



The 7th COMESA Annual Research Forum

Background

Since 2014 COMESA has been organizing Annual Research Forums. The main purpose of the research forum is to bring together the academia, think tanks, government officers and the private sector to discuss emerging topical issues in regional integration. This is made possible through call for papers under a contemporary theme which is informed by the COMESA Council of Ministers decisions, the tripartite free trade area or the continental free trade area negotiations and aspirations as well the global economic and trade dynamics.

The research Forums have been successful, after the call for papers and rigorous internal and external reviews, the final papers are published in the COMESA flagship publication “Key Issues in Regional Integration”. To date, seven editions have been published and the eighth edition together with the policy briefs of the research papers will be being finalized.

The policy implications from the papers are presented to COMESA policy organs and form the basis for policy decision making. Member States have appreciated the critical role of the trade policy research and analysis and most of them have implemented the policy recommendations from various papers from past research forums. There is therefore ready demand for the research forums’ output.

Seventh COMESA Annual Research Forum

This year COMESA is organizing the Seventh Annual Research Forum whose theme is “*Harnessing intra-COMESA trade through the interface with African continental free trade area (AfCFTA)*”. The theme has five sub-themes namely: COMESA industrialization programmes and the AfCFTA; AfCFTA opportunities and challenges to boosting Intra-COMESA Trade; COMESA Role in Implementation of the AfCFTA; COMESA trade in services liberalization and the AfCFTA; and AfCFTA and COMESA trade regimes.

The theme is motivated by the fact that COMESA is among the 8 RECs recognized by the African Union Commission and is the largest economic bloc with a membership of 21 member states, a

COMESA is a regional economic community established in 1994. It brings together 21 African Member States with a population of 583 million people into a cooperative framework for sustainable economic growth and prosperity through regional integration.

combined GDP of US\$ 769 billion and a combined population of 560 million. As such, it is to contribute to the outcome and impact of regional integration through well designed evidence-based decisions and programmes.

This year's research Forum is funded by COMESA, OACPS and the European Union through the TradeCom II Capacity Building Programme under the COMESA Project on "Enhancing COMESA Capacity in Trade Policy Analysis, Research and Training for Deeper Regional Integration and Participation in Global Economy."

COMESA has secured EUR 60,000 for annual scholarships from the European Union through OACP under the TradeCom II Capacity Building Programme.

The Africa regional integration roadmap considers the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the building blocks of the African Economic Community (AEC) as stipulated in the Abuja Treaty of 1991 and the AUs Agenda 2063. The unveiling of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) on 30th May 2019 following ratification by 24 out of the 55 members of the African Union is a historic opportunity towards deepening the integration of the Continent. Indeed, the AfCFTA paves the way for African states to boost trade with each other and drive the economic growth and development of the Continent.

This year's submission of extended abstracts closed on 15 March 2020 and 39 extended abstracts/full papers were received. These were reviewed out of which nine were selected to submit full papers for presentation at the Forum.

Masters in Regional Integration

COMESA is running a collaborative Masters Degree Programme. The Master of Regional Integration is a professional course designed for government officials working in divisions or units dealing with trade, integration and cooperation issues; students intending to work as trade officers, trade policy analyst, advisers, researchers, trade attaches; private sector trade practitioners; media practitioners specializing in business, gender, climate and trade issues; chambers of commerce, manufacturer and consumer associations, consulates and other diplomatic missions, development organizations dealing with trade and integration issues among others. It is also suitable for middle level trade researchers and consultants.

COMESA has signed MoUs with the following universities:

- i. Kenyatta University, Kenya;
- ii. University of Mauritius;
- iii. Open University of Mauritius;
- iv. l'Institut Supérieur de Gestion des Entreprises (ISGE) of Burundi;
- v. University of Zambia; and
- vi. University of Zimbabwe

Kenyatta University and University of Mauritius have admitted students to the programme.

University of Zambia is at advanced stage on of seeking approvals to commence admitting students to the programme.

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