee for the Restructuring of Regional Economic Communities in Central Africa (COFIL-CER-AC), thus contributing to the harmonisation and alignment process for improved regional integration. Furthermore, the SRO-CA supports the 11 ECCAS Member States in the implementation of initiatives aligned with its mandate. In this regard, Angola and Burundi also benefit from specific support to strengthen their integration into regional dynamics.

8. The SRO-CA has thus focused its efforts on promoting structural transformation by prioritising the development of industrial policies, the management of energy challenges, and the transition to a greener, digital and circular economy.
9. Following the conclusion of the 33rd session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) held in Douala, focusing on the theme 'Made in Central Africa: from the vicious circle to the virtuous circle', the experts of the sub-region adopted the 'Douala Consensus'. This consensus calls for an acceleration of economic diversification and structural transformation, based on sustainable industrialisation, driven by natural resources and trade, in order to achieve sustainable development in Central Africa.
10. The SRO-CA is actively working to implement the Douala Consensus, aimed at helping countries in the sub-region to free themselves from their dependence on raw materials and insulate themselves from vulnerability to external shocks. To this end, the SRO-CA has developed a theory of change that guides States in their investments in favour of economic diversification. This approach focuses on increasing the variety of export products and improving the added value of goods and services, particularly through industrialisation and innovation.
11. This report showcases the main results achieved by the SRO-CA since the 38th session of the ICE; the challenges, lessons and opportunities relating to the implementation of the SRO-CA programme and the strategic framework and results for 2025. The ICE is invited to examine our report and provide guidance to improve the implementation of the Office's work programme.

Part 1: Results achieved between October 2023 and September 2024

12. The objectives of the ECA Sub-Regional Office (SRO-CA) are: to contribute to developing high added-value manufacturing and services sectors, the share of commercial and manufactured products in total exports, deepen regional value chains and improve the competitiveness and productivity of local economies to accelerate economic diversification and structural transformation in Central Africa.
13. In order to achieve this objective, the SRO-CA has identified three groups of strategic results for 2024:
- a. Promoting policy changes conducive to economic diversification in the context of consolidating the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and operationalising the AfCFTA.
 - b. Strengthening the capacity of Member States to mobilise sustainable financing through the integration of natural capital into national accounts.
 - c. Promoting the implementation of bankable projects in support of inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, as well as economic diversification in Central Africa.







Son Excellence, M. Ambassadeur Gilberto Da Piedade VERISSIMO

Président de la Commission de la CEEAC



M. Charles Assamba ONGODO

Vice-Président de la Commission de la CEMAC

PROMOTING POLICY CHANGES CONDUCTIVE TO ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSOLIDATING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OPERATIONALISING THE AfCFTA

14. The SRO-CA is actively engaged in the implementation and operationalisation of the AfCFTA in the sub-region.
15. In cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Business Promotion of Equatorial Guinea, the SRO-CA worked on the development of the AfCFTA national strategy document, which was validated during a workshop held from 11 to 12 June 2024 in Malabo.
16. This achievement marks an important milestone, as all countries within the SRO-CA's remit now have a national AfCFTA strategy document thanks to the strong collaboration between the SRO-CA and the relevant Ministries of Commerce.



17. In addition to the national strategy documents, the regional AfCFTA strategy and the *Central Africa Sub-Region Industrialisation and Economic Diversification Masterplan* (IEDMP-CA) were validated last year in conjunction with the two RECs, namely ECCAS and CEMAC.
18. With all the strategy documents finalised and approved, the SRO-CA is currently focusing on mobilising partners and resources to accelerate the operationalisation of the AfCFTA and industrialisation and economic diversification plans in the sub-region, following the systematic implementation approach of integrative, creative and sustainable solution approaches taking into account new-generation value chains and special economic zones (NGVS and NGSEZ).

19. The Sub-Regional Office, in cooperation with the ECCAS Department of Gender, Human and Social Affairs and with the technical and financial support of the African Trade Policy Centre, has also finalised two reports on gender and trade inclusiveness in the sub-regional context of Central Africa, namely:

- ***Gender and intra-regional trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA***
- ***Characteristics of informal cross-border trade in Central Africa: the case of the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea-Gabon three-border area***

These reports provide recommendations for an inclusive implementation of the AfCFTA and the successful inclusion of women, youth and people living with disabilities, informal traders and other vulnerable groups in regional and global value chains.

20. As part of the acceleration of the operationalisation of the AfCFTA and the IEDMP-CA in the sub-region, the SRO-CA brought together various partners and stakeholders during the AfCFTA Week, organised in conjunction with ECCAS, the African Trade Policy Centre, UNDP and UN WOMEN.

21. The AfCFTA week consisted of 3 workshops on trade and African integration:

- *“Regional Capacity Building Workshop on AfCFTA Rules of Origin and the Central African Free Trade Area”*
- Workshop: *“Maximising the potential of the AfCFTA in Central Africa: promoting inclusiveness and gender equality in regional value chains”*
- (iii) A round table of partners committed to inclusive implementation, the promotion of good business practices, as well as advocacy for a human-rights-based approach in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

22. In collaboration with the ECCAS Common Market Directorate, the capacity-building workshop on rules of origin was aimed at: the private sector, including members of the High Council of Business (HCB-ECCAS), chambers of commerce and other employer organisations; representatives of public administrations, including key AfCFTA negotiators and experts in charge of rules of origin; representatives of the ECCAS Commission; representatives of the CEMAC Commission, etc.



23. This workshop was organised in Douala, from 15 to 17 July 2024, as part of an AfCFTA week, with the support of strategic partners: the AfCFTA Secretariat, the UNDP Regional Service Centre, the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC), the Support Programme for Regional Integration and Investment in Central Africa (PAIRIAC) and the World Customs Organisation.
24. As part of the AfCFTA week, the workshop on gender, inclusiveness and trade was organised in collaboration with the ECCAS Department of Gender, Human and Social Affairs. It constitutes part of the SRO-CA's commitment to promote gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusiveness in regional trade dynamics, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA. The workshop aimed to:
- Present the results and recommendations of the gender and trade reports prepared by the SRO-CA;
 - Discuss priority areas to promote gender equality and inclusiveness within regional value chains;
 - Raise awareness among women and young people involved in regional value chains of the rules of origin of the AfCFTA;
 - Raise awareness among key stakeholders, including women and young people engaged in trade and regional value chains, on new developments to the AfCFTA, including the Protocol on Women and Youth;
 - Showcase the progress made in Africa's regional integration efforts as reflected in the ECA reports on the assessment of regional integration in Africa.

25. The workshop also focused on specific needs and recommendations aimed at young people and people living with disabilities, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

The strategic partners of this workshop organised in Douala (18 to 19 July 2024) included the UNDP Regional Service Centre, the African Trade Policy Centre, UN WOMEN, the office of the Resident Coordinator in Cameroon, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Family of Cameroon.

26. The round table of partners committed to greater inclusiveness, the promotion of good business practices and advocacy for a human-rights-based approach in the implementation of the AfCFTA managed to define future areas of cooperation between the various stakeholders, including ECA-CA, the Regional Integration and Trade Development Division (RITDD) of the ECA, the UNDP Regional Service Centre, the African Trade Policy Centre, UN WOMEN, the WTO Chair of the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon (IRIC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, IIED, the media and the African Union, which agreed to coordinate their actions in support of the implementation of the AfCFTA and the development of special economic zones and other industrial clusters within Central Africa.

27. As part of the AfCFTA week, the eleventh edition of the Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA) report was presented to economic journalists from Central Africa during a parallel session organised on Friday 19 July 2024. This meeting was an opportunity to enhance the capacities of the media in the sub-region in relation to ARIA, as well as the AfCFTA to ensure better promotion of this ECA flagship publication and this Pan-African Agenda.



28. In line with efforts to support the operationalisation of the AfCFTA and IEDMP-CA in the sub-region, the SRO-CA has established a partnership with UNCTAD. This cooperation has helped mobilise resources for a project entitled "***Strengthening the capacities of vulnerable African countries to adopt policy incentives and innovative instruments for the participation of SMEs in regional value chains***" <https://unctad.org/project/participation-of-smes-in-regional-value-chains>. The project, to be implemented in the Central African Republic (as well as five other countries outside Central Africa), will begin in September with consultations with key stakeholders. These consultations are expected to result in the drafting of a country report identifying the challenges, opportunities and gaps in inclusive industrial development in the Central African Republic. The project will focus on women- and youth-owned businesses, with a particular emphasis on informal cross-border traders and the reintegration of demobilised youth.
29. With the constant goal of supporting the private sector, particularly SMEs, the SRO-CA took part in the 9th edition of the International Business, SME and Partnership Exhibition in Yaoundé. The Director of the SRO-CA met with managers of SMEs in the sub-region as well as with researchers in agro-industry to raise awareness of the conditions of their contribution to import substitution in CEMAC.
30. To mark International Francophonie Day, the SRO-CA was invited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cameroon to take part in the first Francophonie National Economic Forum. In his speech, the Director of the SRO-CA called on members of the government, diplomats and the academic world to make the French-speaking region a driving force in the optimal implementation of the AfCFTA.

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF MEMBER STATES TO MOBILISE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF NATURAL CAPITAL INTO NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

31. The *National Environmental Economic Accounting Development Plan (NP-EEAD)* was developed in Cameroon through close collaboration between the SRO-CA and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). This plan, which aims to bolster the consideration of interactions between the economy and the environment, was submitted to the statistical authorities for future adoption during an official ceremony held on 29 November 2023, at the National Institute of Statistics in Yaoundé.
32. The initiative has generated keen interest among stakeholders, including the heads of United Nations agencies in Cameroon and the Resident Coordinator, who were trained on the issues and objectives of the NP-EEAD. These stakeholders are now actively supporting the development of environmental statistics in Cameroon.
33. The NP-EEAD is a key instrument for fostering sustainable economic growth and responsible environmental management. It is designed to integrate biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources into the country's decision-making process. By facilitating the integration of natural capital into national accounts, the plan aims to strengthen Cameroon's capacity to mobilise innovative and green financing, while integrating the value of environmental services into development and investment planning. This approach is crucial to achieving environmental sustainability goals and aligning with the commitments of the 2030 Agenda.

Official presentation of the NP-EEAD to the Director of NIS Cameroon



34. With the aim of strengthening the capacities of Member States in natural capital accounting and greenhouse gas inventory, a webinar entitled "*Natural capital accounting, greenhouse gas inventory, nature-based solutions, mobilising sustainable finance: concepts, tools, methodologies at hand*" was held on 2 February, 2024.

The meeting served as a platform to share knowledge and build the skills of participants on emerging concepts related to the green economy, natural capital accounting, expanding fiscal space and mobilising financing for related development. It also facilitated the establishment of sustainable dialogue and the creation of collaborative frameworks of action, promoting an integrated approach to address contemporary environmental issues and challenges in the sub-region.

35. On 15 February, 2024, the SRO-CA organised a webinar on the forest economy, entitled "*The forest economy of Central Africa: issues, challenges and opportunities for inclusive and sustainable industrialisation*". This event is part of the ECA sub-regional dialogues, in preparation for the 56th session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. This webinar was an opportunity to continue the discussions initiated during a previous event focused on natural capital accounting and greenhouse gas inventories. During this meeting, participants were able to discover the main results of the study conducted by the SRO-CA on the forest economy in Central Africa. The discussions also focused on various avenues for sustainable industrialisation of the forest sector, the related innovative financing mechanisms and the expected role of the carbon credit market in this regard. In addition, recommendations were made for the implementation of an adapted business model, aimed at supporting both sustainable and inclusive industrialisation within the forestry sector.

36. Responding to a request from the Ministry of Economy of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), the SRO-CA, in conjunction with the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) in STP and UN Tourism, supported a project to develop tourism statistics in São Tomé and Príncipe. The project's main objective is to improve the availability of tourism data and develop Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs), essential tools to promote the development of the sector in the country. The TSAs will enable an in-depth understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of the tourism sector on the national economy.

37. The launch of the Tourism Statistics Development Project in São Tomé and Príncipe took place during a workshop entitled "*Tourism Sector Potential and Importance of Quality Data in São Tomé*

and Príncipe”, held in São Tomé, from 9 to 10 July 2024. During this event, the awareness of a wide range of stakeholders was raised to the challenges of the project and the country’s tourism potential discussed, alongside the importance of quality data for sustainable and inclusive tourism as a foundation for the country’s economic diversification.

The next steps include various workshops planned from October 2024, aimed at strengthening the capacities of national experts within the National Technical Committee, which will be responsible for developing the TSAs with the assistance of ECA experts. Furthermore, the SRO-CA aims to mobilise additional partnerships for this crucial project, including multilateral development banks.

38. A first training workshop is scheduled for the end of October, where the experts and focal points designated within the National Committee for the establishment of TSAs will be introduced to the technical reference manuals on tourism statistics, as well as to the specific aspects of the establishment of TSAs.

STP launch of the tourism statistics development project in São Tomé and Príncipe



PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BANKABLE PROJECTS IN SUPPORT OF INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALISATION, AS WELL AS ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA

39. As part of the implementation of the IEDMP-CA and the operationalisation of the value chain and special economic zones approach, the Office initiated and completed two new pre-feasibility study reports, focusing on the leather and wood sectors, bringing the number of industrial value chain studies conducted by the SRO-CA to support the systematic implementation of the high-potential value chain and special economic zones approach in Central Africa and other surrounding sub-regions to eighteen.
40. Through advocacy, stakeholder engagement and SRO support, (i) the joint special economic zone on batteries and electric vehicles (BEVs) and renewable energy between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia has progressed towards the first stage of local development of battery minerals, and (ii) Cameroon is accelerating the implementation of its special economic zone for timber.
41. In the DRC, the pre-feasibility study on the BEV SEZ, financed by AFREXIMBANK and carried out by ARRISE IIP, has been completed. It defined the perimeter of the joint SEZ and validated its financial and environmental competitiveness. This study marks a crucial step for the implementation of the joint SEZ, the location of which is clearly defined in both Ndola (Zambia) and Kolwezi (DRC), in connection with the development of the Lobito corridor, which is continuing with the support of the EU and the AfDB. The pre-feasibility study was validated by the DRC government on 8 July, with the Zambian government having already validated the study in April 2024.



42. During the 5th edition of the Katanga Business Meeting (KBM), a major economic event held on 3 and 4 May 2024 in the mining town of Kolwezi in the province of Lualaba in the DRC, the SRO-CA took the opportunity to share information regarding the implementation of the BEV initiative with key players in the Congolese mining industry. In particular, the SRO-CA informed the private sector of the successful completion of the pre-feasibility study. The intervention aimed to generate interest from the local and international private sector to foster active engagement in this ambitious initiative, the main objective of which is to promote industrialisation and local development of the region's mineral resources, in perfect alignment with the commitment made by the Governments of the DRC and Zambia and their development partners.
43. Under the BEV initiative, Buenassa received an initial grant of USD 3.5 million from the Government of the DRC through the Industry Promotion Fund. This funding represents the first tranche to support the development of a copper and cobalt refining facility (hydrometallurgical plant) by Buenassa. The project involves the construction of a refinery in Lualaba province, scheduled to be commissioned by the end of 2027, with an annual production of 30,000 tonnes of copper cathodes and 5,000 tonnes of cobalt sulphate. This project, supported by the ECA and presented during the Global Africa Business Initiative (GABI) 2023 on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York (21 – 22 September 2023), will play a key role in the development of an integrated value chain around the manufacturing of batteries and electric vehicles, in line with the Government's commitment to promote responsible industrialisation and green regional economic development with a lasting positive impact on local communities.
44. Progress in accelerating the implementation of the BEV initiative in the DRC thus supports the country's efforts to capitalise on its wealth of critical and green minerals, including cobalt, copper, lithium and manganese, and its enormous hydroelectric potential.
45. In Cameroon, the Sub-Regional Office continues to play a leading role in supporting the creation of the SEZ for wood processing in Bertoua.
46. The pre-feasibility study for the timber SEZ has been completed. The country is now working on the full feasibility study covering the processing infrastructure, biomass power plant, railway and forestry components. Land has also been secured and a request has been made for additional land.
47. The completion of the pre-feasibility study is a key step which will enable the launch of detailed technical studies and the securing of financing for the infrastructure.

48. These measures are part of the government's efforts to develop the local timber industry and generate added value. The objective is to make this SEZ a centre of excellence for the sustainable development of the country's forest resources.
49. On 28 March 2024, a kick-off workshop was held for the development of an Industrialisation and Economic Diversification Masterplan (IEDMP) in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, by SRO-CA and UNDP-Congo, in conjunction with the Congolese Government. This event aimed to lay the foundations for a IEDMP, considered essential for operationalising the value creation pillars of Congo's Vision 2048 and the National Development Plan 2022-2026 (NDP 2022-2026).
50. Participants, including senior officials, private sector actors, members of civil society and academics, proposed practical measures to promote industrialisation and economic diversification, with the aim of accelerating the structural transformation of the Congolese economy.
51. The discussions resulted in a roadmap detailing the actions to be undertaken and the responsibilities of the various stakeholders, in order to ensure optimal development and better prospects for effective implementation and rigorous monitoring of the IEDMP. This plan is viewed as a strategic lever to profoundly transform the Congolese productive system and ultimately achieve a prosperous, inclusive, competitive, integrated, resilient, creative, digital and green economy.
52. This plan must be based on a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Congolese economy, public policies informed by evidence drawn from diagnostic analysis reports and robust decision-making tools, including the ongoing diagnostic assessment study and the subsequent pre-feasibility study to develop the known potash reserves with the successful establishment of a new-generation Special Economic Zone (NGSEZ) for which the SRO-CA continues to advocate with several partners and impact investors.
53. As part of the implementation of the IEDMP-CA, the Office completed its study on the state of the digital ecosystem in Gabon, in connection with the establishment of an SEZ oriented towards the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). This report contains an analysis of possible scenarios for Gabonese digital transformation through the prism of the fourth industrial revolution. It also identifies projects that could have a sub-regional dimension by bringing together at least two

countries around collective projects focused on the integration and sharing of science, technology and innovation.

54. This project thus contributes to creating value from one of the dimensions of the shared strategic vision of IEDMP-CA - that of making Central Africa an essential hub of ecological, energy, logistical and digital solutions.
55. As part of its support in the implementation of bankable projects to bolster sustainable and inclusive industrialisation, the SRO-CA facilitated a policy dialogue on the human rights approach to SEZs and the AfCFTA, through a webinar organised jointly with the UNDP Regional Service Centre and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), held on 12 June 2024.
56. The ninety-eight experts participating in this political dialogue formulated recommendations aimed at creating a framework conducive to inclusive and sustainable development, beneficial for both businesses and local communities.
57. They focused in particular on the importance of making SEZs fundamental pillars of sustainable development policy, by promoting local processing of raw materials; the need to invest in the sustainability of industrial activities, with emphasis on effective regeneration and recycling practices; the need to ensure adequate and effective compensation for individuals and communities who lose access to their land resources; strengthening corporate social responsibility; and integrating local people's livelihood activities into the business model to mitigate negative social impacts.
58. As part of this collaboration with these two partners and within an approach to capitalising on knowledge and disseminating good practices, the SRO-CA is working on producing two key deliverables (an in-depth report on the subject and a policy brief) with a view to promoting and strengthening capacities for the adoption of more effective and tailored policies and programmes.
59. Every year, on 20 November, SRO-CA partners with UNIDO and the African Union to support the Africa Industrialisation Day (AID), an initiative agreed between the African Union and the United Nations to promote the industrialisation of the continent. The day aims to reaffirm the commitment of Member States and international partners to industrial development in Africa.
60. In November 2023, the 34th edition of the JIA was held under the theme "*Accelerating Africa's Industrialisation through the Empowerment of African Women in Transformation for an Integrated Market*". This theme highlighted the critical role that women play in the sustainable and inclusive industrialisation of the continent. It also highlights the opportunities offered by local processing of raw materials and the integration of African markets.

61. SRO-CA provided technical and financial support to the organisation of JIA 2023 in Cameroon. SRO-CA also assisted with drafting the joint UNIDO/AU/ECA declaration and presented the challenges of and prospects for women's industrialisation in Africa.
62. By aligning with the dynamics of Agendas 2063 and 2030, this 34th edition of the JIA made it possible to mobilise States, the private sector, civil society and development partners around the common objective of sustainable, inclusive industrialisation focused on the economic empowerment of African women.
63. As part of its advocacy actions, the Director of SRO-CA joined a political dialogue with SMEs, agro-industry stakeholders and the media, on the challenges of import substitution in Central Africa, organised on 24 February 2024, as part of the international and multisectoral business, SME and partnership fair (PROMOTE) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. While presenting the state of play of the implementation of the sub-regional import substitution strategy, the ECA highlighted the role played by SMEs, an important link in the supply and distribution chain of consumer products, in the implementation of this strategy within CEMAC. The creation of special economic zones (SEZs), as catalysts for local industrial production and therefore major players in import substitution, should foster an inclusive approach, allowing local SMEs to participate effectively in the value chains concerned. There is no doubt that participation in these industrial clusters will enable SMEs to overcome administrative and fiscal challenges, access to energy (cost, quality and permanence of electricity), domestication of a culture of quality and its standard and skills development.



ADDITIONAL RESULTS: STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF MEMBER STATES

64. In partnership with the ECA Macroeconomic and Governance Division (MGD), SRO-CA organised a capacity-building workshop on the use of the IPRT tool to bring continental and global agendas in line with their NDPs, as well as to assess their progress towards achieving the SDGs and the goals of Agenda 2063 and the Doha Agenda for Action and thereby strengthen their development planning capacities.
65. This workshop, organised from 22 to 26 July 2024, in cooperation with the Ministries in charge of Planning, targeted the Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries of the continent, in particular Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tomé and Príncipe for Central Africa.
66. The main objective was to introduce planners, statisticians and finance experts from Portuguese-speaking countries and Equatorial Guinea to the features of the IPRT, the handling of the web version of the tool and the accompanying modules. The lessons and knowledge gained from this training will be essential in the design and monitoring of current and future development plans.



Integrated Planning & Reporting Toolkit

SRO-CA supported the capacity-building workshop for Cameroon national experts on statistics related to climate change and natural disasters, organised within the framework of the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Cameroon, and held from 7 to 9 November 2023 in Yaoundé. This event was organised by UNEP, UNSD and UNDRR, in partnership with national institutions, in response to an explicit request from the Cameroonian government. The forty experts in attendance were taught how to use innovative tools such as CISAT and the SENDAI FRAMEWORK MONITOR, which are essential for data collection and analysis in these critical areas.

67. In collaboration with the ECA African Centre for Statistics (ACS), the SRO-CA supports the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon on the methodology for calculating the Turnover

Index (TI) based on companies' VAT returns. This project forms part of the ECA's 'Support for monitoring SDGs in Africa - Component: Administrative Data' Programme. In this context, a technical workshop on the TI methodology was held from 11 to 15 December 2023 in Douala, aimed at developing knowledge and producing an improved draft of the revised methodology for producing the Turnover Index based on administrative data. Participants included experts from the NIS, the ECA, the target national administrations and structures (Ministry in charge of Planning and the Economy, Ministry of Finance, GECAM, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industry and Technological Development).

68. An ECA-INSEE-AFRISTAT technical mission to share INSEE's experience in calculating the TI based on VAT data was held from 30 September to 4 October 2024 in Yaoundé. The mission also aimed to support NIS Cameroon experts in improving the methodology they were required to develop. It saw the completion and validation of the methodology and the TI indices.



CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

69. Through its mandate, the SRO-CA aims to support the transformation of the economies of the Member States of the sub-region, for a smoother transition from a dependence on exports of unprocessed raw commodities to an industrialised and diversified economy, in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This mission satisfies several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular **SDG 8**, which promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as **SDG 9**, focused on building resilient infrastructure and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and faster innovation.
70. SRO-CA's efforts to encourage inclusiveness and greening within Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as well as to foster sustainable industrialisation, constitute significant contributions to these SDGs. By integrating these principles into its initiatives, SRO-CA not only supports economic diversification, but also strengthens the capacities of Central African countries to develop infrastructure and ecosystems that respond to contemporary challenges, while ensuring responsible management of natural resources. This holistic approach is essential to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared fairly and contribute to the sustainable development of the region.
71. Outcome Cluster 1 on *'Policy changes conducive to economic diversification in the context of consolidating the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and operationalising the AfCFTA'* contributes to the achievement of several SDGs, including **SDG 8**, **SDG 9**, and **SDG 10** (Reduced inequality).
72. Through its support for the operationalisation of an inclusive AfCFTA that facilitates equality for all and the promotion of women's economic empowerment, this outcome cluster is also aligned with **SDG 5** (gender equality), as well as **SDG 1** (no poverty) and **SDG 10** (reduced inequality).
73. The integrated and holistic operationalisation of the AfCFTA is aligned with **SDG 17** (partnerships for the goals), through cooperation with Member States, regional communities, the private sector, civil society and all development partners to achieve its ambitious objectives.
74. Strengthening the capacities of Member States to mobilise sustainable financing by integrating natural capital into national accounts (outcome cluster 2) represents a vital step towards achieving several SDGs related to sustainable economic growth, responsible consumption and production, climate action and the sustainable use of land and sea resources.

75. 'Promoting the implementation of bankable projects in support of inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and economic diversification in Central Africa' is fully in keeping with **SDG 8** because, by integrating nature and natural assets into national economic accounts, countries are able to more accurately grasp the economic value of their natural resources, thereby promoting sustainable economic growth and the resulting expansion of the fiscal space.
76. This outcome cluster also contributes to **SDG 12**, which promotes responsible consumption and production, by empowering countries to better manage their natural resources through the development of environmental and economic accounts. Furthermore, the outcome cluster is aligned with the targets of **SDG 13**, which focuses on combating climate change. By accounting for natural capital, countries can assess the impact of their economic activities on the environment and implement strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change.
77. Finally, this approach is also relevant for **SDG 14** (Life below water) and **SDG 15** (Life on land), as it encourages sustainable management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, thereby contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainability of natural resources.
78. For example, the SRO-CA has begun work on the blue economy to promote the sustainable management and conservation of marine resources in Central Africa. The SRO-CA also supports the development of tourism satellite accounts in Sao Tomé and Príncipe.
79. Lastly, Outcome Cluster 3, aimed at promoting the *implementation of bankable projects in support of inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, as well as economic diversification in Central Africa*, is in line with the targets of **SDG 17**, which promotes partnerships for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, as well as cooperation between African countries and international partners to achieve its ambitious objectives.
80. The efforts of the SRO-CA have indeed contributed to the mobilisation of strategic partners to support the development of new generation SEZs (in the DRC, Cameroon and Republic of the Congo) and the implementation of industrialisation and economic diversification plans (IEDMP).
81. These bankable projects are directly linked to the Office's mandate and contribute to **SDGs 8** and **9**, and also aim to reduce inequality (**SDG 10**) and poverty (**SDG 1**).
82. As part of the implementation of the SEZ on batteries and electric vehicles between the DRC and Zambia, the development of the African Centre of Excellence on Batteries (ACEB) contributes to **SDG 4**, aimed at quality education to improve people's lives and sustainable development.
83. Given the intrinsically interconnected nature of the SDGs, the achievement of one goal could contribute to the achievement of others. In this light, the programme implemented by the Office could impact all 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Development.



Part 2: Challenges, Lessons and Opportunities/Partnerships for the implementation of the programme

CHALLENGES

84. Despite the progress made, the SRO-CA faces challenges that hamper the implementation of its programme, including the increasing number of requests for support from Member States and Regional Economic Communities, despite limited resources.
85. The implementation of projects and other activities under the auspices of the Programme is subject to the volatility of political instability and challenges linked to security crises, highlighting the importance of more thorough consideration of the political economy of interventions.
86. For example, the validation of the pre-feasibility study of the SEZ on BEVs in the DRC was delayed due to national political constraints. The recent elections in the country and the inauguration of the new government impacted the implementation schedule of the Project. The strengthening of links between the SRO-CA and the new Government made it possible to accelerate the validation process of the study, which finally took place in August 2024.
87. The implementation of the Special Economic Zone for the NPK Congo value chain project has been delayed due to limited financial resources. However, the feasibility study is underway and the SRO-CA has managed to mobilise the SNU in Congo and the RCO to support this initiative.
88. Administrative burdens and delays in the appointment of focal points and other participants hamper the effective implementation of capacity-building activities and other meetings of the SRO-CA programme. These administrative obstacles also slow down the launch and implementation of crucial projects, particularly those related to the operationalisation of the AfCFTA and the IEDMP.
89. State ownership and difficulties in hosting activities also affect the implementation of the SRO-CA programme. This can lead to a lack of coordination between different levels of governance, along with delays in project implementation.

LESSONS

90. The main lesson learned from the SRO-CA remains the crucial coordinating role of the Member States' authorities at the highest level in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating any economic diversification initiative and strategy. This high-level commitment provides the SRO-CA with the political will necessary to implement its work programme effectively.
91. Another key lesson is the importance of adopting a spirit of collaboration with respect to the unified United Nations system, placing common goals at the heart of priorities. This involves recognising the unique experiences and resources that the United Nations system can offer in addressing the challenges of economic diversification and industrialisation in Central African countries.
92. In addition, the SRO-CA recognises the need to work closely with the Regional Economic Communities (ECCAS, CEMAC, COPIL), other development partners and sub-regional institutions to promote harmonious economic and social development. This integrated approach contributes significantly to the effectiveness of the efforts deployed by the United Nations to support the achievement of the SDGs in the sub-region.
93. More inclusive initiatives to mobilise grassroots social classes on the SRO-CA Agenda make it possible to bring issues of industrialisation and regional integration to the level of field actors involved in these initiatives on a day-to-day basis and at microeconomic levels with a view to 'leaving no one behind', but also to collecting opinions and considerations at grassroots level and thus enriching the consensus at the top on current issues.
94. The partnership with banks and other international and pan-African financial institutions enables an effective shift 'from ideas to actions', thus developing the implementation of integrative projects as well as other key agendas of the Programme. The partnerships with Afreximbank, AFC, BADEA, AfDB on SEZ projects in the DRC, Cameroon, Gabon, etc., are living proof of the possibilities of co-creation that cement smoother implementation of projects by removing the financing constraints which often prove an obstacle.
95. The development, implementation and evaluation of the programme activities within a global framework of the sustainable development goals enables the promotion of an integrated approach, where economic effectiveness and efficiency are integrated with the two-fold environmental and social sustainability of the interventions. The Programme's investments in promoting inclusiveness and greening the AfCFTA and SEZs facilitate the mobilisation of rich strategic partnerships and build innovative business models, which are key to the success of the interventions.

OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERSHIPS

96. As part of the implementation of its Programme, the SRO-CA has worked to promote a 'coalition' approach and to broaden its strategic partnerships with a view to mobilising more resources.
97. The SRO-CA has relied, in particular, on the offices of the Resident Coordinator in the sub-region and the United Nations Country Teams (UNCT), the substantive Divisions and other Sub-Regional Offices of the ECA, pan-African and sub-regional institutions, international financial institutions, the private sector, etc., for a better deployment of its ambitions.
98. The SRO-CA has continued its advocacy with the United Nations Country Teams for better integration of structural transformation, economic diversification, green growth and the implementation of the AfCFTA in the cooperation frameworks and the work of the UN in Central Africa, particularly in the first pillar of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Consequently, the Country Teams and the various cooperation frameworks are increasingly integrating these aspects, along with the regional dimensions, in their Agendas at the level of all countries.
99. Whether it is the project on the report and the 'Gender and intraregional trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA' workshop or that on tourism statistics in STP or the one on the development of SEZs in the various countries, the SRO-CA has always involved the UN, in particular the UNDP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as UN Women, UN Tourism and the various Resident Representative Offices.
100. The SRO-CA has strengthened its partnership with AFC, AFREXIMBANK, BADEA, BDEAC, etc. for the implementation of the Economic Diversification Programme for Central Africa, particularly in the development of SEZs between the DRC and Zambia, in Cameroon, and in the Republic of the Congo.
101. For example, during the IEDMP Republic of the Congo launch workshop, a series of consultations were held with key stakeholders, including the President of the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC). The latter expressed his institution's interest in supporting the industrialisation efforts of Central African countries as well as BDEAC's commitment to playing a leading role in the development of special-purpose vehicles to support Member States in making the most of the sub-region's natural capital.

BDEAC- CEA



102. The SRO-CA has worked to strengthen the human rights dimension in the development of SEZs and in the operationalisation of the AfCFTA, in particular through the partnership entered into with the UNDP Regional Service Centre and the International Institute for Environment and Development and the remarkable contribution of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN WOMEN, pioneers of gender- and rights-based development approaches.
103. The SRO-CA envisages expanding its cooperation with United Nations agencies in the ECCAS region, namely UN WOMEN, ILO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to strengthen the inclusiveness and sustainability aspects of its Agenda.
104. The SRO-CA has reinforced its partnership with CEMAC. With a view to consolidating their long-standing partnership and bringing it in line with the economic challenges faced by the sub-region, the two institutions held a retreat on their framework for collaboration, from 1 to 3 July 2024, at the provisional headquarters of the CEMAC Commission in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The work of this innovative meeting resulted in the identification of key sectors of cooperation for the acceleration of industrialisation driven by import substitution and the implementation of

the AfCFTA. The retreat also made it possible to prepare for the signing of a memorandum of understanding aimed at solidifying and governing the partnership between the two institutions.



105. The SRO-CA is working to build a partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB) to support CEMAC countries in the industrialisation of their forestry sector as well as in the development of natural capital accounting, including smoother implementation of the AfCFTA. In this context, the Director of SRO-CA took part in a panel discussion during the celebration of the International Day of Forests on 21 March 2024, at the invitation of the AfDB. This event also brought together key representatives, including the Executive Secretary of the AfDB African Forest Forum and the Director General for the Central Africa Region of the AfDB. It was agreed that SRO-CA and the AfDB would work together to support States in taking advantage of the decision by CEMAC Heads of State to ban the export of logs, thereby strengthening local capacities and promoting the sustainable management of forest resources.

106. The SRO-CA has completed preliminary negotiations that should lead to the establishment of a memorandum of understanding between the ECA and the Tanger Med group, which operates and develops port, logistics and industrial platforms from Morocco. It manages the Tanger Med port complex, the foremost port in the Mediterranean and Africa. On this site, the group acts as a developer and planner for more than 3,000 hectares of economic activity zones, hosting over

1,300 companies and generating an average annual turnover of 14 billion euros in the automotive, aeronautics, textile, agri-food and logistics sectors.

107. The SRO-CA continues to expand the circle of strategic partnerships with key players in the development of New Generation Special Economic Zones in Central Africa. The Autonomous Port of Kribi, which is setting up an industrial-port complex over 16,000 hectares, is holding in-depth discussions with the SRO-CA to establish a collaboration aimed at supporting the efficient development of this platform in the context of implementing commercial strategies and industrialisation plans in Central Africa.
108. Taking advantage of the intensification of cooperation between Africa and China, the SRO-CA and the Chinese Embassy in Cameroon have agreed to work together on the development of agricultural value chains in Central Africa. The Director of the SRO-CA met with the Chinese Ambassador to Cameroon in the run-up to the 9th edition of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).
109. On the sidelines of the work of COP28, the SRO-CA has continued preliminary negotiations for the establishment of a consortium for the evaluation and enhancement of natural capital and the launch of a carbon credit market.
110. In conjunction with ECCAS, the SRO-CA continued the consultations which began in 2021 in Congo Brazzaville, for the establishment of this consortium, whose main objective is to facilitate the implementation of programmes aimed at enhancing the natural capital of the Congo Basin and transforming it into a lever for sustainable development, in particular through the mobilisation of funds.
111. The SRO-CA has consolidated its cooperation with universities and academic institutions on the implementation of the AfCFTA in Central Africa. In Douala, on 15-17 November 2023, a seminar for researchers, academics and heads of academic institutions helped strengthen the ECA-university partnership for the popularisation of the AfCFTA, on the one hand, and the continuation of discussions on the critical areas of economic diversification, on the other.
112. The SRO-CA ensures the involvement of partners right from the conceptualisation phase of initiatives. This guarantees the successful implementation of its programme and promotes ownership and collective learning, the foundations of effective partnerships and solid coalitions.



Diagnosis of Resident Coordinators in Central Africa



SIAKA COULIBALY

Acting Resident Coordinator, Cameroon

I would particularly like to highlight the remarkable work accomplished by the SRO-CA in the inclusive implementation of the AfCFTA. A notable example is the workshop held in Douala in July 2024 on the theme 'optimising the potential of the AfCFTA in Central Africa: promoting gender equality and inclusiveness in regional value chains', in collaboration with ECCAS and the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) and in partnership with UN WOMEN and UNDP. This workshop successfully mobilised the government of the host country through the Minister for the Advancement of Women and the Family as well as all development partners, including the UN System in Central Africa, in particular UNDP, UN WOMEN, UNHCR, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I would like to express my deepest thanks to the ECA for involving the Office of the Resident Coordinator in this crucial and holistic event embracing economic and social issues related to the AfCFTA process and the need to build a coalition for enhanced coordination of the UN system's support for this process. The workshop was a model of inclusiveness, fully embodying the spirit of 'leaving no one behind'. It integrated the voices of women, young people, persons living with disabilities, refugees, rural communities, women leaders in the private sector and captains of industry, etc., ensuring that all segments of society could be heard and taken into account in the discussions around the implementation of the AfCFTA in Central Africa.

I encourage the SRO-CA to continue working in synergy with the UNS in the countries covered, and particularly in Cameroon, by bringing cross-border issues as well as those of economic diversification to the heart of the Country Teams' Agenda and by emphasising the focus of these issues in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. I would recommend strengthening the synergy between regional and national initiatives in economic integration, particularly through the AfCFTA.

I invite the Office to work more closely with development partners and governments to ensure that policies and interventions are adapted to the actual situation on the ground locally, while remaining aligned with regional objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be ensured for all these initiatives, with the integration of specific inclusiveness indicators to ensure that everyone derives concrete benefits from the results and promises of the AfCFTA, but also those of economic diversification and industrialisation. These monitoring and evaluation mechanisms would allow us to measure the strides we have made and adjust our actions in real time to maximise the impact of SRO-CA interventions in the sub-region.

**ERIC JAN OVERVEST**

Resident Coordinator, Sao Tomé and Príncipe

I would like to highlight the important role played by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa (ECA SRO-CA) in supporting São Tomé and Príncipe through the Dialogue on the Potential of the Tourism Sector and the Importance of Quality Data. This initiative, held from 20-24 July, brought together key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Economy, private sector representatives and civil society, to explore the contribution of tourism to economic diversification. The workshop emphasised the need for accurate and reliable data to support informed decision-making and highlighted the importance of establishing a Tourism Satellite Account (TSA). ECA's technical expertise and support in assessing São Tomé and Príncipe's tourism sector was instrumental in establishing a clear roadmap for the development of sustainable tourism in the country. The joint efforts of ECA, the UNCT/RCO and local authorities ensured that the dialogue was inclusive and that all relevant sectors were involved in building a framework for sustainable tourism.

For the effective implementation of the ECA programme in the coming year, I recommend focusing on strengthening data collection systems, particularly in priority sectors such as tourism. The establishment of the Tourism Satellite Account is critical to understanding the economic impact of the sector and enabling targeted policies for growth. Building local capacity through ongoing training workshops for national experts and ensuring that quality data is collected and analysed on a regular basis will be key to advancing this initiative. In addition, strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration between government institutions, private entities and international partners will ensure a holistic approach to economic diversification. It is also essential to integrate robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress of these efforts and ensure that their impact is felt across different socio-economic sectors, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.



BRUNO GEORGES LEMARQUIS

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the UNECA BSR-AC for its invaluable support for the development of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The initiatives led by UNECA, particularly in the area of battery and electric vehicle value chains, are catalysts for sustainable economic transformation. The launch of the initiative on the development of the Special Economic Zone between Zambia and the DRC, as well as the mobilization of funding to implement the recommendations from the DRC Business Forum in November 2021, demonstrate UNECA's commitment to supporting inclusive economic development in our country. The establishment of the African Center of Excellence on Batteries is also a significant advancement that will strengthen local capacities in the strategic field of battery production. I am particularly impressed by how UNECA has managed to mobilize key partners, such as Afreximbank, to promote the local transformation of battery minerals in an inclusive and green manner. This approach aligns perfectly with sustainable development goals.

I also commend UNECA's role in developing the national strategy for the AfCFTA for the DRC. This strategy, resulting from close collaboration with Congolese authorities and consultations with the private sector and civil society, opens new perspectives for the DRC regarding regional integration and trade development. Additionally, I wish to highlight the importance of the workshop organized by UNECA in Douala in July 2024 on optimizing AfCFTA's potential in Central Africa. This event underscored the need for an inclusive approach to economic integration, paying particular attention to women, youth, and vulnerable populations.

To further enhance UNECA BSR-AC's support for the work of the United Nations system in the DRC, I would recommend mobilizing more of the UN system around structural projects and important value chains and playing a more significant role in policy development for inclusive growth and sustainable development in the DRC. This can be achieved by strengthening coordination mechanisms between UNECA and other UN agencies in the DRC for a more harmonious implementation of projects and programs, as well as intensifying UNECA's participation in UN strategic planning in the DRC, such as UNSDCF 2025-2029.

It is also essential to strengthen national capacities in statistics, evaluation, and monitoring-evaluation, and to support the development of monitoring and evaluation indicators that allow measuring progress made in implementing projects and programs supported by UNECA in the DRC.

Part 3: Strategic framework and expected results for 2025

113. In 2025, the ECA SRO-CA will continue to invest in promoting economic diversification within the sub-region, in line with its mandate to promote sustainable and inclusive economic development. Particular emphasis will be placed on the development of natural capital and the promotion of new generation SEZs, driven by regional, inclusive and sustainable value chains, linked to the local economy and contributing to poverty reduction and the structural transformation of Central Africa.
114. In the same vein, the Office will continue its studies on the certification and monetisation of pure gold of local and regional origin to capitalise on the immense reserve of gold resources available to the economies of Central Africa.
115. In line with its objectives of promoting the transition from design to implementation of economic diversification strategies, programmes and projects, the expected results for 2025 are:
- a. The application of economic and environmental accounting methods by Central African countries, thereby facilitating the recalibration of their national accounts and the mobilisation of innovative financing through the integration of natural capital into the latter and the mobilisation of sustainable financing;
 - b. Support for the operationalisation of three bankable projects in Central Africa promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation;
 - c. SRO-CA technical assistance and policy advocacy supported the development of new generation SEZs in Central Africa, leading to the design and/or operationalisation of industrial clusters aimed at achieving sustainable and inclusive economic diversification.
116. Furthermore, the SRO-CA is committed to strengthening its cooperation with United Nations agencies and Resident Coordinators' Offices in Central Africa, in order to promote economic diversification and industrialisation through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), in accordance with the spirit of the unified United Nations System. The UNSDCF plays a crucial role in coordinating the entire programming cycle, guiding the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the United Nations' collective support for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is the most vital instrument for planning and implementing UN development activities at country level in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Conclusion

117. The SRO-CA has made significant progress in its ambitious approach to promote sustainable economic diversification and profound structural change in Central African States. This progress is part of a comprehensive framework aimed at strengthening competitiveness and fostering robust growth, thereby exploiting the natural assets and resources available to the Member States. The programme is helping consolidate its reputation as a centre of excellence in economic diversification policies and strategies, demonstrating its positive impact on the region.
118. During this financial period, the SRO-CA contributed to the validation of national AfCFTA strategy documents and industrialisation plans, as well as the operationalisation of national and regional strategies. The SRO-CA also contributed to capacity building with respect to the AfCFTA and its instruments, on planning in relation to the Development Agendas, as well as the capacity to mobilise sustainable financing through natural capital accounts, the forest economy and tourism satellite accounts.
119. The SRO-CA continues to support the implementation of bankable projects in support of sustainable and inclusive industrialisation through the development of new generation SEZs.
120. The essential partners in the implementation of SRO-CA activities are the Governments, CEMAC, ECCAS, COPIL, Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), Afreximbank, the AfDB, the agencies of the United Nations System (UNS), the Resident Coordinators of the UNS in Central Africa, the private sector, etc.
121. The SRO-CA is committed to strengthening its relationships with existing actors while expanding its cooperation with other stakeholders essential to development in the sub-region. This strategy aims to create a broader and more closely integrated coalition, thus mobilising diversified resources and expertise to achieve sustainable development and regional integration objectives.
122. The ECA and its Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa wish to express their sincerest gratitude to their various partners and clients and are committed to consolidating the achievements while expanding the impact of the interventions.
123. The ECA and its Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa aspire to strengthen and expand their strategic collaboration in the implementation of the work programme for the remainder of 2024 and for 2025. The goal is to optimise synergies and ensure significant impact in joint initiatives, while aligning with ECA's programmatic priorities and promoting mutually beneficial knowledge sharing.

Appendix

Recommendations from the 38th session of the joint ICE

Following the presentations of the ICE working documents, the resulting lively discussions and debates, as well as the in-depth analyses conducted within the panels and round tables, the Committee was able to identify and formulate the following main recommendations:

To the ECA and technical and financial partners

1. Support economic diversification and value chain development.
2. Support smallholder farmers in building their productive capacities.
3. Build the capacity of young people and women to support the implementation of the AfCFTA.
4. The ARSO is already doing good work in developing an African standard. UN agencies should support capacity building in the standardisation process.
5. The ARSO and standards bodies should continue to support women in facilitating backward linkages in agriculture, with a view to ensuring awareness and compliance with standards.
6. Work with national and regional think tanks to ensure the implementation of the quality policy.
7. Conscious application of the 'Leave No One Behind' principle and inclusion of women and persons with disabilities in their work.
8. Continue to supporting women in facilitating backward linkages in agriculture, with a view to ensuring awareness and adherence to norms and standards.
9. Advocate for women's inclusion at the political level, support women farmers in establishing links at the regional level, facilitate the creation of a platform where women can share information and access appropriate advice.
10. Continue advocacy for the inclusion of women at the political level.
11. Help women farmers organise themselves into networks at the regional level.

To States

In order to boost food trade and improve the implementation of the AfCFTA, governments are urged to:

1. Ensure sustainable and inclusive growth and security in the region.
2. Improve the mobilisation of domestic resources and strengthen business capacity to attract FDI.
3. Ensure political will for the effective functioning of the regulatory framework.
4. Prioritise the development of energy needed for industrialisation.
5. Improve dialogue with the private sector to stimulate investment.

6. Encourage public-private partnerships and continuously raise awareness among the private sector about international trade agreements.

7. Create and review special economic zones to ensure that they become economically and socially viable and profitable.

Regarding quality, governments are encouraged to:

8. Invest in quality infrastructure, including cold storage facilities; enable quality food trade;
9. Promote investment in infrastructure, harmonise standards and develop market strategies, leverage domestic demand and market opportunities while encouraging consumption of domestic food products to reduce dependence on imports;
10. Develop national and regional value chains;
11. Harmonise standards throughout the agricultural value chain, from cultivation to shipping, while focusing on quality and safety;
12. Participate in the technical committee of the ISO international system;
13. Adopt national or regional quality policies;
14. Monitor the application of standards as an indicator of the operationalisation of quality infrastructure;
15. Establish committees for the harmonisation of standards between regions;
16. Adopt mutual recognition of certification and accreditation processes;
17. Establish regional laboratories following the example of ECOWAS;
18. Fund research and development;
19. Prioritise the development and distribution of high-yield, high-quality seeds for local farmers;
20. Encourage the private sector to invest in refrigerated transport systems for the rapid transfer of food products between countries

In order to boost food trade and improve the implementation of the AfCFTA, governments are invited to:

21. Comply with their AfCFTA commitments and adopt national laws to align with AfCFTA commitments;
22. Leverage the AfCFTA to enhance food security by promoting increased intra-regional trade;
23. Encourage increased investment in the food sectors of Eastern and Central Africa, to strengthen competitiveness on regional markets;
24. Improve market links, provide technical and financial support and increase the capacity of smallholder farmers, including through outreach services;
25. Improve cross-border payment systems;
26. Develop policies and implement programmes to support youth and women entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector;
27. Address challenges in implementing harmonised standards and strengthen cooperation among standards offices in all countries;
28. Invest more in agricultural productivity programmes through the implementation of policies and technologies that improve agricultural productivity, in order to ensure food security;
29. Adopt open-sky policies to reduce freight costs and facilitate trade in Central and East Africa;

To Regional Economic Communities

1. Consider having specific countries specialised in standardisation, accreditation and specific testing of a product;
2. Encourage cooperation within RECs, to incentivise stronger Member States to support weaker Member States. This applies to all RECs;
3. Help women farmers access regional markets
4. Support gender mainstreaming, help women working in the agricultural system access appropriate advice on the efficient use of quality inputs.
5. Advocate for women's inclusion at the policy level, support women farmers in building regional linkages, facilitate the creation of a platform where women can share information and access appropriate advice.

To the Private Sector

1. Define products, technologies and solutions to drive growth in stock markets,
2. Addressing the logistical challenges of transporting agricultural products from airports to supermarkets is essential for African businesses to compete in regional and international markets; leveraging existing opportunities to harness big data to target the development of Africa's food industry is crucial. Data can help identify market trends and guide investments,
3. Play a role in providing funds to profitable businesses,
4. Combat and reduce illicit trade.

List of key events from October 2023 to September 2024

- **Conference of the WTO Chair of the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon on the theme 'Energy and food security and economic resilience of Central African countries'.**
The SRO-CA took part in the second international conference organised by the WTO Chair of the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon at the University of Yaoundé 2, on 21 November 2023, on the theme 'Energy and food security and economic resilience of Central African countries'. The Director of the SRO-CA invited all stakeholders to form a coalition that would enable governments, NGOs and the private sector to act together to resolve energy insecurity and food insecurity for economic resilience. Diplomacy and academia should work hand in hand for common agricultural policies in Africa.
- **Webinar on Cooperation on Quality Infrastructure in Central and Eastern Africa on Wood and Leather Value Chains, held on 25 January 2024.**
This webinar followed the recommendations of the 2023 Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Central and Eastern Africa.
- **Webinar on Natural Capital organised on 31 January 2024.**
This webinar followed the 2nd Three Basins Summit held in Brazzaville in which SRO-CA participated.
- **Webinar on 'Natural capital accounting, greenhouse gas inventory, nature-based solutions, mobilising sustainable finance: concepts, tools, methodologies at your fingertips'.**
Organised on 2 February 2024, this webinar was an opportunity for the SRO-CA to strengthen stakeholders' understanding and knowledge of natural capital accounting approaches, greenhouse gas inventory and emerging concepts of the green economy.
- **Webinar 'Forest Economy of Central Africa: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialisation'.**
Organised on 15 February 2024, this webinar was part of the ECA sub-regional dialogues in preparation for the 56th session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.
- **Awareness raising of Central African SMEs on import substitution and the AfCFTA, 24 February 2024.**
On the sidelines of the Yaoundé International Business, SME and Partnership Exhibition (Promote), the ECA Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa held discussions with economic operators and agro-industry researchers on the conditions for successful import substitution through SMEs. The result was a plea from SMEs to benefit from ECA's technical support in the upcoming editions of Promote.

- **International Francophonie Day 2024 - Economic Francophonie Forum of Cameroon, 14 March 2024.**
The ECA Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa participated in the first meeting to reflect on the economic challenges for French-speaking Africa. In response to diplomatic representations from French-speaking countries in Africa and around the world, international organisations, the private sector and the academic world, the ECA is encouraging French-speaking countries in Africa to develop French-speaking value chains and thus take full advantage of the AfCFTA.
- **Kick-off workshop for the development of an Industrialisation and Economic Diversification Masterplan (IEDMP) in the Republic of the Congo, organised in Brazzaville on 28 March 2024.**
The SRO-CA and UNDP-Congo jointly organised, in partnership with the Government of Congo, a one-day workshop for the development of the IEDMP Congo. The objective of this workshop was to identify practical actions that could lead to the development and implementation of an IEDMP in Congo. The workshop resulted in a roadmap outlining clear actions and roles to guide the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the IEDMP Congo.
- **Capacity-Building Workshop on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) organised by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) of the Economic Commission for Africa by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, from 4 March to 12 April 2024.**
The SRO-CA has supported the participation of its Member States in the virtual training, which aimed to provide a good opportunity for experts from Member States to acquire or refresh their knowledge on international statistical standards for measuring interactions between the environment and the economy set out in the SEEA Central Framework (SEEA-CF).
- **Capacity building of national experts of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in the development of the methodology for constructing the multidimensional poverty index.**
Organised from 15 to 17 May, 2024, with the support of the African Centre for Statistics of the ECA, and in conjunction with the RCO and the National Institute of Statistics (INEGE), the SRO-CA promotes (i) the capacity building of national experts on the concept of multidimensional poverty and existing and appropriate estimation approaches, (ii) the adoption of a concerted approach to estimating multidimensional poverty in Equatorial Guinea, in order to better exploit the results of the 2nd Household Survey to estimate non-monetary poverty.
- **Conference of Mining Ministers of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific & International Mining Convention and Exhibitions of Cameroon (CIMEC), 22-23 May 2024**

The SRO-CA played a major role in holding the Conference of Mining Ministers of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States organised by the Cameroonian government and chaired by the Prime Minister. The Government of the Republic of Cameroon coupled this event with the 4th edition of the International Mining Convention and Exhibitions during which the country presented its ambitions for the transition from a country of potential to a status of mining producing industry. At these two events, the SRO-CA stressed the thorny issues of certification of precious metals, particularly gold, the strengthening of regional cooperation for the development of regional value chains and the development of skills.

- **Council of Ministers for the Restructuring of Regional Economic Communities in Central Africa, 3-7 June 2024**

The 6th meeting of the Council of Ministers for the Restructuring of Regional Economic Communities in Central Africa was held in Yaoundé from 3 to 7 June 2024. A partner in the process since its inception, the SRO-CA presented the Report on the State of Regional Integration in the ECCAS-CEMAC-CEPGL Zone. It shows that the overall performance of the sub-region is encouraging. The Office strongly recommended that States, RECs and partners focus the economic integration process on the development of Regional Value Chains. In view of the AfCFTA, the restructuring of RECs represents an opportunity to deepen the market, intensify investments and create value for the well-being of populations.

- **Validation workshop of the AfCFTA strategy document for Equatorial Guinea, organised in Malabo from 11-12 June 2024**

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Business Promotion, in cooperation with the ECA, organised a workshop where the national strategy for the implementation of the AfCFTA in Equatorial Guinea was presented and validated by experts from different public administrations, the private sector, and civil society.

- **Webinar 'Fostering Responsible Business Practices for Inclusive and Sustainable SEZs in Africa: Regional and International Perspectives'**

Organised on 12 June 2024, in partnership with the UNDP Regional Service Centre and IIED, the SRO-CA brought together development partners, Member States, CSOs, academia, etc., to discuss the human rights-based model, AfCFTA and sustainable SEZs in Africa.

- **Central African Economic Forum, 19-24 June 2024.**

The Office actively participated in the Central African Economic Forum (CEAF2024), which was held in Yaoundé from 19 to 21 June 2024 and whose theme was Economic Integration and Sub-Regional Common Market: Investing in Local SMEs for their influence in the CEMAC-ECCAS zone. The Office's experts

took part in several sessions and panels of the Forum during which they showcased presentations on digital transformation, quality infrastructure and sustainable development goals and SMEs.

- **Celebration of the 4th Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Day in Cameroon, 27 June 2024**

As part of the celebration of the 4th Day of Micro, Small-Sized and Medium Enterprises, established by the United Nations General Assembly, the Office was invited to take part in a conference/debate moderated by the Minister of SMEs, Social Economy and Crafts. This event allowed the Office to present the main actions carried out by the ECA to promote industrialisation and economic diversification, as well as actions to improve the role and contribution of SMEs within this dynamic.

- **ECA-CEMAC Retreat held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, from 1-3 July 2024.**

The CEMAC Commission hosted the ECA Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa at its interim headquarters in Malabo to hold the first-ever retreat between the two organisations. This meeting resulted in the strengthening of mutual understanding and the technical validation of the priorities of the renewed cooperation framework between the two organisations. To accelerate economic diversification and the implementation of the AfCFTA in the sub-region through a sound partnership, CEMAC and the ECA will sign a MoU and adopt a Joint Action Plan.

- **Dialogue on the potential of the tourism sector and the importance of quality data in São Tomé and Príncipe, organised from 9 to 10 July 2024.**

Organised in conjunction with the Ministry of Planning and Finance and the RCO in São Tomé and Príncipe, the workshop aimed to raise awareness among participants from the public administration, the private sector, academia and civil society on the objectives of the Tourism Satellite Accounts Development Project in STP. It also provided an opportunity to discuss the potential of the tourism sector, identify its challenges and explore growth opportunities, as well as collect data on the current state of tourism statistics in the country.

- As part of the operationalisation of the AfCFTA, the SRO-CA organised the AfCFTA Week from 15-20 July in cooperation with the ECCAS and the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC). This week consisted of three (3) workshops:

- **A capacity-building workshop on Rules of Origin**, organised from 15 to 17 July, in conjunction with the ECCAS Common Market Directorate, CAPC, the UNDP Regional Service Centre, PAIRIAC and the World Customs Organisation. This workshop targeted representatives of national administrations by country, including chief negotiators and experts in charge of rules of origin, as well as the private sector, including members of the High Council for Central African Affairs, representatives of chambers of commerce and other employer organisations, as well as agricultural producer organisations.

- **The workshop ‘optimising the potential of the AfCFTA in Central Africa by promoting inclusiveness and gender equality in regional value chains’,** organised from 18-19 July, in collaboration with the Commission in charge of the promotion of Gender, Human and Social Development of ECCAS and the CAPC, and in partnership with the UNDP Regional Service Centre and UN WOMEN. This workshop saw the mobilisation of the entire UNS in Cameroon and the participation of the Minister for the Promotion of Women and the Family of Cameroon. It began with the launch of the report: *Gender and intraregional trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA*.
 - **The round table of partners committed to better inclusiveness, the promotion of good business practices as well as advocacy for a human-rights-based approach in the implementation of the AfCFTA** organised on 20 July 2024.
- **Capacity-Building Workshop on the Use of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Tool (IPRT) for Portuguese- and Spanish-Speaking Countries, held from 22-26 July 2024.**
Organised in partnership with the Governance and Macroeconomic Issues Division of the ECA and in collaboration with the United Nations Resident Coordinators, this workshop targeted Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tomé and Príncipe for Central Africa.
 - **Webinar - Artificial Intelligence (AI) with development potential: challenges and opportunities.**
Organised on 2 October 2024 as part of the preparations for the 2024 Joint Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts and in line with the ICSOE theme. This webinar aimed to explore challenges connected with the integration of AI in Africa, in preparation for the meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of Central and Eastern African States scheduled for October 2024 in Yaoundé. The aim was to stimulate dialogue, share best practices, identify challenges in the adoption of AI and develop recommendations for Africa to leverage the potential of AI while addressing associated challenges.
 - **Webinar on the Blue Economy**
Organised on 2 October 2024 as part of the preparations for the 2024 Joint Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts and in line with the ICSOE theme. The objective of this webinar was to raise awareness of the innovative solutions available for a transition to an inclusive and climate-resilient blue economy. The proposal is for a panel of experts to present and discuss some of these solutions.

Publications and Communities of Practice

Publications

- *Reports and technical documents*

- **National Plan for the Development of Economic and Environmental Accounting in Cameroon.**

This national plan promotes the development of the national statistical system to improve decision-making related to sustainable development and the green economy. The document, finalised and submitted to the National Institute of Statistics, is awaiting approval from the Cameroonian authorities.

- **Report on the State of Economic Diversification in Central Africa, 2023 Edition.**

The main objective of this flagship report is to produce economic analyses and suggest policy recommendations for a structural transformation that will promote sustainable development in the sub-region.

- **National AfCFTA Strategy Document for the CAR.**

Developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, it aims to take advantage of the opportunities of the AfCFTA to facilitate an expansion of trade and investments in the CAR.

- **Strategic framework for the development of new-generation special economic zones in Central Africa and operationalisation guide.**

This document presents the different stages of development of SEZs at both the strategic and operational levels.

- **Gender and intraregional trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA.**

The result of the collaboration between ECCAS (Commissioner in charge of the promotion of Gender, Human and Social Development - ECCAS) and the African Trade Policy Centre, this report provides an overview of gender, inclusiveness and trade for an inclusive operationalisation of the AfCFTA.

- **Characteristics of informal cross-border trade in Central Africa: the case of the Cameroon -Equatorial Guinea-Gabon three-border zone**

This report provides an overview of cross-border trade in the particular three-border area between Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. It focuses in particular on the collection of qualitative data on informal cross-border trade.

- *Policy Brief*

- **Policy Brief on the Environmental Economic Accounting System: Environmental Economic Accounting Development Plan in Cameroon.**

This Policy Brief discusses the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) in its various forms: what it means and what is needed to implement it, particularly for a region such as Central Africa to benefit from it. It shows how the National Environmental Economic Accounting Development Plan developed for Cameroon can

contribute to strengthening a more effective and efficient national statistical system, as well as to achieving national development objectives.

- **The AfCFTA: catalyst for the economic empowerment of women and youth in Central Africa.**

Taken from the report Gender and Intra-regional Trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA, this document offers targeted recommendations for the operationalisation of an inclusive AfCFTA in the sub-region.

- **Intra-regional trade in Central Africa: Keys to an inclusive AfCFTA through digital technology.**

From the report Gender and intra-regional trade in Central Africa: opportunities and challenges for an inclusive AfCFTA

Brochure

- **Industrialisation of CEMAC economies: towards the development of local content for the deepening of the sub-regional market and the AfCFTA.**

This Brochure lists all the achievements of CEMAC-ECA cooperation in relation to regional integration, industrialisation, infrastructure, digital technology, trade and economic and financial structural reforms.

CoP

- **The Community of Practice (CoP) to build and strengthen cooperation frameworks on quality infrastructure in Central Africa.**

Following the recommendations of the ICSOE 2023, on 2 November 2023, the CoP on Quality Infrastructure in Central Africa held its kick-off meeting, bringing together 42 participants from the private sector, public sector, civil society organisations, international organisations and academia. This webinar, organised in partnership with ARSO, provided a platform for discussion on the urgency for Member States to adopt quality standards and criteria as essential elements to boost the AfCFTA in Central Africa. The meeting also allowed the SRO-CA to begin the process of creating the Community of Practice, which will facilitate knowledge sharing among national standardisation agencies of Member States.

- **The Community of Practice to support the Industrialisation and Economic Diversification Masterplan of Chad.**

The SRO-CA designed the IEDMP-Chad interactive thematic platform, structuring IEDMP material and content for easy uploading to the website. This platform was customised to meet the specific requirements of the team leader and was integrated with the websites of relevant stakeholders, thus promoting better connectivity and increased awareness. In addition, an online discussion platform was integrated, accompanied by a secure repository to host sensitive documents, accessible only to duly authorised experts. An online collaboration service was also set up, allowing IEDMP members to work together on the preparation and joint development of documents, reports and studies in real time. Currently, the platform has a total of 73 users.

