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**2023 CALL FOR INNOVATIONS TO BE EXHIBITED AND PRESENTED AT THE TENTH COMESA ANNUAL RESEARCH FORUM**

**Deadline for submission 30th April 2023**

**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 2023 call for papers under the theme, **“30 YEARS OF COMESA REGIONAL INTEGRATION: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS”**.The sub themes are:

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.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) comprises 21[[1]](#footnote-2) 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.

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).

In line with the Annual Research Forum theme, COMESA calls for innovations concepts to be show-cased and presented during Tenth COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2023.

**Eligibility**

The COMESA Secretarial 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)

The following categories are eligible to submit 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 COMESA 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
* Economic impact (actual or potential)
* Social Impact (actual or potential)
* Patentability

**The Call**

COMESA invites individuals and groups to submit innovation concepts. The concepts will be evaluated and the top two in each category invited to present their innovations/concepts at the Tenth COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2023. The annual Research Forum is attended by government officers, academia, policy think tanks, development partners and the private sector.

**Submission**

Innovation concepts should be submitted electronically in word format 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-2)