

## **Concept Note on the Establishment of the Africa Policy Impact Lab to Enhance AfCFTA Implementation and other Multilateral Agreements in Africa**

### **Context:**

African countries have been seized with the implementation of AfCFTA as a tool of transforming Africa through regional integration and enhanced intra African trade. Africa's past record in implementing multilateral agreements has not been stellar or optimal, as a joint report by the AUC and ACBF found. Therefore, African leaders are determined to break with the past negative record and pursue active implementation of AfCFTA. There is evidence of initial success: 42 countries have ratified and ECA is supporting implementation through analytical studies, modeling and policy advocacy. A Policy Implementation Lab will combine analytical studies, stakeholders' engagements with policy advocacy to trigger accelerated implementation of AfCFTA and other multilateral agreements.

### **Background**

Living Labs have become very important in designing and generating ideas that provide solution to various types of problems that companies, nations and communities face, in our contemporary times. It is a process of co-creation of solutions to problems in which all relevant stakeholders are involved from design to implementation stages. It has different advantages, which include the creation of opportunities for stakeholders to make input in the design of a project, through participation and consultation. It also helps stakeholders to determine and contribute to the design of the research. Living Labs also provide opportunity for co-creation of learning that reflects the needs of the end-users. It enhances a sense of ownership, reflects local peculiarities, and foster continuous learning experiences for both researchers and end-users. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, bringing the right people together with the right policy guidance offers an opportunity to transform a laboratory infrastructure, giving it the robust technical underpinning needed to capitalise on the benefits and opportunities of globalisation and the 4IR, while realising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

**The Africa Policy Implementation Effect Lab is a living Lab that is geared toward using technology such Virtual Collaborative Tools, (Virtual Reality Projects), Big Data Analytics, Machine Learning, and Artificial Intelligence among others in tracking decisions made at the African Union and Regional Economic Communities levels with the aim of ensuring full implementation. Through digital technology, the Lab will facilitate multi-stakeholders' engagement with the processes geared toward the implementation of African Continental Free Trade Agreement.**

The Policy Implementation Impact Lab is pertinent because it will help address the problem of policy implementation in Africa. Over the years, lack of capacity for implementation of decisions have undermined development outcomes in Africa. The location of the Lab in a university will help to reduce the politicization of such initiatives if located in government departments or regional institutions.

The take-off of the African Continental Free Trade Area provides a unique opportunity for socioeconomic transformation in Africa. However, this will depend on the extent to which the regional economic communities and state parties to the agreement can effectively implement different components of the agreement. For instance, there are concerns on how key programs of the African Union such as Boosting Intra-African Trade, Protocol on Movement of Goods and Services and so on can be leveraged upon to achieve the main goals of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. Studies have also recognized the need for training for staff of Regional Economic Communities and state parties in implementing decisions of the African Union.

The relationship between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement requires synergy and complementarity that can foster the smooth functioning of the continental agreement. Additionally, harmonization of macroeconomic policies among state parties, mainstreaming gender, cross-border informal traders to the formal economic orbit, safeguarding the productive capacities of African economies are other areas in which capacity needs to be built.

The Africa Policy Impact Lab is a joint initiative of the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Pan-African Strategic & Policy Research Group (Panafstrag International) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.



The Institute of African Studies, Carleton University is the only stand-alone centre for studying Africa among Canadian universities. The Institute parades well experienced and qualified faculty cross appointed from different departments in the university. The Institute has also forged partnership with many universities and institutions in Africa.

In fostering capacity for regional integration in Africa, The Africa Policy Implementation Impact Lab will be charged with the following functions:

- Using digital technology to track the decisions of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities towards the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement
- Using digital technology to help in building the capacity of national and regional bureaucrats in implementing decisions of African Union and regional economic communities
- Using digital technology to monitor the impacts of decisions reached at the African Union and Regional Economic Communities.
- Training of RECs staff towards building capacity for the implementation of AfCTA
- Boosting synergies between Regional Economic Communities and state parties to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement
- Drawing experiences from other regional trade agreements outside Africa
- Building policy implementation capacity of state parties to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement
- Tracking the implementation of policies at regional and national levels
- Building capacity for trade and investment negotiations
- Facilitating civil society engagements in the implementation of trade and investment related policies
- Facilitating private sector involvement in the implementation of trade and investment related policies.

### **Methodology**

The methodology for the Africa Policy Implementation Impact Lab would include facilitation of policy-oriented engagements with stakeholders involved in the

implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. These include scholars, private sector organizations, civil society groups, policy makers and bureaucrats in African Union, and Regional Economic Communities. Field Research will also be conducted as a critical component of the Lab. It will involve facilitating consultation through roundtables involving various stakeholders on the trade and regional integration sections in Africa, training and capacity building, mapping the landscape of policy, impact assessment as well as monitoring. The main research clusters would include the following:

### **Main Clusters of African Implementation Policy Impact Lab**

Apart from the core functions of helping to boost capacity for policy implementation, the Lab will be responsible for managing research portfolios in the following areas:

- Regional Integration and Industrialisation
- African Continental Free Trade Agreement
- Innovation and Regional Integration
- Market Integration and Regional Trade Agreements
- Migration and Regional Integration
- Informal Economy and Regional Integration
- Cultural Integration
- Institutional Integration and Policy Convergence
- Regional Integration for Governance and Democratic Consolidation
- Regional and Global Value Chains through Industrialization
- Negotiations on regional and multilateral agreements

### **Partner Labs in African Universities**

The Policy Implementation Impact Lab will work in partnership with partner universities that will be carefully selected across the geographical zones in Africa. The partners will

select the universities based on criteria such as research capacity, postgraduate programs in development economics or political economy, institutional support and provision of in-kind assistance

### **Expected Outcomes**

- Improved implementation of Policy Implementation at regional and national levels
- Development of capacity for implementation of treaties and protocols of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities, including AfCFTA
- Enhanced capacity of institutions at the African Union and Regional Economic Communities
- More involvement of stakeholders in regional integration issues in Africa
- Increased intra-African trade in line with AfCFTA and Agenda 2063
- Increased participation of Africa regional and global value chains
- Structural transformation of African economies
- Better assessment of the impact of policies and treaties of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities
- Enhance the participation of Africa in global value chains
- Foster synergy among trade related institutions in Africa.
- Strengthening the RECs to provide strategic support to Member States

### **Activities:**

The key activities of the Lab will include the following:

- Research
- Training
- Policy Roundtables
- Monitoring of implementation of policies at Regional Economic Communities and at national levels
- Impact Assessment of policies in Africa

**Technical Partnership**

Given the technicalities involved in key aspects of the Lab, technical partnership will be forged with United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, the African Capacity Building Foundation in Africa, Universities in Africa, Centre for Governance and Public Management, Regulatory Governance Initiative and the Centre for Law and Trade Policy at Carleton University.

**Governance**

The governance structure of the Lab will include the following: A Board of Directors made up of The Coordinator of the Lab, The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Dean Faculty of Public Affairs, The Director of the Institute of African Studies, The Director of Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, representative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and representative of Panasgraf.