



12th COMESA ANNUAL RESEARCH FORUM

Accelerating Regional Integration Through Value Chain Development in Agriculture, Mining, Tourism and Climate Change Adaptation

Call for Submissions

Background

COMESA aims to promote regional integration through trade and development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region. The 2021-2025 Medium Term Strategic Plan builds on COMESA's commitment to regional integration and is based on four strategic pillars: Market integration; Physical integration/connectivity; Productive integration; and Gender and social integration. The 35th meeting of Heads of State and Government summit identified value chain development, innovative agriculture production, mining, tourism and climate change adaptation as critical to sustainable development of COMESA countries.

Taking a value chain approach to climate resilience is important because it presents opportunities for lifecycle thinking and creative collaborations with special focus to local communities and the natural environment because of their essential roles within business value chains. The approach enables businesses to: analyse vulnerability to climate for each link and identify hotspots for risk across the whole value chain; assess risk for each link individually, taking into account how different impacts can have a compounded effect; identify opportunities for new markets to help communities adapt; identify opportunities to build climate resilience across the whole value chain and appraise the full lifecycle economic benefit-to-cost ratio; and implement climate resilience actions in partnership with those who can mutually benefit from them (Acclimatise, Oxfam & BSR, n.d.). Currently, COMESA economies are characteristically exporters of raw materials as opposed to manufactured value-added products. Yet there exist immense potentials to add value to agricultural produce, mining and tourism industries.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has identified agriculture and agro-processing among four high-potential sectors that are expected to see rapid acceleration in production and trade volumes under the AfCFTA, given that they have high potential to meet local demand with local production (World Economic Forum, 2023). According to World Bank, agricultural development is one of the most powerful tools to end extreme poverty, boost shared prosperity, and feed a projected 10 billion people by 2050. In the COMESA region,

agriculture plays a crucial role in sustaining most economies of its Member States. The sector accounts for more than 32 percent of COMESA's gross domestic product (GDP), provides a livelihood to about 80 percent of the region's labour force, accounts for about 65 percent of foreign exchange earnings and contributes more than 50 percent of raw materials to the industrial sector. However, the sector is heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture which is vulnerable to climate change.

Despite the importance of the sector, it is at the forefront of instigating climatic changes as a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and a vulnerable industry affected by its impacts. The sector contributes more than 10 to 15 percent of global GHG emissions (Magazzino et al., 2023). Heat waves, high temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, droughts and flooding represent adverse effects of climate change. The COMESA region is not an exception, the regional economies have witnessed intensification of extreme weather events such as devastating floods, cyclones and droughts. For example, the region experienced devastating cyclones Idai and Freddy that affected Malawi and Zimbabwe; while the Eastern Africa countries experienced periods of droughts and flooding in 2020-2024. This calls for a shift to climate-resilient agriculture (CRA) which includes sustainably using existing natural resources through crop and livestock production systems to achieve long-term higher productivity and farm incomes under climate variabilities (Srinivasarao, 2021).

COMESA is cognizant of the threat of climate change, the COMESA Regional Climate Change Resilience Framework acknowledges that building resilience requires an integrated approach and a long-term commitment to improving three critical capacities: absorptive capacity (ability to minimize exposure to shocks and stresses through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to recover quickly and avoid permanent negative impacts); adaptive capacity (making proactive and informed choices about alternative livelihood strategies based on an understanding of changing conditions); and transformative capacity (the governance mechanisms, policies/regulations, infrastructure, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms that constitute the enabling environment necessary for systemic change). The framework calls for a paradigm shift from a reactive, unanticipated risks and short-term response focused on meeting immediate needs towards a proactive and deliberate effort of addressing the root causes of vulnerability through a comprehensive package of programmes that are complementary, and which builds on the resilience capacities of the households, communities and institutions.

Africa is home to 30 percent of world minerals and can leverage its mineral wealth and capitalize increased demand for critical minerals in the wake of global energy transition (Goosen, 2023). COMESA region is richly endowed with mineral resources such as iron, copper, nickel, chromium, vanadium, manganese and cobalt. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe are among the African countries endowed with critical energy transition minerals (CETMs) such as graphite, nickel, lithium, manganese, copper, cobalt and rare earth elements which are currently in production and are important in the energy transition value chain. In 2022, DRC accounted for 70 percent of the world's cobalt supply, and 8.6 percent global copper production and 33 percent of global tantalum production. Zambia is the 7th largest producer of copper in the world while Zimbabwe produces 8.3 percent of the world's platinum and is the continent's largest producer of lithium (UNECA, 2024).

These minerals can be used as inputs in the manufacturing sector or exported in refined form. However, almost all the mineral wealth is currently exported as ores, concentrates, alloys or metals with little value addition. COMESA can exploit opportunities in the copper value chain through production of electrical products starting with (copper wires, cables, and other semis) and eventually products such as electric motors, transformers, renewable energy, and potentially copper foils used in Electric Vehicle (EV) battery cells. The EV battery value chain also has potential though it requires highly technical skills (World Bank, 2023).

The COMESA Industrialization Policy 2015-2030 and Industrialization Strategy 2017-2026), have identified mineral beneficiation as one of the priority sectors with comparative advantage for industrialization. The Policy takes cognisance that the benefits of exploitation of the region's natural resources can be further deepened through the introduction and enforcement of local content requirements for business operators. In this regard, COMESA has developed Regional Local Content Guidelines. Local content policies can help address the enclave nature of natural resources exploitation, including minerals, and promote the 'localisation' through enhanced local participation and the procurement of inputs along the minerals value chain.

The tourism sector has strong linkages and a multiplier effect on other sectors of the economy. It is a powerful engine of economic growth, poverty eradication, and inclusion, reducing inequalities both among and within countries. It creates jobs and opportunities, especially for disadvantaged groups such as youth and women, and supports community and rural development. According to UN Tourism (2025), the year 2024 marked the recovery of the tourism sector from the COVID-19 Pandemic with 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, representing 99 percent of pre-pandemic levels and 11 percent increase from 2023. Total exports (including passenger transport) amounted to USD 1.9 trillion, about 3 percent higher than before the pandemic (real terms) while receipts reached USD 1.6 trillion, 3 percent more than in 2023 and 4 percent more than in 2019 (real terms).

During 2024, Middle East, Europe and Africa recorded the strongest performance in arrivals. Middle East with 95 million arrivals was the strongest-performing region compared to 2019, with international arrivals 32 percent above pre-pandemic levels, and 1 percent higher than 2023. Africa had 74 million international arrivals, representing 7 percent and 12 percent more than 2019 and 2023 respectively. Europe, the world's largest destination region, had 747 million international arrivals (1 percent above 2019 levels and 5 percent over 2023) supported by strong intraregional demand.

Ethiopia and Egypt were among the top 20 best performing destinations in the world with international arrivals 40 percent and 23 percent above the 2019 levels. Kenya, Tunisia and Seychelles were among the top 10 best performing destinations in Africa and Middle East. The arrivals increased by 9 percent in Kenya and Tunisia while decreasing by 8 percent in Seychelles compared to the 2019 levels. Global International arrivals are expected to grow by 3 percent to 5 percent in 2025.

Tourism like many industries is vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events linked to climate change. Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events affect tourism supply and demand (Tanriveser et al 2024). Extreme weather events have also been identified as one of the main challenges to international tourism in 2025 (UN Tourism, 2025).

Research Theme

COMESA will host the 12th Annual Research Forum from 15-19 September 2025. The Forum brings together various stakeholders, including policy makers, academia, think tanks and private sector to deliberate on topical issues on trade and regional integration. The Forum is also a capacity building avenue in economic and trade policy research for young researchers. Successful research papers are published in COMESA flagship publication "Key Issues in Regional Integration".

COMESA calls for Extended Abstracts under the theme; ***"Accelerating Regional Integration Through Value Chain Development in Agriculture, Mining, Tourism and Climate Change Adaptation."*** with the following sub-themes.

- i. Value chain development in agriculture, mining and tourism sectors in COMESA
- ii. Innovative approaches towards climate resilient agriculture value chains in COMESA
- iii. Sustainable investment models for agrifood systems transformation in COMESA
- iv. Sustainable mining practices for regional development in COMESA
- v. Climate change adaptation strategies for sustainable development in COMESA
- vi. Circular economy and sustainable development in COMESA
- vii. Leveraging sustainable tourism for regional economic integration in COMESA

COMESA invites researchers to submit Extended Abstracts under the different sub-themes. The Extended Abstracts will be peer reviewed and successful authors invited to submit draft papers and thereafter final papers. The successful authors will be invited to make presentations at the 12th COMESA Annual Research Forum scheduled for September 2025.

Submission Requirements for Extended Abstracts

The Extended Abstracts should have the following structure:

Abstract Title: Topical issue drawing from the sub-themes in the context of overall theme.

Background: The context of the research underlining the issues that necessitate investigation, existing gaps of knowledge that the research paper attempts to fill, stating clearly the problem statement /issue being investigated..

Objective(s): The general and specific objectives of the paper or the Research questions that the paper seeks to answer.

Methodology: A description of the proposed methodology (quantitative or qualitative) including econometric and/or survey tools where applicable, estimation technique, data type and sources.

Submission

Extended Abstracts should be submitted in word electronic form to Dr Christopher Onyango at Conyango@comesa.int with copies to Ms. Jane Kibiru at Jkibiru@comesa.int, and Ms. Mary Chileshe at mrchileshe@comesa.int .

Submission Deadline: 15 March 2025