



African
Union



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Regional Trade Forum for West and Central Africa:
“AfCFTA in motion: Taking Africa’s integration to the next level for a prosperous continent”

Concept Note

Co-Organizers:

- **United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**
- **Government of Senegal**
- **African Union Commission (AUC) and**
- **European Union (EU)**

Partners:

- **Chambre de Commerce de Dakar**
- **ECOWAS**
- **ECCAS**
- **African Capacity Building Foundation**
- **International Trade Centre**

Dates: 24-25 June 2019

Venue: King Fahd Palace, Dakar, Senegal



1. Summary

On 21 March 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda, 44 AU member States signed the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Since then, an additional eight member states have also signed the agreement, and twenty-three have ratified the agreement of which twenty-two have already deposited the instruments of ratification. The AfCFTA will therefore enter into force on 30th May 2019, one month after the 22nd instrument of ratification has been deposited. The AfCFTA is expected to generate a range of socio-economic development benefits through supporting trade creation, structural transformation, productive employment and poverty reduction. The realization of these benefits, however, will require quick ratification by all and effective implementation of the Agreement, along with range of supporting policies to address other barriers to trade, investment and industrialization. In this context, there is an urgent need to build on the current political momentum to support expeditious and timely ratification and implementation of the AfCFTA agreement.

2. Background

In an effort to advocate for ratification and implementation of the AfCFTA, on 2-3 November 2018 in Lagos, Nigeria, the ECA co-organized the Africa Trade Forum on “The AfCFTA ratification and implementation: A game changer for African Economies” with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Federal Government of Nigeria, in coordination with the African Union Commission. The Forum brought together ministers and policy makers, private sector, civil society, academia, international organizations and other influential stakeholders from across the continent to discuss what is need to ensure that the AfCFTA becomes a reality and truly contributes to Africa’s socio-economic development.

The Forum was extremely successful and set the table for progress in the AfCFTA process. Since the Lagos forum, additional countries ratified the AfCFTA and many others have initiated domestic processes with the intention of doing so before the AU Summit in Niamey in July 2019, which will officially launch the AfCFTA. The key messages that emerged from the Forum were as follows:

- While governments are responsible for setting an environment conducive for business and trade, it is the private sector that is the key driver of the economy and the AfCFTA.
- Complementary interventions addressing gaps in infrastructure, finance, trade facilitation and other barriers, will be crucial to ensure win-win outcomes from the AfCFTA.
- The implementation of the AfCFTA must not forget micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), female traders and those involved in informal cross-border trade, who are a large majority.
- Rules on the digital economy should be considered for inclusion in the second phase of the AfCFTA negotiations to maximize the gains from the Agreement.
- Development partners have a key role to play in supporting an improved understanding and the effective implementation of the AfCFTA.
- Successful implementation of the AfCFTA will require State Parties to learn from the drawbacks and successes of Africa’s regional economic communities (RECs).

A leading outcome of the Forum was the decision for ECA to hold at least two more Africa Trade Forums in different sub-regions in 2019.

3. Regional Trade Forum

In this context, ECA has decided to co-organize a regional trade forum in June 2019 targeted at ECOWAS and ECCAS member states (with a Francophone focus). At the Lagos Forum, much discussion took place on Africa’s regional economic communities, and in particular ECOWAS. It was highlighted that Member States need to better understand why certain elements of REC agreements are not working, learn from their failures, and build upon their successes. The Regional Trade Forum on “AfCFTA in motion: Taking Africa’s



integration to the next level for a prosperous continent” will provide a platform to discuss these issues with a focus on the ECOWAS and ECCAS region, and identify how the REC can serve as a building block for the AfCFTA. The Forum will be co-organized with the European Union and the African Union Commission, and will take place in Dakar, Senegal. This will ensure adequate Francophone coverage of the AfCFTA Trade Forums.

3.1. Format

The forum will include plenaries, roundtables and breakout sessions organized around the following topics:

Plenaries:

- AfCFTA an endogenous initiative for furthering integration, boosting industrial competitiveness and jobs creation in Africa
- AfCFTA Ratification and Implementation: Public Policies for a Successful Trade Integration and digitalization to Boost Economic Diversification, foster Industrial Competitiveness and sustain Job Creation
- The AfCFTA - a catalyst for investment – a private sector roundtable
- Trade facilitation to unlock AfCFTA potential for West and Central Africa
- Boosting the Manufacturing Sector in the AfCFTA: the case of the Pharmaceutical Industry value chains

Breakout sessions:

- Making AfCFTA work for ECOWAS Member States
- Making AfCFTA work for ECCAS Member States
- Women and Youth Business Roundtable
- The AfCFTA, Civil Society and Development Partners

3.2. What to expect?

Solutions: Opportunities to connect with leaders and experts to translate ideas into powerful solutions for Africa’s socio-economic transformation

Exposure: Platforms to access cutting-edge evidence-based policy briefs, methodologies and tools to support shared gains from the AfCFTA

Opportunity: Sessions that encourage participants to expand your thinking and explore fresh opportunities under the new continental market

Impact: Recommendations on how to learn to use the AfCFTA as a policy tool to create positive change and impact in African economies

Value: Spaces for lively, interactive multi-stakeholder discussions, along with access to engaging content and intra-African networking opportunities

Networking: Opportunities to participate in roundtables and high-level plenaries and at the same time engage with actors across a diverse range of different sectors