

Launching in Abidjan of the 4th edition of «Assessing Regional Integration in Africa» (ARIA IV)

Abidjan, 26 May 2010 (ECA) – His Excellency Mr. Festus Mogae, Former President of Botswana and Chairperson of the Governing Council of the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA) conducted Monday in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, the launching of the 4th edition of ARIA IV, a joint flagship publication of the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC).

At the ceremony organized on the eve of the annual assembly of the AfDB Group, Mr. Mogae underscored the importance of regional integration for Africa, with particular reference to the urgency of boosting intra-African trade, the theme for the current year.

As Chairperson of CoDA, his appreciation went to the three co-publishing institutions for the quality of work done to produce the current edition. It was now up to stakeholders to familiarize themselves with ARIA IV, give utmost consideration to its content and use it to best advantage.

In his address, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of ECA highlighted the fact that in the entire preceding decade, intra-African trade had accounted for a mere 10 to 12 per cent of the total trade of the African continent.

Mr. Janneh maintained that three key elements requiring our combined efforts within the context of regional integration had to do with our continuing debate over the form and direction it should take. We must combine our efforts to promote trans-border cooperation in key sectors and in strengthening integration institutions in Africa, more particularly AU and the RECs.

Speaking on behalf of the AfDB Group, Mr. Gabriel Negatu, Director of the AfDB Governance Department gave the assurance that regional integration remained an essential pillar of AfDB's medium and long-term strategy.

Obviously, AfDB would be giving utmost consideration to the recommendations of ARIA IV and actually planned to use it as a working tool for African development. In addition, AfDB intended to work with CoDA in implementing some of those recommendations.

Similar assurances were given by Mr. René Kouassi N'Guetta, AUC Director for Regional Integration who recalled, among other things, the policy aspects of the regional integration process.

As the eight RECs recognized by AU pursued integration efforts despite their difficulties and drove the process forward in spite of the obstacles, there was every reason to hope. In his view, AU would most appreciate anything CoDA could do to help maximize impact in an area so essential to the development of Africa.

The launching of ARIA IV on the theme of boosting intra-African trade was preceded on Monday morning by a high-level general debate on regional integration.

At the end of an informative and wide-ranging discussion, participants expressed the hope that members of the CoDA Governing Council would act on some aspects of regional integration and speed up the process.

They would appreciate the Coalition's involvement in the financing of regional integration, by exploring innovative approaches, among other things. Eminent African and international persons members of the CoDA Governing Council were also invited to advocate for the creation of a regional integration trust fund while encouraging the establishment of special structures for the management of the major transport corridors linking land-locked member States with the nearest seaports.

Participants finally appealed to CoDA to impress upon member States the urgency of adopting and ratifying regional integration decisions, protocols and declarations at the national, subregional and continental levels.

Regarding the crucial issue of free movement of persons which kept coming up during the discussions, CoDA was requested to use its good offices to appeal to member States to opt purely and simply for the abolition of visa requirements for Africans travelling from one African country to another.

Several other African development challenges, including migrant remittances and SME micro-financing and development were discussed at various thematic workshops organized on the eve of the 27 and 28 May annual assembly of the AfDB Group held in the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire.

Issued by:

ECA Information and Communication Service
P.O. Box 3001
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Tel: 251 11 5445098
Fax: +251-11-551 03 65
E-mail: ecainfo@uneca.org
Web: www.uneca.org

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