



CONCEPT NOTE
FOR
AFRICAN ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2013

“REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA”

October 28-30, 2013

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



African Development Bank Group



United Nations Economic Commission
for Africa



United Nations Development
Programme

1. Introduction

1.1 Regional integration has been the goal of African countries at least since the attainment of independence more than 50 years ago. Many arguments for speeding up the integration process have been advanced from many quarters since then—political leaders, economists in government and the private sector, and researchers in universities and think-tanks. It is generally agreed that integration would be politically and economically beneficial for Africa in the global economy.

1.2 In response, African countries have tried to strengthen their regional economic communities, streamlining their mandates, and with some regions even considering closer political union. Platforms for an eventual monetary union have been set up in East and West Africa. Importantly, Africa's apex political body, the Organization of African Unity became the African Union. In spite of these efforts, the goal of an economically integrated Africa is still elusive. The aim of the planned *African Economic Conference 2013*, which as in past years will be organized jointly by the **African Development Bank**, the **Economic Commission for Africa** and the **United Nations Development Program**, is to address these challenges and suggest solutions.

2. Challenges and Opportunities of Regional Integration in Africa

2.1 With 54 countries, some landlocked¹, but all contending for the same external markets, and attempting to overcome the same infrastructure challenges, the predominant view is that in spite of recent progress, Africa remains politically and economically fragmented. Without economic integration, Africa will not be able to harness the scale economies in production and benefit from the demand from large markets that for instance spurred and sustained growth in some Asian economies. Fractionalization, if not addressed, will continue to impede the continent's development.

2.2 However, in spite of much debate and variations in policy stance, it is still not quite clear what African countries should do in concrete policy terms to move the process forward. A good starting point is to address infrastructure bottlenecks as well as institutional and

¹ The list of the 14 landlocked countries in Africa is as follows: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

regulatory constraints through, for example, public-private partnerships. Promoting the free movement of goods, services, labour and capital is critical for regional economic integration as well as for spatial inclusion within countries.

2.3 During the past decade, African economies have posted high levels of growth, close to 6 per cent on average—considered by leading agencies to be among the highest in the world. The natural resource boom and new discoveries of oil and gas in many countries in Africa have been a key factor. However, the economic turnaround would not have been possible without policy and structural changes within Africa itself. Macroeconomic reforms have opened up the economies, improved performance, increased investment and lowered inflation. Above all, the macro-risk associated with the African economies has been reduced substantially and countries have been able to go to the markets in the past few years. Notably, much of the recent borrowing on international markets has been targeted to infrastructure in a bid to open up markets, increase power generation and raise competitiveness. This is having economic reverberations beyond individual country borders and is helping countries to take another look at the benefits of regional economic integration.

2.4 For much of the past 50 years, the monocultures of the African economies meant that focus was on trade beyond Africa—i.e. the search for foreign exchange. Therefore, African countries trade more with their former colonial rulers than with their neighbours. Today, things have changed considerably in parts of the continent. In East Africa, for example, regional trade has a greater share in total trade for some countries than that to Europe and Asia. Increasing trade ties are thus changing the integration picture. Regional integration is now driven more by the private sector and civil society—which see benefits in terms of cost and competitiveness—than governments. It is becoming important to build domestic constituencies for regional integration.

3. African Economic Conference 2013

3.1 The *African Economic Conference 2013* on **Regional Integration** will therefore offer a unique avenue for researchers, policymakers and development practitioners from Africa and elsewhere to debate regional integration, from the point of view of its impact on growth and development, and the political economy that drives the adaptation process. In light of Africa's search for economic transformation, the moment is propitious to investigate the contribution of regional economic integration in light of Africa's much changed economic circumstances,

with an expanding middle class and higher investment inflows than in the past, and remittances from the Diaspora. The impact of these new factors on domestic demand, trade, job creations and more generally inclusive growth are yet to be put in their proper perspective.

3.2 The *African Economic Conference* is now the leading Forum for the discussion of Africa's burning issues of the day. The 2013 Conference will be the eighth edition and will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on October 28 to 30, 2013.

4. Objectives and Rationale

4.1 The main objectives of the *African Economic Conference* series are:

- To promote knowledge management as an important driver of policy dialogue, good policy planning and implementation;
- To foster dialogue that promotes the exchange of ideas and innovative thinking among researchers, development practitioners and African policymakers;
- To encourage and enhance research on economic and policy issues related to the development of African economies;
- To provide an opportunity for young African researchers, Africans in the Diaspora, regional and sub-regional organizations to disseminate their research findings as well as share information with African policymakers on the work they do in the region.

Since inception in 2006 the African Economic Conference has brought together outstanding academics and development practitioners in the field of economics and fosters dialogue and exchange of knowledge on issues facing Africa within the global context (see Box 1).

Box 1: Themes of the African Economic Conference Since Inauguration in 2006

- AEC 2006—*Accelerating Africa’s Development Five Years into the 21st Century.*
- AEC 2007—*Opportunities and Challenges of Development for Africa in the Global Arena*
- AEC 2008—*Globalization, Institutions and Economic Development of Africa*
- AEC 2009—*Fostering Development in an Era of Financial and Economic Crises*
- AEC 2010—*Setting the Agenda for Africa’s Economic Recovery and Long Term Growth*
- AEC 2011—*Green Economy and Structural Transformation in Africa*
- AEC 2012—*Fostering Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Africa in an Age of Global Economic Uncertainty*

5. Format of the African Economic Conference 2013

5.1 The 2013 Conference will be organized around the theme: “***Regional Integration in Africa***”. It will be based on four pillars of integration: movement of goods and services; movement of capital; movement of people; and role and impact of regional institutions. The Conference will comprise a number of plenary sessions, which will feature presentations and discussions by prominent academics, policy makers, business actors and opinion leaders, as well as representatives from development partner organisations.

5.2 The break-out sessions will allow for in-depth discussions of salient issues arising from the thematic focus of the Conference, allowing for deeper and more technical analyses. The themes suggested below will make it possible to undertake a broad range of discussions on the current state of Africa’s integration, and generate valuable insights for improved policy making.

The following 10 thematic areas will be covered:

- The political economy of Africa’s regional economic integration;
- Institutional integration, policy coordination and convergence
- Infrastructure and Africa’s regional economic integration;
- The role of the “informal sector” in regional integration.
- Financial integration and emerging financial hubs
- The economics of agglomeration/production across borders;
- Trade and currency unions’ issues in Africa.
- Africa’s economic geography and regional integration
- Regional integration and labour migration

- Comparative examples from other areas of the world

5.3 Accepted papers will comprise original work not previously published. Young African researchers are especially encouraged to submit their papers. This will provide young African researchers the opportunity to share their work with a broader audience, with a view to extending their network, which is crucial for their future career. As in 2012, a prize will be given to the author of the best paper presented at the Conference, selected by a distinguished panel. The prize will be announced at the closing ceremony.

6. Submission of Paper and Time Frame

6.1 Authors should submit full papers following the instructions on the website: www.afdb.org/aec

6.2 The following important dates will serve to guide participants and experts submitting papers for the Conference:

Box 2: Annotated Time Frame	
• Start of online submission	June 24, 2013
• Paper Submission Deadline	August 30, 2013
• Notification of Final Acceptance	September 18, 2013
• Submission of revised manuscripts	October 11, 2013
• Closing of flight bookings	October 18, 2013
• Conference Dates	October 28-30, 2013

6.3 Papers will be blinded reviewed by an independent institution. The objective is to have the highest quality papers presented at the conference. Young researchers are strongly invited to submit papers.

7. Expected Outputs

7.1 The outputs of the Conference will include:

- *Conference Report*: A summary of the key findings and messages from conference papers and keynote speeches that distil policy or operational relevance of the Conference.

- *Conference Proceedings*: These comprise a special issue of the *African Development Review* containing the most innovative articles of policy and operational relevance, as well as proceedings online that publishes papers presented at the conference. These publications find useful application in policy making and subsequently in defining development priorities.

8. Sponsorship

On submitting the abstract authors will be requested to indicate whether they require financial support to cover expenses (travel, accommodation and daily allowance) associated with their participation in the Conference. Only one author per paper accepted for presentation will be eligible for support. Support is reserved for presenters and young researchers from African institutions.