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**Economic Commission for Africa
Committee of Experts of the Conference of African
Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development**

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

Statutory issues

Report on the first session of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology

I. Introduction

1. The first session of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology was held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa on 11 and 12 December 2019. The session was convened under the theme: “Private sector development and the digital economy in support of regional integration in Africa”.

2. The session was preceded by a number of expert group meetings and workshops, including: an inception and methodology workshop on the tenth edition of *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA X)*; an expert group meeting to review a study on the interface between the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the regional economic communities’ free trade agreements and customs unions; an expert group meeting to review a study on harnessing emerging technologies for sustainable development; an expert group meeting to review a study on the possibility of a common investment area in AfCFTA; an expert group meeting to review a study on electricity regulation for private sector investment; and a validation workshop on the AfCFTA country business index.

II. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by the following African member States: Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, the Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

* E/ECA/COE/39/1.



4. Representatives from the following institutions and organizations also attended the meeting: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), African Development Bank (AfDB), African Business Centre for Developing Education, Biofuels Association (Zambia), Cameroon Chamber of Commerce, Competition Authority of Kenya, Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce, General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco, Grain Traders Association of Zambia, Liberia Intellectual Property Office, Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy, Naija Startups (Nigeria), RES4Africa Foundation (Italy), Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (Uganda), Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme, Sustainable Energy Initiative (Kenya), Trade Policy Training Centre in Africa, Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Zambia Development Agency; and representatives from the academic sector.

5. Representatives of the following regional economic communities also attended: Arab Maghreb Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

III. Opening of the session

6. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the outgoing Bureau of South Africa), of the tenth session of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration. He thanked the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for organizing the meeting and expressed gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for hosting the meeting. He underscored the importance of the meeting and the choice of the theme which he said was timely, considering the current debate on trade and digitization. He concluded by reiterating the support of his country for the incoming Bureau and for the secretariat in the implementation of the programmes and activities.

7. Representing the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Director of the Regional Integration and Trade Division, in his opening remarks, welcomed the participants and the representatives of other organizations to the meeting. He indicated that the AfCFTA process of negotiations could not have come at a better time as it offered Africa a new engine to respond to the slowing global economy. He noted that modelling work by ECA had shown that an AfCFTA agreement could increase intra-African trade by between 15 to 25 per cent, compared to a scenario where no agreement was in place.

8. Cognizant of the importance of digital trade and the digital economy, the African Union Commission and ECA are finalizing a digital transformation strategy for Africa, to be presented for consideration at the African Union Summit in February 2020. The speaker remarked that the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development had endorsed the establishment of the new Committee at its annual Conference in 2019.¹ He indicated that the mandate of the new Committee had been broadened to more effectively support the development agenda of the continent and to align more closely the programmes of ECA with the priorities and needs of its member States.

¹ The fifty-second session of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development took place in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 20 to 26 March 2019. In its resolution 966(LII), “the Conference of Ministers endorsed [...] adjustments to the intergovernmental structure of the Economic Commission for Africa...[t]o organise the sectoral subsidiary organs [...]: Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology.”

9. The speaker highlighted the importance of the theme, which he said underlined the contribution of the digital economy to the global gross domestic product (GDP), including the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA. He then called upon African member States to enhance their efforts in improving the use of a digital economy and strengthen the integration of digitization in their national development strategies and plans, and for the private sector to work collaboratively with Governments.

10. In his statement, the Minister of International Cooperation, Regional Integration and Francophonie of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pepin Guillaume Manjolo Buakila, thanked the host Government for its warm hospitality and congratulated ECA for successfully organizing the first session of the new Committee.

11. The Minister observed that the realization of the AfCFTA process was confronted by various challenges, including the low economic level of African States; political status and governance difficulties; and industrialization problems. He made reference to the efforts of African leaders to put in place projects and programmes of regional integration, implemented by regional economic communities at national, regional and continental levels.

12. The Minister further focused on the regulation and facilitation of intra-African trade in the area of transport, and the facilitation of intra-African tourism and highlighted that some of the key elements should be addressed in order to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement, including road, railway and air transport.

13. The opening statement was delivered by the State Minister of the Ministry of Trade of the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mesganu Arga Moach. He welcomed participants to the meeting and to Addis Ababa and commended ECA for its work in organizing the meeting. The Minister offered words of congratulation to his country’s Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, who had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 2019. The Minister emphasized that this award was a success for the whole continent and that it was a cause for celebration by all.

14. He highlighted the importance of digitization, which he said was crucial for developing and expanding business, stimulating economic growth and opportunities, and generating jobs. He highlighted the example of Ethiopia, where home-grown economic reform was taking place, focusing on job creation, inclusive growth and poverty reduction.

15. Making reference on the importance of the theme, the Minister said it was key to influencing African Governments in their focus on digitization as they implement policies relating to trade and regional integration. The Minister noted the impressive breakthrough of the digital economy in many African countries in the past 15 years, which he said was vital for economic growth and development. He highlighted aspects of progress made in the area of digitization, including implementation of the digital free trade area, which empowered traders to perform cross-border trade, infrastructure development, energy and services. The Minister further stressed the importance of the use of digitization in achieving the full benefits of AfCFTA. He concluded by reiterating the strong commitment of his Government in supporting the work of ECA in the area of regional integration, including Agenda 2063.

IV. Election of the Bureau

16. The participants elected the following countries to constitute its Bureau on the basis of rotational regional representation.

Chair: Djibouti (East Africa)

First Vice-Chair:	Democratic Republic of the Congo (Central Africa)
Second Vice-Chair:	Sierra Leone (West Africa)
Third Vice-Chair:	Libya (North Africa)
Rapporteur:	Zambia (Southern Africa)

17. After the election of the Bureau, the Chair of the incoming Bureau, the representative of Djibouti acknowledged the good work and leadership of the Chair of the outgoing Bureau and further, thanked the secretariat for its outstanding work.

V. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work

18. The agenda was adopted, as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of the Bureau.
3. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Presentation of reports by the secretariat:
 - (a) Assessment of progress on regional integration in Africa;
 - (b) Overview of the policy and regulatory environment for innovative financing of sustainable energy and infrastructure development in Africa;
 - (c) Emerging technologies, competitiveness and regional integration;
 - (d) AfCFTA: an update on the establishment of the agreement and the status of negotiations for phase II.
5. General discussion on the theme of the first session, “Private sector development and the digital economy in support of regional integration in Africa”.
6. Review of the 2018–2019 work programme of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration and priorities for 2020 of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology.
7. Consideration and adoption of the report from the first session of the Committee.
8. Closing of the session.

19. The programme of work was adopted with no amendments.

VI. Presentation of reports by the secretariat

A. Assessment of progress of regional integration in Africa

Presentation

20. The secretariat highlighted some of the key achievements of the continent in the area of regional integration, including the signing in Kigali of the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA by 44 African countries on 21 March

2018, and the launch in Niamey of its operational phase in July 2019. The secretariat also outlined progress achieved by the regional economic communities in implementing some of the continental initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

21. In trade, ECA in collaboration with its partners continued to support efforts in the implementation of the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA, including the development of the draft text that was subsequently used as the basis for the process of negotiations. In addition, ECA, AfDB and the African Union Commission jointly prepared the second edition of the Africa Regional Integration Index. It was noted that the Index focused on four modes of infrastructure, attesting to the need for more resources for the development of quality infrastructure in Africa.

22. The secretariat also reported on the performance of macroeconomic integration in the regional economic communities, which was recorded as remarkable, with an average score of 0.399. In terms of infrastructure integration, the secretariat emphasized the importance of infrastructure development in promoting economic growth but pointed out that member States needed to enhance their efforts in allocating more financing resources for infrastructure development.

23. The secretariat concluded by highlighting progress by African member States and the regional economic communities in the area of migration, the free movement of persons across borders, governance, peace and security in promoting regional integration and development.

Discussion

24. There were concerns raised with regard to the slow pace at which countries are ratifying the African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, which seeks to promote the free movement of people on the continent. Though the Protocol has been signed by 32 African countries; only four have ratified the Protocol. A number of member States cited security concerns as one of the main reasons why they were reluctant to ratify the African Union Protocol.

25. Under the same, participants underscored the importance of the establishment of regional banking and financial institutions, to assist in currency convertibility or currency exchange which could conveniently facilitate cross-border transactions. There is also a need to assess the institutional regulatory architecture in regional economic communities and member States.

26. With respect to governance, peace and security, it was pointed out that there may be a need for solid strategies that would assist in maintaining peace and security in Africa, given the importance of peace and security in advancing the continental integration agenda.

27. Clarifications were sought on the Africa Regional Integration Index calculation of composite indices for regional economic communities; extending measures to country-level indices; and the separation of some regional integration dimensions. It was explained that Index had been refined and strengthened, applying the robust Principal Component Analysis, which will include both regional-level and country-level indices.

28. The special needs and challenges faced by African landlocked developing countries was discussed, in particular in terms of integrating their economies into the continent and global trading system. In that regard, a suggestion was made that this group of countries be referred to as interlinked countries in order to emphasize that they harness the benefits of their geographical location for better integration and trade.

Recommendations

29. In light of the discussions, recommendations were made to member States, regional economic communities, the private sector and ECA, as presented below.

30. Member States were requested to:

(a) Establish national implementation committees as well as develop AfCFTA national implementation strategies in order to take full advantage of the Agreement;

(b) Join the single African air transport market to facilitate the full implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision on Liberalization of Air Transport Markets in Africa in order to ease the movement of goods, people and services across the continent;

31. Regional economic communities were requested to mainstream the Action Plan on Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) in their programmes and policies in order to boost industrialization, economic diversification, productive integration and trade integration.

32. Regional economic communities and the private sector were requested to advocate the ratification process of the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment.

33. ECA was requested to:

(a) Continue to sensitize member States to sign and ratify the African Union Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment; AfCFTA;

(b) Expand analytical work on the AfCFTA business index on existing indices, knowledge products and studies in collaboration with partners and international agencies;

(c) Enhance its support towards building the technical capacity of regional economic communities to implement their industrialization policies and strategies;

(d) Continue to broaden its capacity-building programme on the use of macroeconomic and forecasting models in economic planning and development for member States and regional economic communities;

(e) Continue and expand its support to Africa's landlocked countries in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and to enable them to reap the benefits of AfCFTA;

(f) Support efforts to enhance the interface between AfCFTA and the free trade areas of regional economic communities;

(g) Deepen knowledge generation and dissemination in respect to various dimensions of regional integration, including the preparation of the Report on Assessing Regional Integration in Africa.

B. Overview of the policy and regulatory environment for innovative financing of sustainable energy and infrastructure development in Africa

Presentation

34. The secretariat underscored that financing the implementation of infrastructure projects remained one of the major challenges in many African countries and that the infrastructure financing gap was huge – estimated at \$108 billion per annum. Notable challenges remained in respect to the African

electricity market, where more than 595 million people on the continent did not have access to electricity. The continent's infrastructure funding needs had reached an annual figure of \$170 billion, leaving an annual gap estimated at \$108 billion. The greatest financing gap was in the energy sector where an annual investment of \$90 billion was required.

35. The secretariat concluded by identifying critical issues that needed to be explored, including: (a) addressing the challenges that the private sector faces in energy and infrastructure projects; (b) the extent to which public-private partnerships are used to finance energy and infrastructure projects in Africa, and practical challenges they are facing; (c) the region's principles and strategies for engaging with non-African countries and organizations in its regional infrastructure development; and (d) key performance indicators for effective infrastructure partnerships with non-African countries and organizations from an African perspective.

Discussion

36. The need to close Africa's infrastructure investment gap was broadly recognized by participants and the role of private capital in financing infrastructure development was also emphasized. It was mentioned that there were many sources of finance, including the private equity fund, where Africa could secure \$100 billion in investment funds for infrastructure projects. It was acknowledged, however, that the nature of infrastructure projects was complex, long term and capital intensive, thus it required the mitigation of several risks, particularly policy risks, which could be the result of a change in government administration.

37. Participants observed that the continent lacks bankable projects of good quality to attract the private sector. Therefore, capacity on project preparation and development needed to be enhanced. It was reported that many countries had established regulatory framework for public-private partnerships. However, member States struggle to mobilize financing for infrastructure.

38. Participants commented that the Inga project had Africa-wide potential and could increase electricity access across the continent, and that multiple partners from across the world were interested in it. It was noted, however, that African organizations and investors, unlike those from other parts of the world, had demonstrated limited interest in being involved in the development of the project.

Recommendations

39. The following recommendations were made requesting ECA:

(a) Mobilize African partners, particularly from the private sector, to participate in the development of Inga;

(b) Ensure there is adequate investment in science, technology and innovation, as this will ensure that Africa strengthens its own skills and competency to innovate its infrastructure development;

(c) Investigate innovative ways of financing infrastructure projects and assist countries in resource mobilization, internally and externally, including from the public and private sectors;

(d) Collaborate with other partners to assist countries to develop a pipeline of bankable infrastructure projects, as well as assist small island developing States in infrastructure development (particularly transport);

(e) Support African countries in harmonizing the public-private partnership framework with a view to promoting investment in cross-border projects.

C. Emerging technologies, competitiveness and regional integration

Presentation

40. The representative of the secretariat highlighted the importance of harnessing emerging technologies for competitiveness and regional integration in science, technology and innovation. The overall objective of the report was to support member States harness science, technology and innovation and a green economy to meet their development goals which focused on three key issues: emerging technologies, nanotechnology, and regional perspectives to harness emerging technologies, including the opportunities and the steps countries could take to catch up with leading nations on technology.

41. The speaker pointed out that Africa's science, technology and innovation capability remains small and its performance in technology use and ownership uneven. The point was made that, globally, Africa accounted for 1 per cent of the global research and development expenditure, 0.3 per cent of high technology exports and 0.2 per cent of payment for intellectual property. The role of emerging technologies in spearheading the continent's transformation as a subject of great interest and importance was emphasized as was digital technologies, which continued to transform every aspect of society. It was noted, however, that Africa accounted for less than 1 per cent of the global Internet traffic and less than 1 per cent of the world's 70 largest digital platforms.

42. The speaker concluded by referring to the AfCFTA process, which he said could serve both as a vehicle for developing common strategies and also serve as a driver for attracting investment in and reducing the cost of emerging technologies.

Discussion

43. During the discussion, the importance of digital technology in promoting economic growth and sustainable development was emphasized. Questions were raised on what needs to be done to bring the informal sector into the formal sector through digital technologies. Further questions focused on how digital technologies could be used in tax collection from the informal sector.

44. To promote innovation among African young people, participants agreed that educational curricula needed to be amended. In that regard, it was recommended that African universities and centres of innovation form partnerships in order to foster the inclusion of research and development in their educational curricula. It was observed that the promotion of start-ups and hubs of innovation in the region was essential to the economic growth of the continent. Given the importance of start-ups to the economy, participants recommended that start-ups should be supported in their business development to allow them to grow.

45. There was significant debate on the quality of data and the relationship between the numbers on research and development personnel and expenditure development. The observation was made that African research and development institutions needed to collaborate both with one another and globally, and the same held for researchers. A number of experts underscored the need to improve data infrastructure, regulation on data exchange, cooperation on cybersecurity and personal data protection, taking a leaf from the approach of the European Union.

Recommendations

46. The following recommendations were made as described below.

47. Member States were requested to:

(a) Support research and development, technology acquisition and infrastructure development, including through public–private partnerships, in a bid to foster and enhance the inclusive growth of digital and other forms of technologies;

(b) Adopt consistent policies and strategies and build basic infrastructure to harness innovation for sustainable development, in particular to respect and protect intellectual property rights and update educational curricula with the aim of promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship;

(c) Develop minimum acceptable standards and regulations at the regional level to increase intra-African collaboration and attract investment in emerging technologies.

48. ECA was requested to:

(a) Support research that focuses on the key drivers of innovation in informal firms, and how informal firms use digital technologies to expand their businesses and compete in the marketplace;

(b) Undertake in-depth research to improve understanding of the African market for start-ups, the institutions that support them, the levels of support and the policies that target start-ups;

(c) Provide information on the methods used by member States to build their research and development systems and to increase both the number of researchers and the expenditure on research and development, to enable countries to draw lessons;

(d) Develop a virtual platform that will enable African research and development institutions to collaborate with each other, with African researchers in the diaspora and with other researchers around the world.

D. African Continental Free Trade Area: an update on the establishment of the agreement and the status of negotiations in phase II

Presentation

49. The representative of the secretariat provided background information on the work that had been conducted, including the establishment of the present Committee, responded to reform efforts to ensure a more coordinated and streamlined approach, under the new strategic directions and core functions of the Commission.

50. The speaker highlighted some of the main accomplishments of ECA Subprogramme 2 for the biennium 2018–2019, including: further analysis of the effect of the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA issues relating to the elaboration of phase II negotiations (investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy); the launch of a new work stream on digital trade and the digital economy; collecting and compiling data on intra-African investments; the launch of seven electronic investment guides (iGuides); an assessment of the linkage between double taxation agreements and bilateral investment treaties and of drivers on intra-African investment; and the preparation of the second iteration of the Africa Regional Integration Index.

51. The presenter underscored that, as AfCFTA negotiations evolve, there is need for more analytical work, as well as technical support to be able to engage and implement the agreement. Future work would also include deep quantification and analysis on trade in services, to enhance support to the AfCFTA negotiations and national implementation strategies.

Discussion

52. Participants underscored the need for the informal sector to leverage the opportunities available through the digital economy, which would require that the informal sector develop digital literacy and skills to harness such opportunities. Digital identity was also seen as an opportunity to help those who did not have formal identification, which, in the African context, represented half of the population of the continent. The observation was made that, in addition to those advantages, a digital identity could make it possible for individuals to obtain critical services such as voter registration, social services and mobile banking services.

53. Participants commended ECA for the technical support given to member States, with particular reference to the project on the iGuides. It was recommended that a mechanism be put in place by ECA to ensure platform tracks policy developments such as e-regulation, in order to give feedback to policymakers. ECA was requested to continue to prioritize work programmes on capacity-building in implementing this project. . It was deemed critical that the iGuides be interactive with investors to support them and address their needs, while at the same time be able to improve investor tracking., The need to improve online translation was also highlighted.

54. Focusing on the second phase of the process involving AfCFTA, participants underscored the need to include the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the envisaged continental market. In that context, the question that arose was how digitization could be harnessed so as to capture taxes from the informal sector and thereby counter the expected negative impacts. Despite the decrease in tariff revenues, ECA research showed that African welfare gains were set to be positive and were likely to be larger once services and investments were opened up.

Recommendations

55. The following recommendations were made, requesting ECA to:

(a) Deepen the understanding, in its analytical work of economic impact on different sectors of the African economy to assist member States better understand the opportunities and potential benefits;

(b) Review and improve iGuides in order to optimize their functioning, and also consider to subsequently extend this initiative to other member States with a view to building their capacity in investment promotion;

(c) Support more member States in developing their national strategies for implementation of the agreement and in dealing with the negotiations around AfCFTA, including support for member States to set up a fully functioning AfCFTA;

(d) Assist member States, in collaboration with its partners, particularly the African Union Commission, in negotiating phase II issues and implementing the Agreement Establishing AfCFTA;

(e) Provide support for countries in identifying and implementing actions that will support small and medium-sized enterprises in their efforts to transition from the informal to the formal sector while making full use of digital tools.

VII. General discussion on the theme of the first session, “Private sector development and the digital economy in support of regional integration in Africa”

Panel discussion

56. The first panellist highlighted the breadth of digital initiatives already being undertaken by COMESA, including the COMESA digital free trade area, Africa cloud ecosystem and 100 per cent paperless meetings. It was emphasized that the focus and concentration should not only be on technology but in considering information and communications technologies as an enabler for broader objectives. Such technologies can be leveraged to enhance key pillars of regional integration, including production, trade, industrialization and transport.

57. The second panellist emphasized the value of the digital economy for women and commented that digital solutions could bring women to markets and contribute to overcoming traditional gender barriers. The speaker noted, however, that women had less access to digital technologies, digital infrastructure, electricity and the digital economy, and that, for that reason, gender mainstreaming was vital to empower women.

58. The point was made that there were many digital technology interventions being undertaken by AfDB. Reference was also made for the need of the private sector to have open access to digital platforms and the need to take into account the economic dimension of personal data, which has today become an essential infrastructure for the inclusive development of trade.

59. The fourth panellist called for greater attention to be paid for investment in science, technology and innovation – areas that were fundamental to the digital economy, but in which Africa tended to underperform. Investments were needed to address Africa’s skills gap – and to create a “citizen science-ship”. The speaker noted that, nevertheless, intra-African information and knowledge sharing was also critical.

60. The fifth panellist linked the issues of digitization, the private sector and regional integration as a virtuous circle, in which each leads to and deepens the other. Improved infrastructure was called for, including continental cloud platforms and greater smartphone uptake, and production in Africa. The observation was made that regional integration had a role to play in addressing regional digital barriers and in allowing greater scalability of the African technology private sector – the significance of that was highlighted by the AfCFTA concept.

General discussion on the theme

61. Concerns were raised about the limited interoperability among African digital technologies, which were isolated to only a few markets. Improved regional integration could therefore support scalability.

62. Participants acknowledged the pressing need to develop human capacities to achieve the “Africa We Want” and to continue the quest for the “Africans we want”. Solutions proposed, included digital means to provide for education, such as peer-to-peer learning, and investing in science, technology and innovation for “citizen science-ship”.

63. In regard to supporting the digital economy, several challenges were raised: access to markets, logistics, information and data could be limited. Added to which, access to, and affordability of, finance, electricity, the Internet and digital identities posed fundamental obstacles.

64. The discussion focused on success factors for digitization in Africa, including broadband infrastructure, smartphone-facilitated infrastructure,

upskilling, data access, the development of appropriate intellectual property rights regimes, and the promotion of “FabLabs”.

Recommendations

65. The following recommendations were made, requesting member States to:

(a) Links between African universities, regional economic communities and Governments should be established and consolidated;

(b) Allocate more resources to invest in education and in gender mainstreaming to support science, technology and innovation.

66. Member States and regional economic communities, to prepare for the fourth industrial revolution.

67. In light of the discussions, the following recommendations were made, requesting ECA to:

(a) Prepare, in collaboration with its partners, a comprehensive and coherent digital agenda for the African continent, cognizant of all the key pillars necessary to drive the regional integration agenda, including establishing an AfCFTA digital platform, and the funding options available, without leaving any country behind;

(b) Provide technical assistance to streamline regional digital policies and strategies;

(c) Consider dedicating more time for discussions on the theme during future sessions of the Committee, including making provisions for parallel sessions.

VIII. Review of the 2018–2019 work programme of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration and priorities for 2020 of the Committee on Private Sector Development, Regional Integration, Trade, Infrastructure, Industry and Technology

68. The review of the 2018–2019 work programme of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration was adopted with some amendments.

IX. Consideration and adoption of the report of the first session of the Committee

69. The Committee adopted the report with some amendments and requested the secretariat to incorporate all the amendments and forward the final report to the participants.

X. Closing of the session

70. Closing remarks were made by the Director of the Regional Integration and Trade Division and the Chair of the Session, who declared the session closed at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 12 December 2019.