UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.: Limited
E/ECA-EA-SA/ICSOE/2026/11
November 2026

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
SUB REGIONAL OFFICE FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

Joint Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of Eastern and Southern Africa

10 - 13 November 2026
Windhoek, Namibia

Report on the Work of ECA in Southern Africa

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Summary

This report serves as an instrument by which member States, through the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE), assess the relevance of the work of the ECA's SRO-SA, and provide guidance for the future work of ECA in the subregion. In this regard, the report highlights key programmed activities undertaken by ECA in Southern Africa and results achieved since the last ICSOE Session, held in October 2025. It also outlines challenges encountered and lessons learned in implementing the work programme for the period under review. The report also highlights key elements of the Work Programme for 2027.

The Committee is invited to consider the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and legislative authority

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations, has a mandate to foster economic and social development of its member States, promote regional integration and advance international cooperation for Africa's development. In its dual role as the regional arm of the UN and as a key component of the African institutional landscape, ECA is mandated to operate at both the regional and subregional levels to harness resources and bring them to bear on Africa's priorities. The Commission has five subregional offices (SROs) that serve the five subregions of the continent, namely North, West, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.

2. The Subregional Office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA) covers eleven member States namely Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. As with the other Subregional Offices, SRO-SA derives its programmatic direction and guidance from, and reports to the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE), constituted by the Commission Resolution 826 of 1977 and General Assembly Resolution 40/243, as a principal platform for strategic engagement with member States and other stakeholders on policy and programmatic issues of priority to the subregion. Recommendations and decisions of each ICSOE are then transmitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, which in turn reports to the Economic and Social Council, and thereon to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

1.2 Mandate and strategic orientation

3. In line with the ECA strategic direction, SRO-SA has been designated as the centre of excellence for promoting inclusive industrialization aimed at fostering sustainable economic growth and reducing poverty and inequality in the Southern Africa subregion through: (i) enhancing the capacity of member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) to promote and develop inclusive industrialization policies, national and regional plans and institutional frameworks that are aligned with the goals of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embodied in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development; and (ii) strengthening the capacity of member States and RECs to design and implement subregional initiatives aimed at deepening regional integration and strengthening capacities to achieve inclusive industrialization for the reduction of poverty and inequality in Southern Africa.

4. To achieve the objective of this strategic orientation, each ECA entity, including its SROs follows an annual programming cycle which is informed by current and emerging

development issues and is anchored on international, regional and sub regional development agendas to prepare its annual Programme of Work. This entails policy research; advisory services and provision of technical support to member States, RECs, IGOs, civil society and the private sector around key thematic areas of focus, including industrialization, regional integration and trade, private sector development and sustainable development. Using its convening power, SRO-SA promotes policy analysis, policy dialogue and consensus building in addressing development challenges in the Southern Africa region.

1.3 Objectives of the report

5. The report highlights key programme activities undertaken by ECA from the last ICSOE session held in October 2025 in Ezulwini, under the guidance of its Bureau, chaired by the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini. It also highlights results achieved, challenges encountered, and lessons learned thus far in implementing these activities. The report also provides a summary of key initiatives programmed for implementation in 2027. Furthermore, it serves as an instrument by which member States, through the ICSOE, assess the relevance of the work of SRO-SA, and provide guidance for the future work of ECA in the Southern Africa subregion.

2. Highlights of key activities implemented

6. Firstly, the report provides highlights of the last ICSOE session, which was held in October 2025. Then, details of key interventions implemented, and results achieved are highlighted under SRO-SA's key thematic areas: *deepening the policy environment for inclusive industrialization; enhancing the transition to inclusive green economies; promoting regional integration and trade*; and *strengthening development planning in Southern Africa.*

2.1 Session of 31st Annual Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of Southern Africa

7. The thirty-first session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE) of Southern Africa was organized in a hybrid format from 30 - 31 October 2025 in Ezulwini, Eswatini under the theme: *Unlocking AfCFTA's Potential: Building Value Chains and Overcoming Barriers to Trade in Southern Africa*. The Session was Chaired by the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Delegations and participants attended from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

8. Honourable Mr. Neil Herman Rijkenberg, Minister of Finance, Eswatini, in a keynote address officially opened the ICSOE meeting following welcome remarks by ECA's SRO-SA Director, Ms. Eunice Kamwendo; UN Resident Coordinator, Eswatini, Mr. George Wachira; and remarks by Chair, Bureau of the thirtieth session of the ICSOE Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Zambia, Director: Development Planning, Mr. Davison Mapiza. Goodwill messages from development partners were delivered by Ms. Motheba Malibeng, Programme Officer-Regional Trade, SADC Secretariat; and by Ms. Kisa Nkhoma, Senior Programme Officer-Trade Facilitation, AUDA-NEPAD.

9. National, regional and international organizations and Government Ministries represented at the Meeting included the; Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA); Ministry of Trade and Industry, Botswana; Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Eswatini; Ministry of Trade and Industry, Lesotho; Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Malawi; Ministry of Trade and Industry, Malawi; Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection, Mauritius; Ministry of Industrialization, Business, Trade and Tourism, Malawi; Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade, Namibia; Ministry of Finance, Mozambique; SADC Secretariat; Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Zambia; United Nations Resident Coordinator for Eswatini; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Zimbabwe.

10. The ICSOE session was preceded by an ad hoc expert group meeting, held on 29 October 2025. The expert group meeting reviewed a study that was undertaken by SRO-SA on *"Advancing Intra-Regional Trade in Southern Africa through Addressing Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers*". The experts proffered recommendations towards advancing intra-regional trade in Southern Africa through addressing non-tariff barriers (NTBs), for consideration by member States, RECs and other actors, including on the need to judiciously implement the directions provided by the subregional protocols (such as the SADC Protocol on Trade and Tripartite Agreements) and continental protocols on liberalized trade to facilitate and smoothen both intra-regional trade and trade within the AfCFTA; simplify and harmonize Rules of Origin requirements across RECs to enhance cross border trade; strengthen and establish national NTBs Monitoring Committees across member States operating within harmonized policy and regulatory environments with adequate resources and inclusive of all stakeholders; and strengthen the implementation of coordinated border management systems across the region to create a uniform trading environment and minimize impediments to trade.

11. The ICSOE considered three statutory reports submitted by the secretariat: (i) *Report on recent economic and social conditions in Southern Africa*; *(ii) Report on the work of ECA in Southern Africa; and (iii) Report on the implementation of regional and international agendas and other special initiatives in Southern Africa*, which examined the

impacts of climate change on trade and the economies of the 11 member States, and tracked the status of submissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans). The Committee also discussed the findings and recommendations of a thematic study on *building value chains and overcoming barriers to trade in Southern Africa by unlocking the AfCFTA's potential*. The Committee also reviewed and endorsed the recommendations of the expert group meeting on advancing intra-regional trade in the subregion through addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers. The Committee endorsed the *Report on the Work of ECA in Southern Africa* and the Work Programme for 2026.

12. The Committee called upon member States, with support from development partners, to among others, align industrial policies with such emerging issues as climate change and frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence; deepen industrialization and trade by building regional value chains through value addition, the development of regional linkages, the harmonization of standards, and digitalization; accelerate implementation of the Protocol to the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA on Digital Trade, including by aligning national legislation and information and communications technology infrastructure with the provisions on data governance, cybersecurity and interoperability in that Protocol; invest in customs digitalization and connectivity infrastructure by supporting fully automated customs systems, single-window platforms, better internet connectivity and cross-border data exchange mechanisms; institutionalize monitoring, benchmarking and diagnostic tools

Box.1. Examples of recent and ongoing support to member States in line with the *theme* of 31st session of ICSOE of Southern Africa

"Unlocking AfCFTA's Potential: Building Value Chains and Overcoming Barriers to Trade in Southern Africa"

- **Angola:** National AfCFTA Strategy and Implementation Plan developed and validated
- **Botswana:** Project to undertake a Feasibility study on developing a Competitive Beef Value Chain rolled out (funded by BADEA); part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (under development)
- **Eswatini:** Leather Sector Joint Procurement Framework developed, aimed at supporting footwear leather-goods MSMEs
- **Lesotho:** Capacity building of MSMEs on using digital tools to trade under regional trade agreements (SCAU, SADC-FTA) and the AfCFTA; part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (under development)
- **Malawi:** Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028)
- **Mauritius:** Study on Developing Green and Circular Value Chains in Southern Africa in the Context of the AfCFTA: A case study of Mauritius
- **Mozambique:** Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028); Technical assistance in developing its National Industrial Law and Regulations for Industrial Parks;
- **Namibia:** Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028); and Step-by-Step Guide on Trading in Goods under AfCFTA developed and validated; and part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database
- **South Africa:** Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028); and part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (under development)
- **Zambia:** Step-by-Step Guide on Trading in Goods under AfCFTA; Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028); Technical support towards development National Local Content Strategy; and part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (under development)
- **Zimbabwe:** Project on Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028); and part of the Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (under development)

to track progress on the implementation of the Agreement, trade facilitation initiatives and digital integration at borders; support small-scale traders through simplified digital tools and facilitate their access to digital payment options, such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System and local financial intermediaries; finalize national adaptation plans, ensuring that they are aligned with updated nationally determined contributions and national development plans, and mobilize climate finance for resilient industrialization and inclusive growth; and leverage public-private partnerships and regional investment mechanisms to promote green manufacturing, transformation and low-carbon value chains for decent jobs.

13. In this regard, ECA continued to provide support to member States in the subregion and implement interventions of priority to the subregion in line with the theme of the 31st ICSOE session (*Box.1*).

2.2 Deepening the policy environment for inclusive industrialization

14. With the ECA's technical support, the Government of Zambia initiated the review of its National Local Content Strategy and developing a successor Strategy and the Legal and Regulatory Framework. This included facilitating a series of high-level consultative meetings held from 30 March – 1 April 2026 in Ndola; 7-8 April 2026 in Lusaka; 22-22 August 2026 in Livingstone; and 10-11 September 2026 in Kabwe. These consultative meetings brought together a combined total of 105 stakeholders that included policymakers, private sector actors (including MSMEs), academia, civil society and development partners. The broad consultative process, built consensus on developing a new Strategy that ensures that local content plays a role in the industrialization process in line with the country's National Industrial Policy, including the integration and inclusion of MSMEs in the domestic industry. Furthermore, this consultative engagement also identified agro processing; textiles and garments; engineering; wood and wood products; leather and leather products; mineral beneficiation (both metallic and non-metallic); and pharmaceuticals as priority subsectors of the Strategy as an impactful blueprint to promote, among others, the inclusive industrialization agenda. As a result, the successor *National Local Content Strategy and the Regulatory Framework* has since been developed and will be validated by stakeholders and experts by the end of 2026.

15. Furthermore, based on the analytical work undertaken, SRO-SA in collaboration with UNDP, developed the *Local Content Policy Framework and Supplier Development Programme Toolkit*, that would support policymakers in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of effective local content initiatives. The Framework and Toolkit provides global, regional, and national experiences and best practices in local content policy implementation; review policy gaps, constraints, and opportunities within existing local content and supplier development approaches; develop a structured step-by-

step methodology for designing and operationalizing local content frameworks; provide practical policy instruments, implementation tools, incentive mechanisms, procurement frameworks, and monitoring systems; and propose strategies for integrating MSMEs into local, regional, and global value chains. The Framework and Toolkit, whose validation by stakeholders and experts is scheduled for end of November 2026, are intended to equip governments with actionable instruments for maximizing domestic economic benefits from investment and industrial activities while advancing sustainable industrialization, enterprise development, employment creation, and regional economic transformation.

16. In supporting the regional automotive value chain development in Southern Africa, SRO-SA organized a *Capacity Building Workshop for SMEs on Market Access and Market Information for Supplying Automotive Products through Sustainable Procurement*, from 11–13 November 2025 in Windhoek, Namibia. The workshop forms part of a broader Afreximbank-funded project being implemented by ECA on de-risking value chains in Africa, under the initiative on *Strengthened Automotive Capacities in Africa contributing to the Integrated Regional Value Chain*. The initiative includes the design of an *Automotive Sustainable Supplier-Finder Database (ASSFiD)* which will facilitate business linkages and sourcing of supply raw materials. The three-day workshop brought together 35 participants drawn from policymakers, SME representatives, development partners, and private sector stakeholders from six countries in the subregion covered under the project namely, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to integrate sector players into the automotive value chains. The workshop provided a platform for sharing practical experiences from industry experts and practitioners on how the ASSFiD can unlock new market access, strengthen regional linkages, support cross-border sourcing, and drive sustainable procurement across the automotive regional value chain.

17. Additionally, SRO-SA initiated engagement with the Government of Mozambique and UN partners in connection with the country's request for ECA's technical assistance in developing its *Regulations for Industrial Parks*. Once developed, the *Regulations* would facilitate the establishment and governance of industrial parks and align with the mandate of local capacity building and technology transfer to domestic MSMEs, actively integrating them into the national industrialization agenda. This framework would also ensure that both foreign and local investors do not simply extract resources but facilitate beneficiation and value addition, with benefits to the wider national economy. Engagement is ongoing, with the Government of Mozambique, through the Ministry of Economy, and other stakeholders and partners on the development on the development of the *Regulations for Industrial Parks*.

18. SRO-SA also made further progress towards providing technical support the Government of Botswana, including the identification of an expert consultancy firm to undertake the *Feasibility Study on developing a Competitive Beef Value Chain*, with

financing from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), under the modalities contained in a tripartite Letter of Exchange by ECA, BADEA and the Government of Botswana. The feasibility study, which analyses, among others, the industrial capacities of national producers to rear, process and trade beef and beef products, as well as explore the potential to link into regional value chains, will be completed in the first quarter of 2027.

19. Further, the Subregional Office rolled out an initiative aimed at promoting development of the leather value chain in Southern Africa. Under this initiative, SRO-SA working in partnership with the Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI) provided technical support to the Government of Eswatini on developing the *Leather Sector Joint Procurement Framework*, aimed at supporting footwear leather-goods MSMEs in Eswatini by establishing and effective bulk sourcing arrangement that would ensure reliable access to quality raw materials, accessories and other production inputs; helping local enterprises to operate more efficiently. The framework was reviewed and validated at a workshop, held in Ezulwini from 6-7 October 2026. The workshop also provided a platform at which industry stakeholders shared practical experiences, identified opportunities and challenges, and made recommendations to address the realities faced by local leather artisans and MSMEs, to unlock value in the country's leather subsector. If successfully implemented, Eswatini's leather value chain development model could serve as a scalable blueprint for other countries across Southern Africa.

20. The Subregional Office continued to implement the three-year United Nations Development Account funded project on *"Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (2025-2028*)" targeting six member States, namely Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project seeks to strengthen capacities of member States to develop green economy policies, support MSMEs, and facilitate the integration of energy transition plans with industrial policies. In 2026, SRO-SA undertook four regional studies on *green industrialisation policies*; *private sector and circular economy*; *industrial upgrading and sequencing*; and *renewable energy technologies* that were validated at five national workshops held in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The workshops provided an opportunity for national stakeholders and experts in each country to critically review methodologies, findings and recommendations of the four studies, aimed at proving evidence for policy formulation on accelerating green and inclusive industrialisation in Southern Africa.

2.3 Enhancing the transition to inclusive green economies in Southern Africa

21. As part of technical support and policy advice provided to the SADC Secretariat, SRO-SA in close collaboration with ECA's Technology, Innovation, Connectivity and

Infrastructure Division (TICID), facilitated an expert group meeting from 21-23 January 2026 in Lusaka, Zambia that reviewed and validated the draft *SADC Just Energy Transition Policy Framework* in readiness for its approval by the Council of SADC Ministers responsible for Energy, and subsequent adoption by the Summit of the SADC Heads of State later in 2026. The meeting brought together senior officials from SADC countries, regional research and development institutions, power utilities, national and regulatory institutions, a range of experts and private-sector representatives, and members of civil society and critically validated and built consensus around the Policy Framework. This Framework outlines essential policy imperatives that guide the region's approach to just energy transition. Furthermore, an *Action Plan* to guide the implementation of the SADC Just Energy Transition Policy Framework was developed, in readiness for its validation later in 2026.

22. Furthermore, SRO-SA, working in close collaboration with SRO-EA rolled out technical support to the COMESA Secretariat towards the formulation of the *COMESA Sustainable Tourism Development Framework*, *Implementation Plan* and 4 Business case studies (on *agro-tourism*, *blue tourism, circular/eco-tourism, urban tourism and MICE tourism in the COMESA subregion*). This initiative emerged from the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between ECA and COMESA Secretariat during the 23rd COMESA Heads of State Summit, paving the way for technical support to COMESA on tourism development. As such a first Consultative Workshop with key stakeholders was convened from 27-29 April in Mombasa, Kenya which discussed critical issues such as policy coordination, visa facilitation, transport connectivity and other bottlenecks that need to be addressed to enable seamless cross-border travel to promote tourism development in the COMESA region. A Second consultative workshop on the development of the COMESA Sustainable Tourism Framework, Implementation Plan and the 4 business cases was held online on 17 August 2026, and it brought together 18 COMESA member States. The workshop reviewed progress made, obtained further inputs and guidance from member States, and charted the way forward on finalizing the regional framework, which has since been drafted in readiness for its validation in late 2026.

23. Additionally, SRO-SA substantively contributed to the 12th Mozambique Minerals and Energy Conference which was held from 5 – 8 May 2026 in Maputo, Mozambique. The Conference, organized under the theme *Mozambique: Open for Business - Unlocking Natural Resources for Industrialization, Diversification, and Inclusive Growth* discussed development in the oil, gas and minerals sector in Mozambique and across Southern Africa. It also explored policy instruments around mineral beneficiation, local content strategies and on regional policy harmonization and alignment as strategies to strengthen industrialization in resource-rich countries in Southern Africa.

24. The Subregional Office also undertook an analytical study on *Developing Green and Circular Value Chains in Southern Africa in the Context of the AfCFTA: A case study of Mauritius*, which was reviewed and validated at an expert group meeting that was convened on 14 May 2026 in Port Louis, Mauritius. During the meeting, the experts underscored the strategic importance of aligning trade, climate, and industrial policies to enhance resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable growth under the AfCFTA. The expert meeting also deepened the engagement among Southern Africa member States on green value chains development under AfCFTA Agreement.

25. Furthermore, SRO-SA in collaboration with the ECA's Climate Change, Food Security and Natural Resource Division (CFND) and the Subregional Office for Central Africa (SRO-CA) rolled out the *Project on Fostering Environmentally and Socially Responsible, Decarbonized, Inclusive, and Transformative Value Chains for Energy Transition Minerals in the SADC Region*, whose implementation phase was launched on 2 June 2026 in Lusaka, Zambia. The launch was followed up with a consultative meeting of the project consortium partners that was held on 3-4 June 2026. The project, funded by the International Climate Initiative is being implemented by a consortium of partners in six SADC countries namely DR Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project, whose implementation is underway, endeavours to ensure that the extraction and processing of energy transition minerals in the SADC region are undertaken using low-carbon, environmentally and socially responsible mining and manufacturing methods.

2.4 Promoting intra-regional trade through the AfCFTA in Southern Africa

26. With technical support provided by SRO-SA, in collaboration with ECA's African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC), the Government of Namibia finalised and validated its *Step-by-Step Guide on Trading in Goods under AfCFTA*. The Guide, developed with financial assistance from DANIDA, was validated at a meeting held on 5-6 February 2026 in Windhoek, translates the AfCFTA Agreement from a policy framework into a practical tool that businesses can use to trade across Africa, with a with a focus on rules of origin, tariffs, and customs documentation. It is intended to help Namibian firms understand and navigate the procedures, requirements, and opportunities associated with trading under AfCFTA. Particularly the Guide supports MSMEs, women owned business and youth led enterprises, enabling them to access continental markets more effectively, and it serves to significantly lower compliance costs and uncertainty for private sector enterprises. The Step-by-Step Guide has since been integrated into the *Namibia Trade Information Portal*, a web-based platform serving as a comprehensive "one-stop shop" for cross-border trade, which provides importers and exporters with centralized access to information on customs

procedures, permits, and duties. The Step-by-Step Guide will be launched by the Government of Namibia on 9 November 2026.

27. Similarly, SRO-SA and ATPC provided technical support to the Government of Zambia, through its Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, in developing the country's *Step-by-Step Guide on Trading in Goods under AfCFTA*. This included facilitating a series of consultative meetings with stakeholders such as government officials and experts, private sectors and MSMEs (including women and youth-led enterprises and development partners). The Step-by-Step Guide for Zambia has since been developed and was subsequently validated by stakeholders and experts at a workshop held on 24 September 2026 in Lusaka. The Guide, with financial support from DANIDA and GIZ, is currently being finalized and readiness for its launch in early 2027.

28. With technical support provided by SRO-SA in close collaboration with ATPC, the Government of Angola validated its *National AfCFTA Strategy and Action Plan*, marking a decisive step toward harnessing intra African trade to accelerate the country's economic diversification and industrialization agenda. The National Strategy, which was reviewed and validated on 23 June 2026, in Luanda, aims to diversify the country's oil-dependent economy, expand non-oil trade, and boost the participation of MSMEs, women, and youth in continental value chains. Key pillars and priority areas of the validated Strategy include economic diversification (reducing the heavy reliance on crude oil, which currently accounts for roughly 95% of the country's goods exports); regional integration (utilizing infrastructure corridors, particularly the Lobito Corridor, to boost intra-African trade and logistics; and inclusivity (ensuring women, young entrepreneurs, and MSMEs have access to financing and market information).

29. Furthermore, SRO-SA, in collaboration with ECA's African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) and partnership with the Southern Africa Youth Forum held a pre- Pre- *Africa Development Impact Forum* (ADIF) webinar on the theme *"Unlocking Regional Value Chains: Empowering Youth-Led Enterprises in Africa to thrive Under AfCFTA"* on 14 April 2026. The webinar served as a precursor for the inaugural *Africa Development Impact Forum*, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 2026, during which a side session on the same theme was convened 11 June 2026, in collaboration with ILO and the Southern Africa Youth Forum.

30. Additionally, SRO-SA, working with ECA' African Trade Policy Centre and in collaboration with the UN RCO (Lesotho), UNDP, International Trade Centre (ITC), and other partners (including SADC, SACU and GIZ), provided technical support to the Government of Lesotho, by designing and delivering a *capacity building training workshop, which equipped 100 MSMEs in Lesotho* with knowledge and skills on using digital tools to trade under regional trade agreements such as the Southern Africa Customs

Union, the SADC-FTA and the AfCFTA. The training included building practical familiarity of the MSMEs with ITC trade enabling tools such as Trade Map and Market Access Map; examining tariffs, non-tariff measures and market-entry requirements; rules of origin and certification processes; and compliance with SPS and technical barriers to trade (TBT) requirements and export certification. This training was aimed enhancing the participation of MSMEs, including women and youth led enterprises, in trading under regional trade agreements and the AfCFTA. The training, held in Maseru from 28-29 September 2026, was followed up with *Business-to-Business event* for the private sector and MSMEs in Lesotho on 30 September 2026, that fostered business-to-business networking and exploring deals between sellers and buyers.

31. Additionally, SRO-SA facilitated the participation of 20 young entrepreneurs, under Pan African Alliance of Women and Youth Entrepreneurs (PAAWYE) at the *Zambia Youth Connect Expo 2026* that was held in Lusaka from 29-30 September. The Expo was convened by the Government of Zambia under the theme *"Green Hustle: Cultivating Wealth, Creating Jobs,"* and it brought together government officials, development partners, private sector actors, innovators, entrepreneurs and young people from across Zambia to explore pathways for youth-driven economic transformation. The Expo provided a platform for expanding access to youth innovation and fostering business linkages, creating opportunities for youth participation in regional value chains and trade.

2.5 Supporting development planning, economic governance other development initiatives in Southern Africa

32. As part of technical support towards strengthening of development planning in the subregion, the Subregional Office in collaboration with ECA's Knowledge Management Services Section has, in the past, provided technical support towards the development of an *Online Portal*, as a Community of Practice (CoP) for the *SADC National Planning Entities (NPEs) Platform*, which was subsequently launched on 12 September 2025. The Online Portal serves as a digital space for promoting expert discussions, knowledge networking among the SADC National Planning Entities (NPEs) in the SADC region, thereby enhancing coherence between the regional development frameworks and national development plans, and to track progress in achieving development commitments at the national, regional, and international levels (including the SADC Vision 2050, 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063). In providing further support, ECA in collaboration with the SADC Secretariat, delivered a training workshop for Administrators of the SADC NPEs and Think Tanks CoP portal and the SADC IT team took place from 27-29 April 2026, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The training session enabled a complete migration and hosting of the Online portal from the ECA web server to the SADC Secretariat; finalization of the configuration of email settings, Simple Mail Transfer Protocol transport, dashboard, content structure and platform governance; reviewing Windows Subsystem for Linux

basic commands, required tools, source code backup and basic troubleshooting; reviewed the platform content to reflect the involvement of the SADC network of Think Tanks; and populating of the Portal with thematic areas from the SADC NPEs and Think Tanks.

33. As a follow-up to the training about the online Portal, the SADC Secretariat convened a *Policy Dialogue and Capacity Building on Research and Regional Integration*, which was held from 13-14 July 2026, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Dialogue strengthened evidence-based, decision-making processes in support of SADC's regional integration agenda through enhanced collaboration between Think Tanks and NPEs. The Policy Dialogue brought together the NPEs and Think Tanks and provided a platform for strategic convergence of research and policy communities in the SADC region with the aim of strengthening evidence-based decision-making. Specifically, the Dialogue convened NPEs and Think Tanks for substantive exchange on the planning–research interface in the SADC region and engaged participants on contemporary policy issues affecting the region.

34. At national level, ECA through Macroeconomics and Governance Division (MGD) and SRO-SA is supporting the Government of Zambia on the development of the country's *9th National Development Plan (NDP9),* particularly on segments on macroeconomic analysis, capital market deepening, export-led growth. The process of developing the national development plan is currently underway, and ECA's support will include sharing the analysis on the alignment of the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit (IPRT)* with NDP8 and the *Voluntary Local Reviews* (VLRs), for consideration in the development of NDP9. Technical support will also ensure grounding the new plan in evidence, strengthening the link between planning and financing, and ensuring that implementation mechanisms are built into the Plan from the outset. Once developed, the NDP9 will serve as the principal framework for advancing Zambia's long-term development for the planning period of 2027-2031.

35. ECA has been providing support to the Government of Zambia, through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by strengthening the capacity of local authorities to integrate the SDGs into local planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting. This support is also aimed at connecting local-level evidence and priorities with Zambia's national development planning and SDG reporting processes. This has included supporting the Lusaka City Council in embarking on its first Voluntary Local Review (VLR) for the period 2024–2025, promoting the preparation of VLRs, the application of the *Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit* (IPRT), and improved infrastructure asset management. Furthermore, a capacity-building workshop on SDG Localization, VLRs and Infrastructure Asset Management was conducted in Ndola City from 14–17 September 2026, bringing together five Local Authorities and relevant national and local institutions.

The activity strengthened local authorities' preparedness to undertake VLRs through practical orientation on the VLR process, milestones and deliverables, institutional preparedness assessments, and development of VLR action plans. Practical training was also provided on applying the IPRT to align Integrated Development Plans with the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the 8th National Development Plan, alongside Infrastructure Asset Management and data-management approaches. The workshop identified M&E, data management, IPRT knowledge and institutional capacity gaps as priority areas for continued technical support.

36. ECA, through MGD and SRO-SA initiated technical support to the Government of Botswana towards the preparation and validation of country's *Public Financial Management Reform Roadmap (2026–2030)*, covering public investment, budgeting, accounting, procurement, revenue, cash, debt, State-owned enterprises and modernization of the Government Accounting and Budgeting System and Integrated Financial Management Information System. MFGD has and continues to provide technical support on macroeconomic modelling, policy simulation; and on Economic Planning and Implementation Coordination-based planning, while the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) continues to contribute relevant capacity development under the macroeconomic policy, finance and integrated planning thematic area.

37. In responding to a request for support from the Government of Malawi, SRO-SA continued to provide technical assistance towards the review and formulation of economic diplomacy strategy as part of the country's foreign policy. The Government of Malawi is reviewing its *Foreign Policy* and developing its *Strategic Plan* aimed at realizing the Malawi 2063 Agenda, as strategic instruments for the country to achieve its development agenda across priority sectors such as agriculture, tourism and mining. It is also envisaged that the new policy will focus on long-term national development, including innovative means to attract international and domestic development financing and investment opportunities. In this regard, ECA initiated consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as other partners at country level to subsequently inform a more forward-looking Foreign Policy that would foster the country's sustainable and inclusive development.

38. Furthermore, ECA through its Subregional Offices for North Africa and Southern Africa, continued to provide technical support to the Government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, on leveraging diaspora contribution to the country's sustainable national development. This initiative is part of the Development Account Project on *Strengthening the Migration-Development Nexus in Africa*. As a result of technical support, the Government has formulated the *Remittance-Investment National Framework*, a proposed regulatory, institutional and financial framework for diaspora investment that is aimed at strengthening the contribution of the Basotho diaspora to

national development. The framework was validated by stakeholders at a workshop that was held on 18 August 2026. This was followed by a Capacity-Building Workshop on 29-30 August 2026, that introduced a practical toolkit for integrating migration and diaspora considerations into development planning. These workshops brought together 50 participants, that were drawn from the Government Ministries of Finance, the National Technical Working Group, the Central Bank of Lesotho, banking associations, UN agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. Validation of the proposed framework and its reform matrix drew on international case studies from Israel, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya and Ghana and grounded firmly in Lesotho's own context. Key outcomes included validation and refinement of the proposed framework and implementation matrices, identification of priority regulatory and institutional reforms, and strengthened national capacity to advance implementation of Lesotho's diaspora and migration-development agenda.

3. Challenges and lessons

39. One of the challenges faced is ensuring high level representation and participation, especially in statutory meetings such as the ICSOE, of senior officials who can make decisions and ensure that recommendations made are taken to the national level for implementation. Another challenge faced is delayed responses from member States, and other partners, which affects timely delivery of support or implementation of planned initiatives. Furthermore, dwindling financial resources that the UN system is experiencing continues to be a major challenge particularly needs for technical support to member States. Also, limited availability of official statistical data also continues to be a challenge affecting delivery of the analytical and research work, especially on emerging issues of priority to member States and the subregion.

40. An important lesson learned was that forging strong partnerships with RECs, intergovernmental organisation, other development partners and the private sector at subregional and national level is critical to ensuring relevance of the technical support provided and interventions implemented. Another lesson was that working closely with other UN entities at subregional and country levels is key to leveraging and pooling available expertise and limited financial resources and building synergies and for impactful delivery of development initiatives. Furthermore, engaging member States and partners early in programme planning and processes is critical to ensuring timeous implementation as well as alignment and coherence of priority interventions.

4. Highlights of the Work Programme for 2027

41. The Subregional Office for Southern Africa is designated as ECA's *Centre of Excellence for Inclusive Industrialization*, whose long-term objective is to *deepen*

regional integration and strengthen capacities to achieve inclusive industrialization for the reduction of poverty and inequality in Southern Africa. In this regard, ECA's proposed Programme of Work for Southern Africa in 2027, will mainly continue to focus on strengthening capacities of member States, regional economic communities and intergovernmental organization to formulate and implement policies, strategies and programmes aimed at *deepening the policy environment for inclusive industrialization and value chain development*; enhancing the *transition towards more sustainable economies*; and *promoting trade through the AfCFTA* for the reduction of poverty and inequality. This will be done through analytical policy studies, convening policy dialogues, providing advisory services and technical support to member States, regional economic communities and intergovernmental organisations, while leveraging on collaborations and partnerships national, subregional and regional levels.

42. Key initiatives and deliverables programmed for 2027 are outlined in Box 2 below:

Box 2: Summary of key initiatives/deliverables for 2027

Objective: *Deepen regional integration and strengthen capacities to achieve inclusive industrialization for the reduction of poverty and inequality in Southern Africa*	
Category	**Key programmed initiatives/deliverables**
(a) Servicing of statutory intergovernmental meetings	1. Annual session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa - *Report on key economic and social conditions in Southern Africa* - *Report on the work of ECA in Southern Africa* - *Progress report on regional and international agendas and special initiatives in Southern Africa* - *Report to the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa*
(b) Analytical policy studies and ad hoc expert group meetings	2. Analytical studies and ad hoc expert groups meetings - *Regional integration in Southern Africa* - *Inclusive and sustainable industrialization in Southern Africa* - *Regional value chain development in Southern Africa*
(c) Technical cooperation	3. Fellowship programme for young African economists
(d) Seminars and workshops	4. Workshops and forums – *Workshop on inclusive and sustainable industrialization* – *Workshop regional integration in Southern Africa* – *Workshop on regional value chain development*
(e) Technical support and advisory services	5. Advisory services to member States and RECs: - *Supporting regional integration and the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement in Southern Africa*

	– *Development of national and transboundary special economic zones including the Battery Electric Vehicle initiative between DR Congo and Zambia; and the Common Agro-Industrial Park initiative between Zambia and Zimbabwe* – *Supporting the development of regional value chains (including automotive, beef and leather value chains)* – *Private sector development, including women and youth-led enterprises* – *Promoting sustainable tourism development in Southern Africa* – *Others, upon request from member States, RECs and IGOs*
(f) Policy dialogue and consensus building	6. Policy dialogue and consensus building – *Policy brief on industrialization and economic transformation in Southern Africa* – *Policy dialogue on economic development in Southern Africa*
(g) UN Development Account projects	9. UN Development Account 17th Tranche Project (2025-2028): *Innovative Climate Action to Accelerate Green and Inclusive Industrialization in the Southern Africa Region (under implementation).*

43. The Committee is invited to consider and endorse the report.