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**CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE 10TH COMESA ANNUAL RESEARCH FORUM**

**Background**

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) comprises 21[[1]](#footnote-1) Member States that came together with the aim of promoting regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region. COMESA was initially established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA), within the framework of the Organization of African Unity’s (OAU) Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. The PTA was established to take advantage of a larger market size, to share the region’s common heritage and destiny and to allow for greater social and economic co-operation. The PTA transformed into COMESA in 1994. COMESA is one of the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union (COMESA, 2018).

The COMESA Free Trade Area was launched on 31 October 2000 after a sixteen-year period of progressive trade liberalization through reduction of intra-COMESA tariffs (COMESA, 2018). As of December 2022, 16 countries were participating in the FTA. The other five Member States, namely Ethiopia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Congo D R and Somalia were at different levels regarding their participation in the FTA. The COMESA Rules of Origin are used to determine whether goods produced in the COMESA region are eligible for preferential treatment within the FTA (COMESA, 2018).

Intra-COMESA exports increased from US$1.5 billion in 2000 to US$ 12.8 billion in 2021(COMSTAT, 2022). Despite the phenomenal increase, intra-COMESA exports accounts for about 8 percent of global exports. Moreover, COMESA has intra- export potential of US$ 101.1 billion using the 2019 statistics. Some of the constraints hindering exploitation of the export potential include weak productive capacities, poor infrastructure connectivity, high transport costs, non/slow implementation of COMESA FTA agreement, non-tariff barriers, and trading in similar products (COMESA, 2021).

Furthermore, intra- COMESA exports mostly exclude Small Scale Cross Border Trade (SSCBT) which is estimated at around 40 percent of total trade. To facilitate SSCBT, COMESA launched the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) in 2010. The objectives of the STR include, enabling small-scale traders to benefit from COMESA Free Trade regime, formalise informal cross border trade, and simplify the trade and customs (and related immigration) processes for small traders. The STR is based on three elements; the common list of eligible products (agreed bilaterally) between two neighbouring countries; the simplified customs document and; threshold amount of US$2000 for originating products. STR is being implemented in 8 out of 21 COMESA Member States. Digitalizing trade can level the playing field, by promoting cost-efficient, transparent processes that reduce the costs of cross-border business for small-scale and informal traders.

Commodity dependence remains a typical challenge leading to trading in similar products in the region. About 65 percent of developing countries are commodity dependent (UNCTAD, 2019). A country is commodity dependent if it derives at least 60 percent of its merchandise export revenues from the commodity sector (UNCTAD, 2021). Twelve of the seventeen COMESA Member States covered in the Commodities and Development Report, 2021 are commodity dependent. According to UNCTAD, 2021, new technologies are essential for technological upgrade of traditional product sectors in commodity dependent countries as well as diversification into other sectors. Regional integration creates larger markets which attract more foreign direct investments that provides a channel for technology transmission, it also fosters productivity increases from better allocation of productive resources.

Trade enhances growth which is essential in eliminating extreme poverty. However, given the existing structures of production, this growth may also drive increasing emissions (Brenton & Chemtai (2021). Climate change can negatively impact trade by disrupting distribution and supply chains and raising trade costs. According to (Brenton & Chemtai, 2001), “trade is also a central element of the solution to climate change due to its potential to enhance mitigation as well as adaptation efforts; trade shifts production to areas with cleaner production techniques; trade promotes the spread of environmental goods and services necessary for transitioning to low-carbon production; and trade delivers critical goods and services that are vital in periods of recovery from extreme weather events”. The 2021 Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report underscores the importance of making international trade and investment climate smart.

Unsustainable production, consumption and disposal of the world’s resources are primary causes of the triple threat of pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss. A transition to an inclusive circular economy is essential to help address these challenges (Barrie et al, 2022). According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, a circular economy keeps materials, products, and services in circulation for as long possible. It reduces material use, redesigns materials, products, and services to be less resource intensive, and recaptures waste as a resource to manufacture new materials and products. Circular trade is important in enabling the efficient redistribution of the materials, goods and services necessary to make circular activities economical including reducing exposure to, and the impact of supply-chain shocks (Barrie et al, 2022).

COMESA has been holding Annual research forums to deliberate various topical integration issues since 2014. The forum brings together various stakeholders, including policy makers, academia, think tanks, private sector and young professionals. Successful research papers are published in COMESA flagship publication “Key Issues in Regional Integration”.

**Objective of the call for papers**

The objective of this call is to seek empirical and/or policy-oriented research papers to address issues pertinent to regional integration agenda in the context of implemented programmes and past experiences of tariff liberalization and trade facilitation. Selected papers will be presented at the 10th COMESA Annual Research Forum to be held in September 2023.

**Research Theme**

COMESA therefore calls for papers under the theme; **“****30 YEARS OF COMESA REGIONAL INTEGRATION: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS “**

Sub-themes:

1. The role of the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) in promoting trade efficiency;
2. Value added production and market linkages in COMESA;
3. Nexus between trade, trade policy and climate change adaptability;
4. Transport (road/rail/air/maritime) and intra-COMESA trade;
5. Digitalization and small scale enterprises/ cross border trade in COMESA; and
6. Emerging trends in circular economy in COMESA.

**Proposed Structure**

It is expected that each paper will have the following structure:

**Title of the study**: topical issues drawing from the sub-thematic areas in the context of **30 Years of COMESA Regional Integration: Retrospect and Prospects**

**Background:** The context of the research underlining the issues that necessitate investigation, existing gaps of knowledge that the research paper attempts to fill, stating clearly the problem/issue being investigated;

**Objective(s):** A clear statement of the specific research objective/s, the issues addressed or to be addressed. The Research questions or hypothesis that the paper attempts to answer;

**Existing knowledge:** a review of the relevant literature (theoretical and empirical), on the research issue including methodological approach, scope, parameters, and findings among others.

**Methodology:** a description of the research methodology including econometric and/or survey tools where applicable, a discussion of estimation technique, data type and sources, and data analysis tools and methods used and, where necessary, data collection strategy;

**Results/Findings:** a succinct discussion of the research findings and how they compare to findings of similar studies; and

**Policy Implications:** a detailed discussion policy implications emanating from the study findings which should be clear and practical

**The Call**

COMESA now invites researchers to submit extended abstracts under the different sub- themes. The abstracts and papers will be reviewed, and successful authors invited to make presentations at the 10th COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2023. Selected papers will be peer reviewed and considered for publication in the COMESA flagship publication “Key Issues in Regional Integration”, Volume XII.

**Important Deadlines**

Submission of extended abstracts: 15th March 2023

Submission of draft papers: 30th May 2023

Submission of final papers:10th July 2023

**Editorial Policy**

The papers shall be written and presented in accordance with the COMESA Editorial Policy and should not exceed 10,000 words.

**Submission**

Please submit extended abstracts and draft papers in word electronic form to: Dr Christopher Onyango at [Conyango@comesa.](mailto:Conyango@comesa.)int and Jane Kibiru at [Jkibiru@comes.int](mailto:Jkibiru@comes.int) with copies to [Ekandeo@comesa.int](mailto:%20Ekandeo@comesa.int)

1. Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)