



BRIEF ON COMESA ANNUAL RESEARCH FORUM

Background

1. The COMESA Annual Research Forum was initiated in 2014 with funding from African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF). The forum brings together policy makers, academia, think tanks and the private sector to discuss emerging topical issues in regional integration. The Annual Research Forum is based on a contemporary theme which is informed by COMESA Council of Ministers decisions, emerging issues in economics, trade and regional integration at continental and global level.
2. The event is part of capacity building initiatives aimed at building capacity in economic and trade policy research and analysis to strengthen integration and trade in COMESA region and the African continent. The forum is an avenue to narrow the gap between academia, private sector and policy makers in economic integration and regional trade policy formulation process.
3. COMESA Secretariat usually advertise the call for papers in January every year. The papers go through rigorous internal and external review process, and those that meet the required criteria are presented during the forum. The forum presents an opportunity for researchers, policy makers and academia to dialogue and peer review research papers on various sub-thematic areas. The final papers that meet publication criteria are published in COMESA flagship publication “Key Issues in Regional Integration”. To date Ten editions have been published. The authors also prepare policy briefs from final papers for ease of reading and utilization by policy makers.
4. The policy implications from the papers are presented to COMESA policy organs and form the basis for various policy decisions.
5. Some of the themes for the past ARFs include:
 - i. 30 Years of COMESA Regional Integration: Retrospect and Prospects-2023:
 - ii. Enhancing Business Competitiveness and Resilience to boost Intra-COMESA Trade, 2022;
 - i. Rethinking Trade and Doing Business in the Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021 ;
 - ii. Harnessing Intra-COMESA Trade Through the Interface with African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA), 2020;

- iii. Promoting Intra-COMESA Trade through Innovation, 2019;
- iv. Harnessing Demographic Dividend for Social Economic Transformation and Deep Regional Integration in COMESA through Academia-Industry Linkages, 2018;
- v. Boosting Intra-African Trade through Regional Economic Communities (RECs): Perspectives from COMESA Regional Integration Programmes, 2017; and
- vi. Trade in Services and Trade Facilitation for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization in COMESA region, 2016.

The 11th Annual Research Forum – 17 – 19 September 2024

6. The theme for the Eleventh Annual Research forum is **“Fostering Economic Integration and Inclusivity in COMESA through Value Addition, Green Investments and Tourism”** with the following sub-themes.

- (i) Opportunities and challenges for investment in green projects in COMESA
- (ii) Creating an enabling environment for investment in green technologies in COMESA
- (iii) Role of public development banks and export credit agencies in mobilising and scaling climate finance
- (iv) Investment, value addition and value chain transformation in COMESA
- (v) Drivers of regional value chain development and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) integration in COMESA
- (vi) Opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growth in COMESA
- (vii) Women and youth inclusivity for sustainable development and regional economic integration.

7. The theme is based on the Council of Ministers Decision that the next Research Forum should reflect the COMESA Authority thematic areas and emerging issues, taking into account gender mainstreaming and social integration. In addition, the COMESA Medium-Term Strategic Plan (2021-2025) has identified 4 key pillars, namely market integration, productive integration, physical integration/infrastructure, and gender and social affairs. Under the productive pillar, several game changing value chains (Agro-processing, Energy, Textile and Garments, Leather and Leather Products, Mineral Beneficiation, Pharmaceuticals, Chemicals and Agro-Chemicals, Light Engineering and the Blue Economy) have been earmarked to actualise the regional integration and industrialisation agenda. The tourism sector on the other hand is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors, it contributes to economic growth, enterprise development and employment especially for women, youth and local communities. The sector is one of the seven priority sectors under COMESA’s trade in services liberalization programme

8. COMESA advertised the call for papers in February 2024. Thirty-seven (37) extended abstracts were received and reviewed internally, and authors provided with comments. Consequently, internal review was undertaken on the draft and full papers. Eight (8) full papers qualified for presentation at the forum.

9. The following eight papers will be presented at the Forum following both internal and external reviews.

- (i) Evaluation of Economic Feasibility of Renewable Energy and Compost Production from the Food Waste from the Hospitality Industry in Zimbabwe
- (ii) Economic Diversification and Natural Resource Depletion in COMESA
- (iii) Mapping Potentially Risky Import Products in COMESA
- (iv) Climate Change Vulnerability and Resilience of Tourism Sector in COMESA

- (v) Travel and Tourism Industry in COMESA: A Diamond Factor Model Perspective
- (vi) Determinants of Tourism Demand in the COMESA Region
- (vii) Fostering Sustainable Regional Integration: The Complementary Roles of Unpaid Work Reforms and Entrepreneurship Training for Women and Youth in COMESA. Cases of Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of the Congo
- (viii) Climate Financing in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

10. Apart from Member States, universities and COMESA institutions, this year's participation will also include collaborating partners including, Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), Afreximbank, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), The African Development Bank Group, AfCFTA Secretariat, World Bank Group, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency (NPCA), Delegation of the European Commission to Zambia and the International Trade Centre.