

AFRICAN UNION

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2021 AFRICAN INTEGRATION FORUM & COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICAN INTEGRATION DAY

CONCEPT NOTE

Theme:

*The Role of Continental Integration in
Accelerating African Economic Recovery
from the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Department of Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining
African Union Commission
July 2021

A. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. Africa's integration Agenda is enshrined in the Abuja Treaty (1991), and has an overarching goal of achieving an African Economic Community at continental level, in six successive stages, which include the strengthening of sectoral cooperation and the creation of regional free trade areas, establishment of a continental Customs Union, a Common Market and a monetary and economic union. It is understood that consolidation of the Common Market will hinge free movement of people, right of residence and right of establishment.
2. A historic milestone for regional integration in Africa was recorded on 1 January 2021 with the start of trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The remarkable speed of negotiations, signature, ratifications and entry into force of the AfCFTA Agreement took place between June 2015 and May 2019 and is unprecedented in the treaty making history of the AU just behind the Constitutive Act of the Union.
3. Despite the adoption and implementation of the AfCFTA, the results in attaining the objectives of the Abuja Treaty remain rather mixed with the RECs at different stages of implementation of the Treaty. In addition, more effort is needed to make the ordinary African Citizens understand and own the regional integration process.
4. It is in this vein, that during their 12th Extraordinary Summit on the launch of the operational phase of the AfCFTA in Niamey, Niger on 7 July 2019, AU Heads of State and Government decided that 7 July of each year be designated as "the African Integration Day" to celebrate major achievements attained in regional and continental integration process, and also to deliberate on critical lessons learned, with a view of addressing challenges faced. The first commemoration of African Integration Day took place from 12 June to 9 July 2020.
5. The mobilisation and enthusiasm observed during the first commemoration of the Africa Integration Day in 2020 is a clear testimony of the importance that the African Union leadership attaches to faster regional and continental integration as embedded in the Abuja Treaty.
6. Over the last two decades, Africa has recorded a 4.6 % growth rate on average, despite an unfavourable international economic and financial environment. The current COVID-19 pandemic plunged the continent into its first recession in 25 years. Faced with the disruption of global and regional supply chains due to government containment, restriction measures put in place to combat COVID 19 and the structural weaknesses inherent in African economies characterised by underdeveloped, fragmented small markets, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has once again exposed and exacerbated the vulnerability of African economies.

7. In the perspective of reaching Agenda 2063 annual growth target of 7%, there is a growing consensus among the African Union Member States about the role regional integration can play in fostering inclusive growth and structural transformation.
8. The 2nd commemoration of the African Integration Day will take place from 7 to 9 July 2021. During this commemoration, the AUC will also organise the African Integration Forum as recommended by the meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration at its meeting held in Yaoundé (Cameroon) from 5 - 8 March 2019, which requested the African Union Commission (AUC) to organize, annually, a Forum on African Integration.
9. These commemorations will provide a platform that ensure broad participation of all actors at the national, regional and continental levels, including Member States, RECs, the African Diaspora, Development Partners, Academia, Private Sector, Civil Society, Women and Youth to keep alive the dream of a unified, prosperous and peaceful Africa as enshrined in the Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063.

B. OBJECTIVES

10. The overall objective of the commemoration is to deliberate on how to use integration as a tool for the continent's economic recovery to ***build back better together following the COVID-19 Pandemic.***
11. The specific objectives of the 2021 commemorations of the Africa Integration Day are to:
 - ❖ provide a platform where the main players, including RECs, policymakers, private sector, civil society, will openly discuss the challenges facing regional and continental integration, with a view to providing practical solutions to overcome them;
 - ❖ foster citizens' participation with a view of instilling an unwavering commitment to regional integration in Africa;
 - ❖ create a new positive mind-set on the importance of integration as a tool to accelerate economic recovery from COVID-19 pandemic for those living in the continent and in the diaspora;
 - ❖ celebrate the progress made in the implementation of the African Integration Agenda including, the launch of the AfCFTA and its implementation;
 - ❖ reflect and share lessons learned, with a view to accelerate the attainment of the African Economic Community;
 - ❖ take stock of the major initiatives launched during the 2020 commemoration of the Africa Integration Day;

- ❖ gather opinions from all relevant stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of key strategies for enhancing the coordination of regional and continental integration projects;
- ❖ enhance the realization of a faster Africa integration process and agenda with a view to achieving Africa’s structural transformation for inclusive and sustainable economic development as outlined in “*Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*”;
- ❖ Enable the African Union Commission advocate for speedy ratification, entry into force and effective implementation of the Free Movement of Persons Protocol to complement and ensure the success of AfCFTA;
- ❖ communicate its integration projects and programmes and strengthen mechanism to enhance dialogue with African citizens on matters regarding African regional integration process, as well as explore opportunities for cooperation with relevant stakeholders for faster realization of the of the integration agenda;
- ❖ sensitise the people on the benefits of integration as well as on the Status of Regional and Continental Integration; and
- ❖ Identify key challenges facing African citizens in the integration process as well as necessary measures to address them for their benefit.

C. THEME OF THE FORUM

12. The Theme of the 2021 AID commemorations is “***The role of Continental Economic Integration in Accelerating African Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic***”.

D. ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

13. The commemorations will include a number of activities, covering among others:
- ❖ Status of regional integration in Africa;
 - ❖ Dissemination of the 2021 African Integration Report;
 - ❖ Discussions on African Integration Programmes;
 - ❖ Market Integration: practical modalities and successful implementation of the AfCFTA;
 - ❖ Challenges encountered in the implementation of regional and continental integration agenda;
 - ❖ Issuance of joint statements by the Chairperson of the Union, Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Champion of the AfCFTA;

- ❖ Launch and follow up of programmes and initiatives on regional integration; and
- ❖ Free movement of persons, right of residence and right of establishment.

E. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

14. The following outcomes are expected:

- ❖ Promoting civic participation for an inclusive implementation of Africa's regional integration agenda. This is essential to foster the popularization of the idea of regional integration and promoting broad citizen ownership and participation;
- ❖ Foster co-ordinated policy-making processes through inclusive dialogue for the identification of appropriate, practical and effective means to accelerate continental integration, including addressing, issues around sovereign, which have found to impede accelerated integration process;
- ❖ Improved assessment for better policy formulation through the production of a Meeting Report and a Progress Report on the implementation of initiatives launched during the 2020 commemorations of the Africa Integration Day;
- ❖ Enhanced understanding and awareness by Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora on integration matters, and AfCFTA in particular, and the current status of its implementation;
- ❖ Strengthened political will and leadership for Africa's integration through advocacy efforts targeted at AU Member States to accelerate the ratification, domestication and implementation of AU legal instruments related to continental integration, especially the Protocol to the African Economic Community on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment;
- ❖ Generation of momentum to expedite conclusion of outstanding treaties and protocols, including those related to the establishment of 3 proposed African Union financial institutions (namely, the African Central Bank, African Investment Bank, and African Monetary Fund) among others; and
- ❖ Strengthened cooperation between African Union Institutions, RECs and Member States on regional integration.

F. PARTICIPATION

15. The 2021 African Integration Forum will attract participants drawn from African Union Member States, AUC, AU Specialized Institutions, RECs, Institutions from the UN System and other Development Cooperating Partners, African Financial Institutions, the Private Sector, Academics, Professionals, Youth, Women, Civil Society, the Diaspora, Research Institutions and Think Tanks, among others.

G. DATE AND VENUE

16. The 2021 commemorations of the Africa Integration Day will be held physically and virtually from 7 – 9 July 2021. The physical meetings will be in N'djamena – Chad.

H. FORMAT OF THE COMMEMORATION ACTIVITIES

17. The Forum will be organized as follows:
- (i) Debates structured around plenary sessions and parallel sessions on topics to be identified;
 - (ii) A special session devoted to the sharing of experience between the AUC, the RECs and other participants;
 - (iii) A cultural day capturing the cultural diversity of African regions.
 - (iv) Regional Integration Initiatives/competitions launch with live demonstrations and interactions;
 - (v) Media outreach in the form of statements and press briefings; and
18. In order to emphasise and celebrate the importance of all stakeholders' participation in building regional integration in Africa, the various categories of stakeholders (AU Institutions including the AfCFTA Secretariat; Regional Economic Communities; Private Sector, Civil Society, Research Institutions; the African Diaspora...) will be given the opportunity to lead certain activities of the programme, under the coordination of the AU Commission.

I. BREAKDOWN OF TASKS

19. The Forum will be organized by the AUC in collaboration with the following main partners: RECs Secretariats, AfCFTA Secretariat, AUDA-NEPAD, UNECA, African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), African Development Bank, African Export and Import Bank, African Business Council, Pan-African Chamber of Commerce, AfroChampions Initiative, AeTrade Group, Trade Law Centre and others.

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