

CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Forum on the Implementation of Cross-Border Transport Infrastructure Projects in Africa

“Boosting Market Integration and Intra-African Trade through Effective Management of Regional Transport Infrastructure and Services”

1. Background

There is consensus at the national, sub-regional and regional levels in Africa that economic transformation is the right path for the continent’s development. In this regard, many African countries have formulated national development plans, setting their sights on becoming middle income countries in the near future. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have also developed medium to long term visions with similar objectives. At the continental level, the African Union Commission, working closely with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), is spearheading the articulation of a 50-year vision for Africa, commonly referred to as Agenda 2063. At the same time, African leaders have stepped up efforts to strengthen regional market integration and enhance cross-border trade on the continent. The African Union (AU) Summit of Heads of State and Government, in January 2012, endorsed a seven-cluster Action Plan for boosting intra-African trade (BIAT) and a framework for establishing a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by an indicative date of 2017.

Achieving Africa’s transformative development agenda, realizing the benefits of the CFTA, and boosting intra-African trade all require adequate infrastructure, particularly regional transport infrastructure and services. The importance of improving Africa’s regional infrastructure is widely acknowledged and this, indeed, has led, over the years, to the adoption of several regional programmes such as the Trans African Highways (TAH) network, the First and Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decades in Africa (UNTACDA I & II), the NEPAD Short Term Action Plan (STAP), and more recently the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Sub-regional programmes such as the Transport Master Plan for Central Africa as well as the North-South Corridor involving countries in Southern and Eastern Africa have also been adopted. Most RECs also have infrastructure programmes or Master Plans.

However, the implementation of projects in these programmes has generally been unsatisfactory. For instance, missing links or sub-standard sections still constitute over 20 per cent of the Trans-African Highways network. Similarly, only 50 per cent of UNTACDA II and 15 per cent of NEPAD STAP projects were completed. This situation has been attributed to several factors, including; lack of finance, inadequate political support, technical capacity, and institutional frameworks, among others. The economic, social, political and physical environments of concerned countries have also been identified as contributing factors to the low level of implementation of projects. Moreover, monitoring and evaluation of regional infrastructure and trade facilitation projects and programmes in Africa is inadequate, rendering it difficult to analyse progress and plan for their improvement.

Overall, initiatives to identify the challenges to the implementation of regional projects and to effectively monitor and evaluate their implementation are more likely to succeed if all stakeholders are involved, especially project implementing agencies. While project implementation agencies are probably the most reliable sources of information on progress in the implementation of projects, they have not generally been adequately represented in discussions on regional infrastructure development in Africa. Involving such agencies would enable stakeholders and potential financiers to have updated information on the status of Africa's infrastructure programmes and projects. This will enable them to make informed decisions on their involvement in the programmes and projects.

It is in this context that the regional forum on the implementation of cross-border transport infrastructure projects in Africa is being organized. In addition to RECs that coordinate the implementation of regional projects, Project Implementation Units at the national level would be invited, since implementation of projects mostly takes place at the national level. The forum will contribute to efforts to address emerging trade issues, particularly the role of effective management of cross-border transport infrastructure and services to strengthening market integration and enhancing intra-African trade. It will also enable different stakeholders to exchange their experiences on the relationship between trade and transport.

2. Objective

The objective of the Forum is to provide a platform for participants to:

1. Discuss the role of transport infrastructure and services in regional trade; as well as mainstreaming trade in transport projects as a strategy for resource mobilization, particularly in the context of the Aid for Trade initiative;
2. Exchange views and share information on the challenges to the implementation of regional transport infrastructure projects;
3. Provide updates on progress in PIDA and other regional infrastructure projects;
4. Better understand their roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating PIDA and other regional projects; and
5. Provide baseline data on infrastructure in their countries/sub-regions.

3. Expected Outcomes

1. Better understanding of the role of transport infrastructure and services in regional trade, and how to access Aid for Trade funds;
2. Better understanding of the challenges to the implementation of regional infrastructure projects in Africa;
3. Updated information on progress in PIDA projects;
4. Better understanding of project implementing agencies of their roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating PIDA projects; and
5. Availability of baseline data on infrastructure in countries/RECs represented at the meeting.

4. Format

The Forum will be held in plenary sessions and each session will consist of presentations and discussions. An issues paper on transport infrastructure and trade; as well as the guidelines for monitoring and evaluating regional infrastructure projects will be presented at the forum.

5. Participation

The meeting will be attended by representatives of national project implementation units/Agencies; associations of national road agencies, RECs, AUC, NPCA, Corridor Management Organisations, transport associations, development partners and international organizations.

6. Date and Venue

The meeting will be held from 24-26 July 2014, at the United Nations Conference Centre, within ECA premises in Addis Ababa.

7. Contacts

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