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

Forty-fourth meeting

Tangier, Morocco (hybrid), 28–30 March 2026

Item 6 (f) of the provisional agenda**

**Statutory issues: reports on the work of the subsidiary
bodies of the Economic Commission for Africa**

Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa on its thirty-first 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 Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa on its thirty-first session.

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Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa on its thirty-first session

Introduction

1. The thirty-first session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for Southern Africa was held in Ezulwini, Eswatini, in a hybrid format, with both in-person and online participation, on 30 and 31 October 2025. The theme of the session was “Unlocking the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area: building value chains and overcoming barriers to trade in Southern Africa”. The session was chaired by the Government of Eswatini.
2. Delegations and participants attended from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
3. Representatives of the following entities of the United Nations system and intergovernmental bodies were present: African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa’s Development, Economic Commission for Africa, Resident Coordinator Office in Eswatini, secretariat of the Southern African Development Community.
4. Representatives of the following government entities were also present: Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis; Ministry of Trade and Entrepreneurship of Botswana; Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection of Mauritius; Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade of Eswatini; Ministry of Finance of Eswatini; Ministry of Finance and National Planning of Zambia; Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs of Malawi; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Zimbabwe; Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade of Namibia; Ministry of Industrialization, Business, Trade and Tourism of Malawi; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development of Lesotho.

I. Opening of the session

5. The Minister of Finance of Eswatini, Neal Rijkenberg, in a keynote address, officially opened the session. Welcoming remarks were delivered by the Director of the Subregional Office for Southern Africa, Eunice Kamwendo; the Resident Coordinator in Eswatini, George Wachira; and the Chair of the Bureau of the thirtieth session and the Director of the Ministry of Finance and National Planning of Zambia, Davison Mapiza.

II. Election of the Bureau and adoption of the agenda and programme of work

6. The Intergovernmental Committee elected the following members to constitute the Bureau of the thirty-first session:

Chair:	Eswatini
Vice-Chair:	Malawi
Rapporteur:	Lesotho

7. The Committee adopted the following agenda for the session:

1. Opening of the session.

2. Election of the Bureau and adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Goodwill messages from development partners.
4. Presentation of statutory reports:
 - (a) Recent economic and social conditions in Southern Africa;
 - (b) Work of ECA in Southern Africa;
 - (c) Implementation of subregional and international agendas and other special initiatives in Southern Africa.
5. Presentation of the thematic report on unlocking the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area by building value chains and overcoming barriers to trade in Southern Africa.
6. Panel discussion on trade facilitation, digitalization and the African Continental Free Trade Area.
7. Panel discussion on trade and product complementarity in Southern Africa, including on the mapping of products in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area.
8. Presentation and discussion of the recommendations of the ad hoc expert group meeting on advancing intraregional trade in Southern Africa through measures to address tariff and non-tariff barriers.
9. Preparatory dialogue on the theme of the 2026 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, "Growth through innovation: harnessing data and frontier technologies for economic transformation in Africa".
10. Presentation and adoption of the outcome statement of the thirty-first session.
11. Host and venue of the thirty-second session.
12. Closing of the session.

III. Goodwill messages from development partners

8. Goodwill messages from development partners were delivered by the Programme Officer for Regional Trade of the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community, Motheba Malibeng; and the Senior Programme Officer for Trade Facilitation of the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development, Kisa Nkhoma.

IV. Presentation of statutory reports and of the thematic report on unlocking the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area by building value chains and overcoming barriers to trade in Southern Africa

9. The Committee considered three statutory reports submitted by the secretariat: a report on recent economic and social conditions in Southern Africa; the annual report on the work of ECA in Southern Africa and the work programme for 2026; and a report on progress on the implementation of subregional, regional and international agendas and other special initiatives in the subregion. The Committee also discussed the findings and recommendations of the study on the theme of the session.

10. The Committee endorsed the annual report on the work of ECA in Southern Africa for 2025 and the work programme for 2026.

V. Presentation and discussion of the recommendations of the ad hoc expert group meeting on advancing intraregional trade in Southern Africa through measures to address tariff and non-tariff barriers

11. The Committee reviewed and endorsed the recommendations of the ad hoc expert group meeting on advancing intraregional trade in Southern Africa through measures to address tariff and non-tariff barriers and emphasized the importance of ensuring stakeholders' ability to implement the recommendations as soon as possible.

VI. Observations

12. The Committee commended the secretariat for its detailed reports and for the high quality of the panel and plenary discussions during the session. In the light of the presentations and discussions, the Committee made a number of observations on the challenging economic and social conditions faced by Southern Africa and the ongoing geopolitical tensions, trade friction and adverse effects of climate change in the subregion. The Committee:

(a) Noted the slow economic growth in Southern Africa that had been partly induced by recent droughts and low commodity prices;

(b) Noted also that the recent tariff increases imposed by the United States of America on countries in Southern Africa that would dampen the subregion's economic prospects and reverse hard-won social gains, including in employment;

(c) Noted with concern the growing macroeconomic instability as a result of increases in public debt, a fall in foreign direct investment and official development assistance, and persistent exchange rate volatility;

(d) Welcomed the price stability recorded in some countries, noting, however, that the rate of price increases for essential items was continuing to accelerate;

(e) Noted the recalibration of industrial policies to ensure better alignment with emerging global dynamics, in particular those driven by climate change and advances in artificial intelligence;

(f) Noted also the development and roll-out of policies to promote mineral beneficiation at source and bans on the export of raw materials;

(g) Emphasized the need to ensure that mining operators took environmental, social and governance considerations into account;

(h) Underscored the need for industrial reforms to deepen regional value chains in such priority sectors as agroprocessing, mineral beneficiation, pharmaceuticals and textiles;

(i) Underscored also the importance of enhanced support for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, women and young entrepreneurs to ensuring their inclusive participation in regional and global value chains;

(j) Noted that digitalization, including through such diagnostic tools as the traffic light system developed by the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development, could facilitate trade and improve corridor and border management;

(k) Noted also that climate change posed a threat to sustainable development in Southern Africa and subregional trade competitiveness;

(l) Stressed that regional economic integration under the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area could not be achieved without climate-resilient infrastructure and coordinated adaptation measures;

(m) Noted with concern that gaps persisted in the implementation of climate-smart trade policies and the mobilization of long-term finance, despite most countries in the subregion having updated their nationally determined contributions;

(n) Welcomed the quality, relevance and impact of the work of ECA in Southern Africa to increase intra-African trade, improve regional integration and strengthen capacities for inclusive industrialization aimed at reducing poverty and inequality.

VII. Recommendations

13. With a view to strengthening macroeconomic stability in the subregion in order to promote resilient and sustainable economic growth and employment creation; leveraging the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area to build value chains and to remove barriers to trade; and promoting green value chains, including the optimal exploitation of critical minerals, to support industrialization and accelerate social and economic development in Southern Africa, the Committee made the following recommendations:

- (a) Members of ECA in Southern Africa should:
 - (i) Accelerate economic growth through targeted budget support for such job- and growth-enhancing sectors as agriculture and manufacturing;
 - (ii) Use exchange rate policies judiciously, given the limited effect that they can have on growth and trade when they are not accompanied by concerted efforts to address underlying structural weaknesses that hinder economic activity;
 - (iii) Align industrial policies with such emerging issues as climate change and frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence;
 - (iv) Deepen industrialization and trade by building regional value chains through value addition, the development of regional linkages, the harmonization of standards, and digitalization;
 - (v) Accelerate implementation of the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area on Digital Trade, including by aligning national legislation and information and communications technology infrastructure with the provisions on data governance, cybersecurity and interoperability in that Protocol;
 - (vi) Invest in customs digitalization and connectivity infrastructure by supporting fully automated customs systems, single-window platforms, better Internet connectivity and cross-border data exchange mechanisms;
 - (vii) Institutionalize monitoring, benchmarking and diagnostic tools to track progress on the implementation of the Agreement, trade facilitation initiatives and digital integration at borders;
 - (viii) Support small-scale traders through simplified digital tools and facilitate their access to digital payment options, such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System and local financial intermediaries;
 - (ix) Mainstream climate adaptation into national strategies for the implementation of the Agreement, including by prioritizing investments

in climate-resilient transport, logistics and energy systems that support the development of regional value chains;

(x) Finalize national adaptation plans, ensuring that they are aligned with updated nationally determined contributions and national development plans, and mobilize climate finance for resilient industrialization and inclusive growth;

(xi) Leverage public-private partnerships and regional investment mechanisms to promote green manufacturing, transformation and low-carbon value chains for decent jobs;

(b) Regional economic communities should:

(i) Formulate a subregional climate-resilient trade framework to support the integration of climate adaptation into national strategies for the implementation of the Agreement;

(ii) Develop regional guidelines and standards for climate-resilient transport, storage and energy infrastructure to reduce supply-chain disruptions;

(iii) Develop mechanisms for ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the Agreement by the countries in the subregion;

(c) ECA should:

(i) Deepen ongoing initiatives to support regional value chains and inclusive industrialization through the development of special economic zones, agro-industrial parks, electric battery and automotive initiatives, pharmaceuticals and agroprocessing value chains;

(ii) Accelerate support for the implementation of the Agreement by leveraging the private sector and other stakeholders;

(iii) Deepen support for the integration of climate considerations into trade and industrialization strategies, including on critical energy transition minerals and the just energy transition.

VIII. Way forward

14. The Committee underscored the need for the secretariat:

(a) To ensure that the recommendations are transmitted to the appropriate stakeholders for action, monitor the implementation process and keep the Committee apprised of progress achieved;

(b) To ensure that the recommendations made during the session are transmitted to the meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to be held during the fifty-eighth session of ECA.

IX. Host and venue of the thirty-second session

15. Malawi offered to host the thirty-second session of the Committee on a date to be determined. Its proposal was supported by delegates.

X. Closing of the session

16. Innocent Sbusiso Khumalo, speaking on behalf of the participants, expressed his appreciation to the Government of Eswatini for hosting the meeting and for its excellent steering of the deliberations. He also thanked the

secretariat for diligently organizing and servicing the successful hybrid meeting.

17. Ms. Kamwendo thanked all delegates for their attendance and active participation in the proceedings. She assured the delegates that their recommendations would be transmitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to be held during the fifty-eighth session of ECA, which would take place in Morocco in 2026.

18. On behalf of the Government of Eswatini and the Bureau, Mluleki Dlamini thanked everyone for their active participation and promised to work tirelessly with the secretariat to ensure that the recommendations were transmitted to stakeholders and that the Bureau worked towards achieving the development priorities of the subregion.

19. The Chair of the Bureau declared the session closed at 6 p.m. on Friday, 31 October 2025.
