

**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**MARCHE COMMUN DE
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**2022 CALL FOR INNOVATIONS TO BE EXHIBITED AND
PRESENTED AT THE NINTH COMESA ANNUAL
RESEARCH FORUM**

Deadline for submission 30th April 2022

Background

The COMESA Innovation Awards was launched in 2013 to celebrate the Africa Union 50th Anniversary. The Awards are aimed at recognizing and celebrating individuals and institutions that have used science, technology and innovation to advance the regional integration agenda. The inaugural Innovation Awards ceremony took place at the 17th Summit of the COMESA Heads of States and Government held in Kinshasa DR. Congo in February 2014.

The call for innovations is in line with COMESA 2022 call for papers under the theme, **“ENHANCING BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS AND RESILIENCE TO BOOST INTRA-COMESA TRADE”**. The selected innovation concepts will be presented at the Ninth COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2022.

Trade and competitiveness are integral to spur growth, productivity and job creation. Trade success is fundamental for a country's economic competitiveness, and competitiveness in turn boosts the success of firms and economies in global trade, in particular to integrate into Global Value Chains (GVCs). The competitiveness of economies in an integrated world determines how well they convert the potential created by access to global markets into opportunities for their firms, farms and people (World Economic Forum, 2015)

Competitiveness can be defined as the set of factors, policies, institutions, strategies and processes that determine the level of sustainable productivity of an economy, be it the world, a continent (or macro region), nation, region or even a city (World Economic Forum, 2014). Competitiveness centres on productivity which is the efficiency with which an economy uses available inputs to produce outputs. It determines the rate of return on investments, which fundamentally drives economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2015).

The International Trade Centre (ITC) defines competitiveness as the demonstrated ability to design, produce and commercialize an offer that fully, uniquely, and continuously fulfils the needs of targeted market segments, while connecting with and drawing resources from the business environment, and achieving a sustainable return on the resources employed. Several factors at the firm, business ecosystem and national levels influence the capacity of a company to be competitive.

According to ITC's competitiveness framework, there are three pillars of competitiveness; compete, connect and change. Capacity to compete focuses on factors for a firm to deliver output of appropriate quantity, quality and cost. Capacity to connect describes a company's ability to exploit information to underpin strategy and operations. Capacity to change refers to factors that support a firm's capacity to make changes in response to, or in anticipation of, dynamic market forces.

The World Bank's Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 (GCI 4.0) measures factors and attributes that drive productivity, growth and human development in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It includes 12 pillars of competitiveness: Institutions; Infrastructure; ICT adoption; Macroeconomic stability; Health; Skills; Product market; Labour market; Financial system; Market size; Business dynamism; and Innovation capability (World Economic Forum, 2019) The pillars are organized in three sub-indexes; basic requirements, efficiency enhancers and innovation and sophistication factors.

The competitiveness index score is measured on a 0-100 scale, where 100 represents the 'frontier', an ideal state where an issue ceases to be a constraint to productivity growth. The average GCI score across the 141 economies studied in 2019 was 60.7, with a deficit of 40 points implying that on average, most economies continue to be far from the competitiveness "frontier" (World Economic Forum, 2019).

COMESA's average GCI score was 49.0 in 2019. Six Member States were ranked among the top 100. These are Mauritius with a score of 64.3 and ranked 52, followed by Seychelles (score 59.6, ranked 76), Tunisia (score 56.4, ranked 87), Egypt (Score 54.5, ranked 93), Kenya (score 54.1, ranked 95) and Rwanda (score 52.8, ranked 100).

Resilience is the capacity to withstand disruption. Firms display the ability to absorb shocks with situation-specific responses, based on how robust, related and responsive they are. Robust firms have strong management and operational procedures to withstand pressure during a crisis. Related firms leverage internal and external connections to access resources and support during a crisis. Responsive firms overcome crises with inventive, well-adapted strategies to absorb shock, transform and cope with the new reality. Resilient firms emerge from a crisis as strong, or stronger, than before (International Trade Center, 2021). According to ITC, a firm's resilience is likely to be closely linked to its competitiveness.

According to a recent study by Secretariat, COMESA's export potential stood at US\$ 100.1 billion in 2019. However, the potential remains unutilized mainly due to weak productive capacity in information and communication technology, transport, structural change, energy, institutions and human capital; high freight and transport costs mainly due to inadequate export cargo to ensure sufficient return cargo for the vessels; high banking charges; lack of information on production capacities and available goods in the region; problems in payment settlements; slow implementation of COMESA FTA agreement; and non-tariff barriers.

COMESA global exports declined by 26.9 percent from US\$123.4 billion in 2019 to US\$90.3 billion in 2020. Global imports reduced by 28.7 percent from US\$223.1 billion in 2019 to US\$ 159.1 billion in 2020. The decrease in global trade may be attributed to the effects of covid-19 such as restrictions of international travel, closure of borders and disruptions in global and regional value chains. Intra-COMESA trade was not an exception, exports declined by 11 percent from US\$10.9 in 2019 to US\$9.7 billion in 2020. This was mainly due to Covid-19 restrictions imposed by governments such as restrictions on movement of people, border closures and shutdowns which affected cross border trade. The following export sectors contributed to the decline; fuels (63%), agricultural raw materials (47%), food (10%) and manufactures (6%). Most Member States recorded decrease in intra-COMESA exports except Burundi, Djibouti, Congo DR, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In line with the Annual Research Forum theme, COMESA calls for innovation concepts to be show-cased and presented during the Forum. The focus of the 2022 Innovation Concepts will be on new products, new methods of production and new ways of enhancing business competitiveness and resilience to boost intra-COMESA trade. Although the Innovation Concepts are geared towards all innovators in Member-States, the 3 main target groups are SMEs, youth and women.

SMEs: COMESA has established an aggressive program to foster the development of technology based new enterprises. It is envisioned that SMEs would serve as the vehicle for harnessing existing technologies and use them to enhance industrial production. However, SMEs are expected to be technology-based with high potential for growth. Thus, the need to recognize and reward SMEs that contributes to the achievement of this goal.

Youth: COMESA seeks to harness, nurture and grow the innovative capacity of the youthful population in the region for sustainable economic development. The youth are encouraged to harness science and technology to create wealth and employment. This can enable them provide innovative ways of increasing competitiveness and resilience of businesses.

Women: Women have traditionally been under represented in the fields of science and technology. Consequently, COMESA will focus on women and like the youth challenge them to harness science and technology to come up with innovative ways of increasing business

competitiveness and resilience.

II. CRITERIA

The COMESA Secretariat invites innovation concepts from the following categories:

1. Youth (35 and below male and female)
2. Women (Open to all Female applicants)
3. SMEs (SMEs that meets the definition of SMEs of a COMESA member state)
4. Group (open to all collaborative efforts)
5. Institution (Open to all institutions of any kind)

Eligibility

Only the following categories can submit the innovation concepts:

- Citizens or long-term legal residents of member states,
- Teams of less than four members with at least one citizen of a member state.
- Teams of 5 or more with at least 3 citizens of a member state.
- A non-citizen member team will be considered if all its team members legally reside in and the project is based in a member state.
- SMES who are based in and operate in member states,
- All institutions who are based in and do a substantial amount of business in member states

Criteria

Each submission will be scored on the following aspects:

- Novelty/Significant advancement in the field
- Social Impact (actual or potential)
- Economic impact (actual or potential)
- Patentability

The Call

COMESA now invites individuals and groups to submit their innovation concepts. The concepts will be competitively evaluated and the top two in each category invited to present their innovation concepts at the Ninth COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2022. The annual Research Forum is attended by Government Officers, Academia, Policy Think Tanks, Development Partners and the private Sector. The successful innovators will be notified by 30 May 2022.

Funding for participation

COMESA will fund the participation of the innovators in the research forum. The funding will cover a return economy air ticket, accommodation and a daily subsistence allowance.

Submission

Innovation concepts should be submitted electronically to Jane Kibiru; Email: Jkibiru@comesa.int; Telephone: +260211229725/32

With a copy to:

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