



ICE
Central Africa
11 - 12 Nov. 2020

HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE

Theme:

**A skills revolution for economic diversification
in Central Africa in the advent of COVID-19
and a call for building back better**

CONCEPT / MODERATOR NOTES

Date : 11 November 2020

Time : 10 h 30 – 12 h 45 (GMT+1)

Online

I. BACKGROUND

The competitive capacity and economic diversification potential of Central African countries are currently stifled by inadequate skills development and low productivity. This is evident in the rankings of countries from the subregion in the World Economic Forum's (WEF's) Global Competitive Index (GCI) of 2019. It measures countries' progress against 12 productivity factors of which 4 are directly related to skills building, viz.: skills, innovation capability, labor market conditions and the level of ICT adoption. Out of the 141 countries reviewed, Central Africa's best performer is Rwanda which is the 100th in ranking. Six other countries from the subregion, classified, are in the 75th (least performing) percentile with Gabon topping this group of countries on the 119th spot and Chad trailing the entire index on the 141st position (World Economic Forum 2019)¹.

This situation is due to a wanton lack of skills for economic diversification in the subregion, made abundantly evident by the advent of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). The disease disrupted the supply chains for finished products and vital services ranging from consumer goods through pharmaceuticals to air and sea transportation, showing how dependent the region has been on the outside world for its supplies due to a skills deficit to locally produce these items. It is a paradox that the subregion is, for instance, one of the most endowed in the world with raw materials and the plant biodiversity that are needed for most of its important finished goods and pharmaceuticals, respectively.

There are many causes for the dearth of capacity to deal with such crises, one of the most important of which is the mismatch between skills needed for economic diversification and sustainable development (on the one hand) and the kind of training received by students in secondary and tertiary institutions across countries of the sub-region (on the other). In fact, UNESCO and the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) say of the 14 million university students in Africa, less than 25% of them are enrolled in the productive sectors of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

¹ World Economic Forum. 2019. "The Global Competitiveness Report 2019." www.weforum.org. Edited by Klaus Schwab. Accessed August 6, 2020.
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf.

Following two preparatory webinars for this year' ICE, debaters laid the groundwork for a well-informed conversation at the ICE Session itself in order to clearly elaborate recommendations for policy makers and other stakeholders involved with imparting crucial skills in the mindsets of our countries' existing and would-be labor forces. In the first webinar held on 29 May 2020, participants called for Central African countries to upgrade their skills base and competencies, while putting innovation at the center of their development drive if they want to remain competitive, break the vicious cycle of overdependence on the export of commodities and harness the opportunities offered by COVID-19 in the pharmaceuticals and food sectors (details here: <https://www.uneca.org/webinar-1-36-ice>).

In the second webinar held on 30 July, participants concluded that, if Central African States draw inspiration from the experiences of Ethiopia, Japan and South Africa, among others, to pave their pathways to economic diversification, they can retool their human resources to become more developed, prosperous and resilient to external shocks(details here: <https://www.uneca.org/webinar-2-36-ice>).

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE POLICY DIALOGUE

The objective of the High-Level Policy Dialogue at the 36th session of the ICE is to identify practical measures to take in mobilizing the skills crucially needed for Central Africa's economic diversification, especially with the lessons learnt from COVID-19, and advise member States, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the private sector and all development stakeholders accordingly.

III. ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

The role of the moderator in the dialogue will be to identify the issues and elicit from the panelists, answers as to why the situation in Central Africa is what it is, then prod them to provide concrete recommendations to be implemented by member States, the regional economic communities, academia, the private sector and other stakeholders in the short, medium and long terms.

The debate will run for two hours only, hence, disciplined time management will be of the essence. The moderator will therefore not allow anyone, without exception, to respond to a question or make a comment for more than three minutes.

In addition to the issues raised and questions provided in the event threading guide, the moderator will be expected to carry out further readings around the topic, to deepen their knowledge on in other to guarantee smooth interaction with the panelists and the audience.

The moderator will therefore contact each of the panelists at least two weeks before the panel discussion to calibrate the debate and give them time to research on the questions they will be answering.

IV. ROLE OF THE PANELISTS

The panelists' main responsibility is to provide well researched, succinct answers to the questions of the moderator, constantly bearing in mind that these would be considered as policy recommendations for Member States and all other Stake holders in Central Africa.