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**Economic Commission for Africa
Committee on Private Sector Development,
Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure,
Industry and Technology**
Second session
Addis Ababa (online), 9 and 10 December 2021

Africa's economic development in the post-coronavirus-disease era: the role of regional integration, infrastructure and technology

Aide-memoire

I. Introduction

1. The second session of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology will be held online on 9 and 10 December 2021 under the theme “Africa’s economic development in the post-coronavirus-disease era: the role of regional integration, infrastructure and technology”. The session will be preceded by expert group meetings on 30 November and 1 December 2021.

II. Background

2. The Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology was created to review the work of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in these areas, to provide a forum for dialogue and consensus-building, to discuss the prospective work of ECA and to serve as a catalyst for accelerating progress at the national and regional levels. The Committee is expected to address relevant topical and emerging issues and to take stock of the progress made by member States in the areas concerned. The first session of the Committee was held on 11 and 12 December 2019 under the theme “Private sector development and the digital economy in support of regional integration in Africa”.

3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) will continue to suppress economic activity and threaten lives in Africa in 2022 as the vaccine is gradually rolled out and African economies try to recover from the economic, social and health impact of the crisis. Inequality between countries will become more pronounced as more prosperous economies return to some form of normality while poorer countries continue to grapple with the crisis. Inequality within countries is expected to be more prominent, undermining the development progress previously achieved and widening the divide in many societies.



4. Economic development in the post-COVID-19 era is likely to entail greater uncertainty and turbulence as the impact of climate change intensifies, value chains reorganize, and digitalization accelerates. Past development options are no longer viable; a paradigm shift is required for Africa to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in what remains of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development and to achieve the aspirations of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. ECA estimates that climate change alone will reduce the gross domestic product of some African countries by as much as 15 per cent by 2030.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequality. Initial studies indicate that deprived children in the poorest countries have lost more than six times as much schooling as children in high-income countries. According to the International Labour Organization, the impact of the pandemic on young people has been “systematic, deep and disproportionate”. Public health-care systems may struggle to recover, with health-care workers estimated to be seven times as likely to contract severe COVID-19 as the general population. This prediction is underpinned by the lessons learned from the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, following which there was a 23 per cent decrease in the delivery of health services in Sierra Leone. COVID-19 is ultimately estimated to push as many as 150 million people into poverty, compounding the pre-existing threats of climate change and conflict.

6. Given the aforementioned challenges that the continent faces, African Governments need to consider and reflect on the multidimensional effects of the pandemic and the responses to it. Specifically, how has COVID-19 affected regional integration and the development of infrastructure and technology in Africa? How has the current state of regional integration, infrastructure (soft and hard) and technology development influenced the spread and impact of the virus on the continent? What role could regional integration, infrastructure and technology play in ensuring that Africa is more resilient to shocks such as COVID-19, climate change and natural disasters? What opportunities does COVID-19 offer for regional integration, infrastructure and technology development on the continent? What kinds of infrastructure and technology would enable Africa to cope better with future pandemics, climate change and natural disasters and reduce inequality on the continent?

7. In essence, a reflection is needed on the challenges posed to African economic development in the post-COVID-19 era and the kind of economic development that the continent should aim for so that the next generation can better cope with current challenges and future shocks. Policy dialogues also need to take place to shed light on the economic-development opportunities that COVID-19 and other challenges offer to Africa and the role that regional integration (including leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area), infrastructure and technology can play in addressing these challenges and harnessing the opportunities.

8. Against this backdrop, the second session of the Committee will provide insight into these questions and a platform through which member States, partners and stakeholders can share experiences and emerging best practices and identify areas for joint action.

III. Objectives

9. The overall objective of the session is to ensure that ECA responds effectively and efficiently to the evolving needs and demands of its member States

and to changing institutional landscapes and shifting priorities concerning national, regional and global economic and social development.

10. Specifically, the objectives of the session are:

(a) To review the work of ECA on private-sector development and finance, regional integration, trade, infrastructure, industry and technology;

(b) To provide a forum for dialogue and consensus-building in the above areas in the context of the African development agenda, that is, Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(c) To catalyse progress at the national and regional levels in these areas;

(d) To address topical and emerging issues of relevance to the Committee's areas of focus to take stock of the progress made by member States in the aforementioned areas;

(e) To reflect on the prospective work of the relevant subprogrammes and issue recommendations to guide such future work;

(f) To generate inputs for the fifty-fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, which will be held in 2022.

IV. Expected outputs and outcomes

11. The following outputs are expected:

(a) The report of the second session of the Committee, which will provide insights into the issues mentioned above;

(b) The reports of the expert group meetings.

12. The following outcomes are also expected:

(a) A better understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by member States in the post-COVID-19 era and the role of regional integration, infrastructure and technology in that regard;

(b) Guidance from member States, in the form of recommendations, on the work of ECA in the areas of private-sector development and finance, regional integration, trade, infrastructure, industry and technology.

V. Format

13. The session will consist of plenaries during which the secretariat will deliver presentations on parliamentary documents and the issues paper on the theme of the Committee session. General discussion will follow the presentations.

VI. Participation

14. The Committee session will be attended by representatives of member States, the African Union Commission, regional economic communities, development finance institutions, United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the private sector, civil society, academia and sectoral organizations.

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