



ECOWAS COMMISSION DIRECTORATE OF TRADE

PROVISIONAL CONCEPT NOTE

ECOWAS/UNCTAD/GIZ Stakeholder Consultation on the Development of a Regional Strategy for the CFTA Negotiations

Coconut Grove Hotel, Accra – Ghana
09 – 11 March, 2016



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Trade Directorate is in the process of formulating an ECOWAS Regional Strategy for engagement with other partners in the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Negotiations. The process will commence with a brainstorming session (Meeting) scheduled to hold in Accra, Ghana from 9th to 11th March, 2016. The Concept Note below provides the background to the Meeting, the objectives, and issues to be discussed as well as the expected outcomes.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In January 2012, the 18th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union approved an Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) and the establishment of a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by an indicative date of 2017. According to the approved Road Map, during the period 2012 to 2014, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – recognised by the African Union – are to ensure the effective implementation of their regional trade agreements. ECOWAS, in particular, was encouraged to ensure that its regional trade area was working effectively and to prepare to engage for negotiations that were scheduled to commence from February 2016.

2.2 As part of the preparations for the CFTA negotiations, the ECOWAS Commission partnered with the African Union Commission and UNECA in organising a Consultative Meeting on the CFTA. Issues that were discussed included the current state of play of trade liberalization in the ECOWAS region, principles guiding the negotiations for the CFTA, institutional arrangements and private sector views as well as preparedness of the Member States towards the negotiations.

2.3 The limited institutional and human resource capacities in the region hindered the formulation of a coherent trade strategy that is closely integrated within the region's overall development strategy. Yet, it is essential that ECOWAS Member States adopt a well thought out and structured approach before engaging other RECs in the CFTA negotiations.

2.4 Noting that CFTA negotiations have been launched, and building on the region's Consultative Meeting on the CFTA in November 2015, the ECOWAS Commission, in collaboration with UNCTAD, through its Regional Office for Africa, and GIZ, is organising a three-day brainstorming session propose a Regional Strategy for engagement with other RECs and Members in the forthcoming CFTA negotiations.

3. OVERALL OBJECTIVES

3.1 The Meeting will facilitate consultations and dialogue among selected ECOWAS Member States and the ECOWAS Commission on the CFTA for a start, with a view to developing regional strategy for engagement with other partners in the CFTA negotiations. It is further intended to provide an occasion to review the opportunities and

challenges that confront ECOWAS Member States in the implementation of the Community's Goods and Services Protocols and Supplementary Protocols. Progress made towards regional integration within the ECOWAS region, in particular, in the areas of goods and services trade, the challenges, and the role partners can play in building capacity for the CFTA negotiations will also be highlighted. More specifically, the Meeting has the following objectives:

- 3.2 Noting that CFTA negotiations have been launched, and building on the ECOWAS Consultative Meeting on the CFTA in November 2015, the Meeting will review and adopt strategies for engagement with other RECs in the CFTA negotiations
- 3.3 Assess the progress, opportunities and challenges in ECOWAS' regional integration efforts, with particular reference to goods and services trade;
- 3.4 Draw out best practices from the current status of the implementation of the ECOWAS' Goods and Services Agreements/Protocols/Supplementary Protocols;
- 3.5 Identify areas for capacity building at the regional and national levels;
- 3.6 Identify synergies, linkages and complementarities in the ongoing initiatives in trade development at the ECOWAS level, on the one hand, and the other RECs, on the other hand, and agree on areas of immediate follow up actions at country and regional levels.
- 3.7 Build consensus on specific areas, approaches and actions for high level engagement with other RECs
- 3.8 Agree on coordination mechanisms, and more specifically mandate for the ECOWAS Commission, for engagement in the CFTA negotiations

4. GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 4.1 What exactly is ECOWAS negotiating in the CFTA for goods and services?
- 4.2 How can the ECOWAS Commission support its Member States in the CFTA negotiations?
- 4.3 Similar to the Statutory Conferment on the ECOWAS Commission by Member States to negotiate the EPAs, should such a mandate be renewed for the CFTA negotiations?
- 4.4 What are the implications of the developments in the multilateral trading system for the efforts to establish the CFTA?
- 4.5 How can the role and capacity of the private sector in West Africa be strengthened to facilitate effective participation and consultative CFTA negotiations?

- 4.6 How can the CFTA negotiations enhance or boost the integrity of the Common External Tariff (CET), and promote the free flow of goods and services within the ECOWAS region?
- 4.7 How can the principles of asymmetry and special and differential treatment in favour of “smaller” ECOWAS Member States be applied?
- 4.8 How can reducing tariffs/barriers to trade on intermediates and other inputs to industrial production help to boost industrialization?

5. EXPECTED OUTCOME

- 5.1 Dialogue among ECOWAS and selected Member States, on the one hand, and the organised private sector, on the other hand, on the CFTA and the BIAT Negotiations Implementation Strategy
- 5.2 Initiate preparations in ECOWAS for the CFTA negotiations that could lead to the development of a **Draft ECOWAS Action Plan and Strategy**, taking into account the regional dynamics and realities;
- 5.3 Identification of capacity building needs of ECOWAS Commission and its Member States for effective participation in the CFTA negotiations and agreement on a joint resource mobilization strategy; and
- 5.4 A summary report on the proceedings with actionable recommendations.

6. PARTICIPANTS

- 6.1 Participants will include all the 15 ECOWAS Member States, the ECOWAS Commission and UNCTAD, through its Regional Office for Africa, and GIZ. As the Meeting seeks to propose a regional strategy towards the CFTA negotiations, representatives of organised private sector, in particular the Federation of the West Africa Chambers of Commerce and industry (FEWACCI) will be invited to participate. Representatives from the academia, the civil society, the African Union and UNECA as well as other international organisations (ITC; WTO etc.) will also join in the discussions, as appropriate.

7. CO-ORGANISERS

- 7.1 The organisers of the Consultation are the ECOWAS Commission and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – through its Regional Office for Africa, and GIZ.

VENUE AND DATES

- 7.2 The Stakeholder Consultation will be held in Accra, Ghana on 09 – 11 March, 2016.