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Item 6 (f) of the provisional agenda\*  
**Statutory issues**

### **Report of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for Central and East Africa on the work of their third joint session**

#### **Note by the secretariat**

The secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa has the honour to transmit to the members of the Commission the report of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for Central and East Africa on their third joint session.

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\* E/ECA/COE/43/1.



# **Report of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for Central and East Africa on their third joint session**

## **I. Introduction**

1. In partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon, the subregional offices for Central and Eastern Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) held the third joint session of the Intergovernmental Committees of Senior Officials and Experts for Central and East Africa, from 15 to 18 October 2024, in Yaoundé, on the theme “Research and innovation solutions to fast-track economic diversification in Central and East Africa”.

2. The main objective of the joint session was to examine regulatory issues related to the mandate and operation of the two subregional offices and to provide experts with a platform to exchange views on economic and social development issues and identify realistic, inclusive and sustainable options aligned with the theme of the joint session. Specifically, the aims of the joint session included providing an understanding of the major issues and challenges involved in building technological capacity for industrialization in the two subregions; exploring how knowledge transfer among countries could be facilitated to create an enabling environment for the establishment of effective subregional collaboration platforms; establishing interdependence between technological and industrial development in African countries; and exploring how intra-African trade could foster such interdependence.

3. Participants examined, in the activity reports for 2024, statutory matters related to the operation of the two subregional offices.

## **II. Attendance**

4. The hybrid joint session was attended by 247 participants, including representatives of the following members of ECA: Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania.

5. The session was also attended by observers from many institutions and organizations in the two subregions, by representatives of United Nations agencies and by consultants and journalists.

6. The subregional offices for Central and Eastern Africa and technical and designated officials and experts from Cameroon acted as the secretariat for the joint session.

## **III. Opening of the joint session**

7. The outgoing Chair of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for East Africa, Francine Inarukundo, of Burundi, welcomed representatives and thanked the Government of Cameroon for hosting the event and ECA for organizing it. She noted that the Intergovernmental Committee provided a platform

to deliberate on socioeconomic policy. She recalled the successful second joint session, held in Burundi, during which the need to strengthen economic resilience through diversification had been underscored. She highlighted the timeliness of the theme of the current session and welcomed the discussions on the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and thanked the outgoing members of the Bureau for their service and engagement and the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa for supporting the members. She also thanked the participants and expressed her wishes for fruitful exchanges during the third joint session.

8. In his opening remarks, the outgoing Chair of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Central Africa and representative of the Central African Republic, Denis Beina, welcomed the representatives and emphasized the importance of the theme of the joint session. He said that it had been an honour for the Central African Republic to chair the previous session of the Intergovernmental Committee. Rapid and innovative responses to diversify economies and ensure sustainable prosperity in the face of complex economic, environmental and health challenges were essential. He recalled the significance of the theme of the second joint session, held in 2023, which had encouraged reflection on transforming economies into engines of sustainable growth while attracting strategic investment and offering goods that met market standards. He expressed his satisfaction with the results achieved by the Subregional Office for Central Africa since the previous joint session and invited participants to review the activity report of the Subregional Office and provide guidance for the programme for 2025. He wished the incoming Bureau success in its future endeavours.

9. The Deputy Executive Secretary (Programme) of ECA, Hanan Morsy, speaking on behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Claver Gatete, thanked the Government of Cameroon for hosting the third joint session. Emphasizing that innovation was a catalyst for the attainment of all the Sustainable Development Goals and one of the main determinants of productivity, especially in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, she said that it was important for African countries to design policies that promoted research and development, innovation and infrastructure development to drive inclusive economic growth and reduce poverty and inequality. African countries could increase their liquidity by implementing innovative financing instruments, such as debt-for-nature swaps and green and blue bonds, or by promoting carbon markets to establish a fair carbon price. The inclusion in the programme of a high-level dialogue on strategic partnerships to leverage natural capital as a means of mobilizing finance and the blue economy was therefore welcome. She wished a successful joint session for everybody and reiterated the commitment of ECA to working closely with member countries.

10. In his remarks, the Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon, Alamine Ousmane Mey, welcomed the participants, thanked the two subregional offices for choosing Cameroon to host the joint session and recalled that a joint session was being held in Central Africa for the first time since the restructuring of the statutory meetings of the subregional offices. Diversification remained a major challenge for Central and East Africa, which, despite their real potential, remained vulnerable to the international economic context. States urgently needed to explore new ways to drive structural transformation of their economies. ECA had provided the opportunity

to reflect upon research and innovation solutions to accelerate industrialization and diversification. Noting that greater investment in innovation would accelerate economic growth, he stressed that African States needed sustained assistance to become innovation-friendly so that they would promote the blue and green economies, inclusive industrialization and economic diversification.

11. Mr. Mey highlighted his country's innovation efforts in manufacturing and energy production, which were supported through the modernization of industrial infrastructure and a pro-innovation environment. He noted, however, that Cameroon faced numerous constraints related to financing with guarantees and high interest rates, and had an intellectual property framework that hindered innovation. He invited participants to work hard to ensure the full success of the third joint session, which he then declared open.

#### **IV. Constitution of the bureaux and review and adoption of the agenda and programme of work**

12. Participants elected the following bureaux:

##### **Central Africa**

Chair:	Cameroon
Vice-Chair:	Gabon
Rapporteur:	Congo

##### **East Africa**

Chair:	Uganda
Vice-Chair:	Burundi
Rapporteur:	Democratic Republic of the Congo

13. Participants adopted the agenda and the programme of work of the joint session.

14. The work was carried out in hybrid plenary sessions. The items on the agenda were the subject of presentations followed by discussions.

#### **V. Session 1: Macroeconomic overview of Central and East Africa**

15. The session was chaired and moderated by the Director of Regional Integration of Cameroon and incoming Chair of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Central Africa, Dorothy Tataw Bekolo.

16. An economic affairs officer at ECA, Mamadou Malick Bal, and the Acting Director of the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, Andrew Mold, highlighted macroeconomic developments in Central and East Africa and the perspectives of States in both subregions. They focused primarily on three macroeconomic challenges that countries faced: high debt burdens, inflationary pressures and low growth rates. The two subregions had shown resilience against many internal and external shocks. Average growth in real gross domestic product was higher in East Africa (5.8 per cent) than in Central Africa (3.5 per cent). Owing to persistently high food and energy prices, inflation remained a common concern in both subregions. Although Central Africa was

less fiscally exposed than East Africa, public finances continued to be highly dependent on the price of raw materials, in particular oil, which exposed economies to the risk of global shocks. States needed to address such challenges to achieve their national and international development goals. In the context of the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, priming regional trade would be important to build stronger economies. In relation to international and regional benchmarks, East Africa had endured the adverse effects of the recent global economic crises better than Central Africa and Africa as a whole. The development of value chains and the Agreement provided a route to economic success. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals remained out of reach for most countries, owing to the challenges they faced in boosting growth in ways that would lead to sustainable economic and social transformation.

17. The discussions that ensued were focused on the need to generate more inclusive and sustainable growth and fiscal stability, ensure food security and catalyse innovation. Participants underscored that countries in both subregions wished to innovate and to harness scientific research for sustained economic growth through education and training. To improve their research and innovation indicators, however, countries needed to invest in infrastructure, adapt and modernize their education systems, and provide sufficient financial and material support for research and development.

18. At the conclusion of session 1, the Subregional Office for Central Africa launched the report on improving the quality of imports to protect food and nutrition security in Central Africa. In the report, the overreliance of countries of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community on food imports to meet domestic demand was highlighted. During the session, it was noted that the Heads of State of Central African countries had adopted an import-substitution strategy in March 2023. The report contained a recommendation on promoting local production with greater focus on improved quality.<sup>1</sup>

## **VI. Session 2: High-level dialogue on research and innovation to accelerate economic diversification in Central and East Africa**

19. The session was chaired by Ms. Bekolo and moderated by the Director of the Subregional Office for Central Africa, Jean-Luc Mastaki. A consultant, Christian Otchia, gave a presentation on economic diversification through research and development. Participants made observations during the session.

20. Mr. Otchia highlighted the critical role of research and innovation in economic diversification in Central and East Africa. He emphasized the need for reliable data to understand the innovation landscape in the two subregions, with a focus on domestic and foreign patents, researchers and research and development technicians. Historically, Africa had committed to allocating 1 per cent of gross domestic product to research, as outlined in the Lagos Plan of Action

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<sup>1</sup> Central African Economic and Monetary Community, ECA and Economic Community of Central African States, *Réussir l'import-substitution en Afrique centrale en embrassant la qualité: enjeu crucial pour la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle* (ECA, 2024).

for the Economic Development of Africa (1980–2000).<sup>2</sup> More recent initiatives, such as the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024,<sup>3</sup> had served to catalyse sustainable growth. Despite some progress being made in scientific output and patent applications, Central and East Africa still lagged behind West Africa in terms of innovation dynamics and faced such challenges as limited investment in research and development and insufficient private sector engagement. Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa had made notable strides, yet budgetary and infrastructural constraints remained. Cameroon was struggling to diversify its export structure and to transition from low-value to higher-value sectors. Cross-border patents were the main catalysts for innovation, facilitating technology transfer and attracting foreign direct investment. The dominance of foreign patents presented hurdles for local innovators. Global trends showed that China and other countries in East Asia were leading the way in patent filings; some countries in Africa, in particular South Africa, were making some progress, but Central and East African countries were filing very few patents. Innovation was crucial for the survival of African enterprises, with larger firms and exporters more likely to innovate. Mr. Otchia discussed various innovative financing mechanisms for research and innovation in Africa, including patent buyouts, collaborative research grants and public-private partnerships, and he provided examples from Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia. He highlighted the challenges that countries faced as they sought to enhance local innovation, increase investment in research and development and reduce their dependence on foreign patents. Strengthening human capital, institutions and innovation ecosystems would be essential for sustainable economic transformation in Central and East Africa.

21. Participants discussed the issue of funding research and innovation. They acknowledged that innovation received insufficient attention from public institutions, large companies were not making enough effort to respond to the challenges of the international market, and productivity in Central Africa was unsatisfactory. They welcomed the innovation demonstrated by micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and urged countries to adopt national research and innovation policies that encouraged further innovation by companies. They agreed that innovation was a response to a lack of productivity.

## **VII. Session 3: Status of the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in Central and East Africa: lessons from the past for the future**

22. The session was moderated by the Acting Director of the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa. During the discussion, participants emphasized the misalignment of policies among regional economic communities and national strategies, the varying pace of implementation across the two subregions and the need to improve the quality and increase the quantity of value chains and products. Infrastructure deficits, a lack of customs procedure harmonization and the predominant use of the United States dollar for intra-African trade

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<sup>2</sup> Organization of African Unity (Addis Ababa, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> African Union Commission (Addis Ababa, 2024).

were also highlighted as challenges that impeded seamless trade. Participants called for better coordination and policy alignment among members of ECA and regional economic communities. They stressed the importance of the role of the private sector, especially micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, in accelerating the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and highlighted that smaller businesses had limited access to finance and market information. The continuous implementation of national strategies on the Agreement and steps to turn transport corridors, such as the northern and central corridors, into economic arteries to boost regional trade were important. Most countries in Africa were ready to trade under the Agreement, which had received 47 ratifications. In addition, 18 countries were ready to implement the protocol on digital trade. Participants underscored the crucial role of the regional economic communities in harmonizing policies to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement. Young people and digital trade were highlighted as areas requiring more capacity-building and investment, especially in terms of access to finance and digital literacy to ensure broader participation in the implementation of the Agreement. Insufficient infrastructure, data and finance still needed to be addressed.

23. Participants recommended strengthening the role of the regional economic communities and Governments in aligning strategies, prioritizing investment in infrastructure, improving access to finance, providing private stakeholders with good commercial information and addressing the use of multiple currencies. Strong political will was essential to overcoming challenges and accelerating the implementation of the Agreement.

### **VIII. Session 4: Priorities of the private sector and perspectives of young people on the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area**

24. The session was chaired by a representative of Uganda, Cosmas Mwikire, and moderated by a journalist for the Rwandan newspaper The New Times, Tesi Kaven. Perspectives were shared by representatives of the private sector, young people and women.

25. During the session, observations were made by the following participants: representative of the Eastern African Subregional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women, Claudia Lina Asimwe; representative of the Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Pierre Quatre; Secretary-General of the Association of South Sudan Manufacturers, Kennedy Kenyi Lodiong; Executive Chairman of the East Africa Business and Investment Advisory Council, John Bosco Kalisa; and representative of the Cameroon Employers' Association, Narcisse Chassem.

26. Participants noted that enterprises were not well represented in the decision-making and policy processes for the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. A lack of infrastructure and affordable energy continued to undermine industrial transformation in Africa. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises lacked access to finance and information on markets and trade, especially women- and youth-owned enterprises engaging in trade, which could lead to delays and the decay of products. High transportation costs and visa fees undermined prosperity.

27. It was noted that women in informal sectors needed support to seize the opportunities presented by the Agreement. The cost of trading was high, and related documents were rarely available in local languages. The panellists acknowledged the role of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in providing employment, but noted the low rates of financial and digital literacy, in particular in relation to the ability of countries to protect commercial data. Product diversification and public and private sector dialogue were crucial.

28. It was recommended that meaningful private sector engagement and the empowerment of marginalized groups, in particular women and young people, were needed to ensure the successful implementation of the Agreement. Political will and increased awareness among stakeholders were essential to overcome the challenges and accelerate the implementation of the Agreement.

## **IX. Session 5.1: Innovations for the transition to a climate-resilient blue economy**

29. The session was chaired by a representative of the bureaux and moderated by the Chief of the Corporate Policy and Planning Section, Strategic Planning, Oversight and Results Division, Daya Bragante. It comprised a presentation given by an economic affairs officer at the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, Honita Cowaloosur. Observations were made by participants. The session included discussions on innovations to catalyse the blue economy for economic growth and diversification in the two subregions. Participants shared the outcomes of, and recommendations emanating from, the expert meeting on innovations for a climate-resilient blue economy transition in Central and East Africa, held online on 2 October 2024. They also shared information on recent and ongoing blue economy initiatives of ECA and future goals.

30. Participants recognized the need to mainstream blue economy policies to avoid siloed sectoral development. They highlighted the need for an integrated, cross-cutting, multisectoral approach to developing the blue economy, which should be aligned with sustainable economic, environmental and social development goals. The development of the blue economy was focused on the sustainable use of marine and freshwater resources to boost prosperity. It required competitiveness, resilience and financing, such as through the Blue Fund for the Congo basin in Central Africa, which had created jobs, reduced hunger and promoted gender equality.

31. Presentations were given on lessons, challenges and opportunities related to the blue economy in Seychelles. The speakers said that the country had sought to strengthen economic diversification through non-traditional sectors, thus making the blue economy a driver of sustainable and equitable growth. Seychelles had invested in such ocean-based solutions as biotechnology and had established incubator spaces, with tangible results. It had also focused on the circular economy, including through a major initiative to reduce marine pollution and minimize the 90,000 tons of waste generated annually. ECA had trained 80 Seychellois to support the development of a road map on the circular economy, research related to market access and financing for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in the circular economy. The integration of frameworks on the blue and circular economies was aimed at creating value, supporting local industries,



protecting biodiversity and unlocking new opportunities for businesses and communities.

## **X. Session 5.2: Sharing knowledge and experience on regional and national innovation platforms**

32. The session was moderated by a representative from the private sector, Tumenta Kennedy. Observations were made by representatives of the private sector and academia. The main objectives of the session were to explore the practical applications of research and innovation to address regional challenges and to highlight the perspectives of the private sector and specific innovators on the challenges faced.

33. During the discussion, participants highlighted challenges and opportunities in the management of innovation across Africa. Innovation needed to be supported through such initiatives as workshops and laboratories. Well-structured funding and innovations were needed and had to be responsive to consumer or market needs. Many innovative ideas were unsuccessful owing to such systemic issues as a lack of clarity regarding next steps in the innovation process, which made local consumers sceptical about the quality of products. Innovators therefore needed to prioritize quality and simplicity and to have a strong focus on market needs.

## **XI. Session 6: High-level dialogue on strategic partnerships to leverage natural capital and to finance industrialization and economic diversification**

34. The session was moderated by the representative of Gabon, Fidèle Magouangou. The Chief of the Subregional Initiatives Section at the Subregional Office for Central Africa, Adama Ekberg Coulibaly, gave a presentation on strategic partnerships and innovations for the establishment of a consortium and a carbon credit market to enhance the value of the natural capital in the Congo basin.

35. In his presentation, the Chief of the Subregional Initiatives Section noted that Central African countries had exceptional natural capital, largely owing to the Congo basin, which would help them to support green and climate finance needs to ensure sustainable industrialization in line with Sustainable Development Goal 9. Despite the significant potential for green growth, countries in Central Africa did not strongly value the opportunities for wealth creation and green jobs provided through research and innovation. It was to that end that the Economic Community of Central African States had initiated the idea of establishing a consortium for the evaluation and development of the natural capital of Central Africa, which would be used to raise funds for the implementation of development programmes in the subregion. Although the consortium could have member States and stakeholders from Central Africa, it was important to establish strategic alliances with countries in Latin America and South-East Asia, given that the Amazon and Congo basins, the Mekong basin and the basin in Borneo accounted for more than 80 per cent of the world's tropical rainforest cover. Such alliances would give them one voice with which to negotiate better prices for the ecosystem services provided by natural capital, including carbon credits. The Central African States

Development Bank, ECA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme in Gabon and the World Wildlife Fund, which had expressed interest in joining the consortium, should therefore move towards operationalizing it.

36. The panellists focused on the carbon market pricing process and governance of the consortium. Participants stressed that, once the consortium was operational, there should be a study undertaken to determine the natural capital of each member country to define the potential benefit of developing that capital.

## **XII. Session 7: Presentation of the reports on the activities of the subregional offices for Central and Eastern Africa**

37. The session was co-chaired by a representative of each bureau and moderated jointly by the Director of the Subregional Office for Central Africa and the Acting Director of the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa. Presentations were given by representatives of the two subregional offices.

38. An economic affairs officer at the Subregional Office for Central Africa, Sandrine Koissy-Kpein, gave a presentation on the efforts made by the Subregional Office for Central Africa to promote economic diversification and structural transformation for inclusive and sustainable development. She highlighted some of its main achievements, which included supporting the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by finalizing national and subregional strategies thereon for eight countries, and two reports on gender and trade inclusivity. The Subregional Office had also organized a week for the promotion of the Agreement in Central Africa and capacity-building workshops and had enhanced expertise on natural capital accounting, the Tourism Satellite Account and the blue and forest economies. It had also advanced the development of new generation special economic zones, with notable progress made in an initiative related to the manufacture of batteries in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the promotion of digital ecosystems in Gabon. It had supported initiatives on tourism data in Sao Tome and Principe and had strengthened statistical capacities across the subregion. The challenges identified included political instability, administrative delays and limited financial resources, which underscored the need for high-level engagement and the mobilization of private sector resources. In 2025, the Subregional Office would continue promoting economic diversification and industrialization, in particular through the sustainable exploitation of natural resources and inclusive economic zones, while ensuring collaboration with United Nations agencies and strategic partners to achieve broader development goals.

39. In her presentation, a social affairs officer at the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, Emelang Leteane, shared that the Subregional Office had engaged with member countries to advance important development initiatives, including by supporting Burundi, Djibouti and Rwanda in accelerating the implementation of their strategies on the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. The Subregional Office had assisted Burundi in formalizing its committee on the Agreement and had guided businesses

in Djibouti on requirements related to the Agreement in order to improve market access. It had worked to leverage the potential of the blue economy under the Agreement by supporting the East African Community in developing a subregional strategy thereon. In Seychelles, a “bootcamp” and competition had been held for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises to find ways to improve plastic recycling and reduce waste. In addition, the Subregional Office had actively supported the role of the tourism sector in economic diversification, including by assisting the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in drafting its Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (2024–2034) and helping Djibouti and Ethiopia to develop the use of Tourism Satellite Accounts to measure the economic contribution of tourism.

40. In his presentation, an economic affairs officer, Giuseppe d’Aronco, focused on artificial intelligence, highlighting its ability to simulate human intelligence. He differentiated weak artificial intelligence, which was geared towards specific tasks, from strong artificial intelligence, which was aimed at providing human-like general intelligence. He discussed the exponential growth of artificial intelligence, which was driven by technological advancements and investments from multinational information technology companies, and future prospects and ethical issues. He addressed such challenges in Africa as limited access to the Internet (42 per cent in 2024) and the region’s low contribution to research in artificial intelligence (0.77 per cent of global publications on the subject). He highlighted the opportunities offered through artificial intelligence, especially in such agricultural initiatives as mAgri.

41. In conclusion, participants stated their appreciation for the work accomplished by the two subregional offices and urged ECA to support all African countries, include artificial intelligence in subregional integration initiatives, and enhance innovation.

### **XIII. Recommendations for future action, reflecting the theme of the third joint session**

42. In the light of the discussions, Committee members made the following recommendations:

- (a) ECA and technical and financial partners should:
  - (i) Continue to increase support for African countries;
  - (ii) Support countries in developing coordination units on national blue economies to facilitate the implementation of plans on the continental, subregional or national blue economy and the assessment of the potential of the blue economy;
  - (iii) Support countries in developing their position on deep-sea mining;
  - (iv) Support countries in harmonizing circularity in the blue economy;

(b) In view of the importance of research and innovation, Governments should:

- (i) Develop funding and solutions tailored to the African context, increase their focus on micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and mobilize and diversify

funding by fostering public-private dialogue and digitalizing fiscal administration;

(ii) Share best practices on financing blue economy projects and continue to provide frameworks for improved access to finance;

(iii) Promote import substitution to address food security issues and stimulate growth;

(iv) Increase research and development budgets, start an African research hub and promote the opening of national research and innovation incubators, strengthen the capacities of existing bodies and inculcate a culture of innovation through the education curriculum;

(v) Strengthen appropriate regulatory frameworks and incentivize the development of programmes for the promotion of innovation;

(vi) Engage in dialogue with the private sector, with a focus on empowering women, young people and other marginalized groups, for the success of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, address the security of traders and traded goods, and facilitate the improved integration of firms in processes to implement the Agreement;

(vii) Increase the amount of suitable cross-border infrastructure, including transport and cross-border solutions, to link countries and facilitate commercial activity;

(viii) Continue to raise awareness about the Agreement in the private sector, especially among women and young people;

(ix) Build digital and physical platforms to encourage information-sharing on good practices and innovation related to the Agreement;

(c) Regional economic communities should:

(i) Further harmonize trade rules;

(ii) Establish a subregional strategy for pooling resources to fund innovation.

## **XIV. Session 8: Closing**

43. The session was presided over by Mr. Mey. The members of the Committees thanked the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, and the Government and the people of Cameroon for the warm welcome. The directors of the two subregional offices also thanked all representatives for their participation in the joint session, noting the high quality of the discussions. They further thanked the organizers, members of committees, interpreters and the staff at the venue and wished everybody a safe trip home. They reiterated the commitment of the bureaux to implementing the recommendations that had been made.

44. Participants were informed that Gabon would be the host of the next joint session, to be held in 2025. Regarding the theme of the next

joint session, participants made suggestions related to import substitution, but it would be finalized by the members of the bureaux.

45. In his closing remarks, Mr. Mey noted the importance of the theme of the joint session and emphasized that structural transformation and economic diversification in the subregions would continue to be prioritized. He referred to the need to rapidly implement the recommendations emanating from the joint session, with research and innovation as a critical catalyst for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. He discussed the need to make the most of the natural capital in the subregions and to enhance strategic partnerships, such as those offered through the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. He urged the participants to continue their advocacy work and to translate the recommendations into clear and achievable goals. He declared the proceedings of the third joint session closed.

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