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Economic Commission for Africa



# ICE 2021

37th session of the Intergovernmental Committee  
of Senior Officials and Experts of Central Africa

*FOSTERING LEADERSHIP AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE  
FOR ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA*

06 - 10 DECEMBER 2021

## CONCEPT NOTE

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## Background

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The Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICE) is the policy organ of the Subregional Office for Central Africa (SRO-CA) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This body provides a strategic platform for dialogue and close collaboration among economy, planning and other development-sector ministries, government advisors, senior civil servants, the regional economic communities (CEMAC and ECCAS) and thematic high-level experts in the subregion. They meet to build consensus on avenues for inclusive growth, as well as sustainable economic and social development in the subregion. Representatives from development organisations, the private sector and, increasingly, from youth and women's leadership ecosystems also take part in ICE deliberations.

The ICE is convened annually to identify and discuss challenges to the economic and social transformation of the subregion and propose holistic and practical pathways to address them. The Committee sessions also serve as platforms to review the state of regional integration in Central Africa and adopt coherent strategies to accelerate its pace, particularly in this era of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which statutorily came into force in May 2020 but went operational in January 2021 as member States tried to address the challenges posed by the new Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

Over the last 10 years, ECA/SRO-CA has taken advantage of the annual ICE meeting to promote the Commission's structural transformation agenda in Central Africa. In 2011, the ICE meeting held in Yaounde focused on industrial policy; in 2012, the session in Brazzaville dwelt on the energy challenges in the subregion; in 2013, the session in Libreville focused on the challenges of the green economy; in 2014, the session in N'Djamena highlighted how firms could be retooled for the green economy via industrialization; in 2015, the meeting held in Brazzaville discussed the forest industry and structural transformation; and in 2016, the session held in Douala reviewed the place of agriculture in structural transformation.

The port city of Douala again hosted the 33rd session of the ICE in 2017 under the theme "Made in Central Africa: from a vicious to a virtuous circle." That session marked a turning point in ECA's efforts to champion structural transformation in the subregion. It witnessed the adoption of the ***Douala Consensus on Economic Diversification in Central Africa*** – a theory of change for the total transformation of the economies of the subregion from commodity rent-seeking to manufacturing and high-end service provision. That theory of change has informed all subsequent sessions of the ICE. The 34th session, held in N'Djamena, was anchored on financing industrialisation; followed by the 35th session in Malabo on digital transformation. The 36<sup>th</sup> ICE session, which was held online in November 2020, examined the crucial role of skills for economic diversification in Central Africa and prompted the declaration of the years **2021-2030** as ***Decade of Economic Diversification in Central Africa***. Participants at the session were unanimous that the Decade be kickstarted with a careful examination and issuance of guidelines on the urgent need for a movement towards improved leadership and transformational change for achieving economic diversification. It neatly coincides with the UN's Decade of Action for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## The nexus between transformative leadership and transformational change: A conceptual framing

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Committed, resolute and results-oriented leadership at various levels and spheres of society will be critical to achieving the objectives of the 2021-2030 Decade of Economic Diversification in Central Africa<sup>1</sup>.

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“Leadership is the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants—a human and social achievement that stems from the leader’s understanding of his or her fellow workers and the relationship of their individual goals to the group’s aim” (Prentice 2004). The Balance Small Business (2020) posits that leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act toward achieving a common goal. These two definitions are complementary and underscore that leadership cuts across all spheres of society from global geopolitics to the life of nations and from firms to family structures.

Leadership is a key vector for change in any given sphere. In his foreword to the **Africa Capacity Report 2019** on “Fostering transformative leadership for Africa’s Development,” by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), President Paul Kagame of Rwanda postulates that “the pace of progress towards Africa’s transformation will be set by the effectiveness of our leadership in both the public and private sectors” (ACBF 2019). The Report further notes that:

*“However, poor political leadership has been highlighted as a major obstacle to Africa’s socioeconomic development. This results partly from the impact on political systems of the continent’s colonial history and severe postcolonial internal social fragmentation. As a consequence, African leaders tend to operate in political systems that are highly personalized and leadership-dependent”* (ACBF 2019, p6).

It is transformative leadership that will engender transformational change from narrow to inclusive growth and job-producing diversified economies in Central Africa. ACBF (ibid) defines transformative leadership as “leadership that brings about positive radical changes. In a development context, it is leadership that engenders widespread, demonstrable improvements in peoples’ lives as evidenced by rising incomes, longer life expectancies, comprehensive social safety networks, and universal access to basic services.”

*“Transformative leadership is less about the leader or chief executive and more about the leadership group, drawn from the political and management segments of the state, the private sector, and civil society who are capable of directing change toward desired outcomes”* (ACBF 2019, p5).

Transformative leaders in government promote and respect human rights, transparency, accountability, and codes of conduct for public officials which promote service delivery, as well as the rule of law and independence/effectiveness of public institutions. Transformative leaders in the private sector also

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<sup>1</sup> According to the concept & stakeholder campaign strategy document of the Decade, the change sought is that “Central African countries move from commodity exporting countries to valued-added economies, through resource-based and trade-induced industrialization in terms of traditional manufacturing, digital transformation and service delivery; hence escaping the vicious circle of booms and bursts in GDP gains.”

promote rights, transparency, accountability, service delivery, non-discrimination. Meanwhile, traditional or community leaders, civil society leaders and media moguls are also expected to contribute to the change they want to see in society through their own transformative leadership endeavours.

### **What, then, is transformational change?**

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Grass (2010) considers transformational change as one which is holistic and involves radical breakthroughs in paradigms, beliefs and behaviour. In his perspective, it is change which engages the heart, happens at all levels (wider society, corporate bodies, individuals), accentuates the positive and capitalises on collaboration.

Some of these tenets of transformational change were strongly called out during the 36<sup>th</sup> ICE session for Central Africa which made propositions for building competencies for economic diversification in Central Africa. For example, Cameroon's Minister of Mines, Industry and Technological Development, Gabriel Dodo Ndoke said "there should be a shift from the education for an extractive, rents-getting productive system to one that prepares learners for a transformative productive system; besides, we should design training curricula for job creation and entrepreneurship rather than for creating bureaucrats and job-chasers."

Equally calling for sweeping changes, ILO's Senior Economist, Irmgard Nübler, mooted for a change in mind-sets and subscription to strong work ethics in order to build skills and innovate for economic diversification. To support Grass' (2010) point for capitalising on collaboration for transformational change, Nübler had argued that "there must be a departure from focusing on individuals to focusing on the collective, building a society compact for a skills revolution, in order to witness meaningful changes," to spur economic diversification in Central Africa.

Transformational change would often require a private sector entity to make sweeping changes in its structure, culture and management, to reposition itself on the market, adapt to new technologies and take advantage of new business model (Chron 2020). The Big Picture People (2018), outlines five stages of transformation in a corporate entity or business as: 1) setting performance and wider organisational goals; 2) assessing the capabilities of the organisation; 3) designing the initiatives that will complete the transformation; 4) executing the initiatives; and 5) sustaining the initiatives and the changes achieved. This can be extrapolated to transformation in institutions and the wider society– such as those of Central Africa.

It is therefore relevant to think of transformational change in nations, communities, families, private business entities, etc. as "profound, fundamental and irreversible" and as "a metamorphosis, a radical change from one form to another" (Grass, *ibid*).

### **An enhanced theory and practice of change for economic diversification in Central Africa**

Sweeping changes must be inspired by transformative leaders who show example and inspire human agents to execute actions that result in transformational changes for economic diversification. Actors engaged in economic diversification in Central Africa (civil servants of industry, enterprises, trade, finance ministries as well as customs and taxation bodies of the public sector; and investors and innovators from the private sector) are familiar with theories on good governance and political economy constructs for

doing business. However, there is a high degree of unease with the governance and doing business construct especially because it has always been associated with naming and shaming or the labelling of countries of the subregion as hindering environments for doing business; generating counterarguments that malpractices pointed out are engineered by vested interests of the countries of the critics. Hence, the conversation needs to move towards **demystifying good governance** as being practical to achieve efficacy for economic diversification by removing red tape and embracing good practices learnt from elsewhere, for instance. How do we move from naming and shaming to effecting change by “applying reinforcement mechanisms” as ACBF (ibid) terms it, aimed at promoting a change in mindsets and building a coalition or movement for change? This proposition basically calls for **rewarding change agents within the constituencies when they enforce new mindsets for change**, in this case towards economic diversification. Rather than just theorising on governance, an effort must also be directed at demonstrating the costs and risks Central African countries run in not embracing radical change.

A clear demonstration of the costs and benefits of transformational change would be instrumental in avoiding situations of “**lock-in**” in Central Africa. The notion of **lock-in** here, according to Mebratu and Swilling (eds) (2019), is a blockade against change by forces comfortable with the status quo but who should be shown the win-win benefits of **leapfrogging** or radical change to them and society at large.

To achieve transformational change and engender rapid economic diversification (e.g. in Central Africa), attention must go beyond innovation and technology policy debates to consider a wider range of policy instruments combined in a suitable mix which may contribute to ‘**sustainability transition**’ (Kivimaa and Kern 2016). As argued above, the policy mixes must not be reduced to ones that enforce the destruction of the old to bring forth the new as played out by some agents of new technological advancements.

Kivimaa and Kern (ibid) state that new policy mixes seeking change either play out as ‘**layering**’ (piling up new goals and instruments to existing ones in an inconsistent manner), ‘**drifting**’ (adding new policy goals without corresponding instruments), ‘**conversion**’ (adding new instruments without revising policy goals) or ‘**replacement**’ (fundamentally changing both policy goals and instruments). They have proposed a new theory of transformational change in policy mixes termed ‘**motors of creative destruction**’ to guarantee **sustainability transition**. These motors basically incorporate instruments addressing two dimensions to transformational change: “those aimed at creating niche-innovations and building effective innovation systems around them, and those aimed at destabilising currently dominant regimes creating openings for a speedier take-off and sustained growth of niche innovations to replace incumbent,” for instance, in the case of replacing high energy technologies with low energy ones (Kivimaa and Kern, 2016, p215).

Still according to Kivimaa and Kern (ibid), this approach to cushion the old while introducing the new happens through the explicit analyses of ‘active destabilisation’ and is desirable because “solely relying on the emergence and growth of a variety of alternatives to replace incumbent systems will be too slow.” In the context of Central Africa, to win the support of all actors (including agents of “**lock-in**”), it would be critical to present transformational change as a means of matching available capabilities with unexploited opportunities, an idea well explored by Mebratu and Swilling (eds) (ibid). This line of thinking informs the present work by ECA to help the Government of Cameroon to capitalise on the economies of agglomeration by transforming the Kribi-Douala-Edea trajectory into a growth triangle with the necessary special economic zones of industrial productivity.

It is all about urgently identifying and leveraging the low hanging fruits available for transformational change for economic diversification in Central Africa especially with the opportunities and possibilities gleaned from the lessons of COVID-19 (opportunities include quickly developing the local pharmaceutical industry; moving up the agribusiness value chain; improving transportation and logistics to ease trade with neighbouring countries). With its **physical, ecological, human and institutional** resources – which is the **infrastructure** needed for the wellbeing economy of jobs and poverty alleviation (Mebratu and Swilling, eds, *ibid*) – the Central African subregion should make significant leaps in transformation during this 2021-2030 Decade of Economic Diversification. The subregion must capitalize on the possibilities that lie ahead rather than fixating on perceived risks, as is propounded by Berman (2013). These possibilities have already been well-identified within the Central Africa Industrialization and Economic Diversification Masterplan (PDIDE-AC) being developed for the ECCAS and CEMAC Commissions with analytical support from ECA. Developing value chains in agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, energy, the blue economy and critical minerals as well as making use of spatial planning tools to inform investment decisions and promoting a *Made in Central Africa* legend, are key directions for instituting transformational change.

To broaden the subregion's fiscal space for economic diversification, ECA is advocating natural capital accounting as a means of rebasing the wealth of nations in the subregion. A project called 'Green Gabon' supported by ECA, UNDP and UNEP is a pilot in this sense, which should result in the issuance of blue and green bonds for Gabon to finance some of its structural development priorities. With the transformational change agenda, speed to deliver is of the essence.

To foster transformational change for economic diversification in Central Africa, it may also be necessary to emphasise the role of champion states who are in a position to lead such transformation due to their better advanced ecological, human, institutional and physical productive infrastructure, in order to pull others along especially with regards to value chains. This is called the neighbourhood effect (More 2004).

From the foregoing arguments, we submit that transformative leadership and transformational change should be the leitmotiv for economic diversification in Central Africa to happen speedily during this 2021-2030 Decade of Economic Diversification in the sub-region, which coincides with the Decade of Action for Delivering on the UN's Agenda 2030.

## Rationale for transformational change toward economic diversification in Central Africa: Seven questions to ponder

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1. Central Africa's quest for economic diversification would come to naught without societal transformational change. But transformative leadership is a crucial missing ingredient in the pursuit of transformational change that can bring about sustainable development and economic diversification in the subregion. How does it present itself?
2. Governance is a crucial yardstick for transformative leaders to lead by example and pull "the crowd" for the transformational change needed to engineer economic diversification. But how can be demystified to show that it is a collective principle, it is not about naming and shaming, it

is about context and red tape removal and it can be copied from comparators in the developing South and not necessarily the GDP-rich Global North?

3. Poor, unconcerned public and private service delivery is hobbling efforts at quality economic diversification in Central Africa. Only sweeping changes in leadership can engender efficient public and private service delivery. How can we break the status quo?
4. Formal training in just management and public administration is not enough to create the sine qua non conditions for economic diversification in Central Africa. Deliberate investments must be made in transformative leadership training to produce transformational change which supports such a diversification drive. Is this enough?
5. The role of youth and women are crucial in the transformational change needed to propel Central Africa in this knowledge, information and digital economy, especially with the opportunities of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Traditional practices which serve as barriers to contributions from youth and women towards economic diversification in Central Africa, must be dismantled with the support of renewed leadership. How can this be achieved; and what more?
6. For economic diversification to come to fruition, governments cannot be left alone to figure out ways of providing transformational change. The private sector, civil society, community and traditional leaders, the media, academia, industry captains, diaspora influencers and other individuals must be part of a conversational movement which co-creates irreversible transformational change. What is the right formula?
7. The COVID-19 pandemic has abundantly demonstrated fundamental weaknesses of Central African economies, notably their very low levels of structural transformation and economic diversification. There can be no turning back to business as usual. The subregion must build forward better from the pandemic. As indicated in the UNCTAD 2020 *Trade and development report*, recovering better demands that the Covid-19 pandemic be treated not only as a crisis to be managed, but an opportunity to identify and address the structural barriers in the way of a more prosperous, equitable and resilient future. As such, transformative leadership and transformational change would engender the revolution in Central Africa towards building forward better to become more economically diversified and resilient. Are we sure?

### **Digging deeper: Suggested signposts for engineering transformational change for economic diversification in Central Africa but “no one size fits all”**

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To calibrate thinking for this year’s ICE on leadership and transformational change for economic diversification, it would be necessary to suggest some signposts for the ecosystem of these transformations, which are urgent. Here below are the elements which can inform both the background study (which should serve as a blueprint for the subregion on this agenda) as well as the ICE deliberations and outcomes.

**1) RAPID TRANSITIONS:** What are the **rapid transitions/ short term measures** needed? Value chains for critical minerals, agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, energy as well as the pursuit of natural capital

counting for rebasing the wealth of economies to broaden the fiscal space for economic diversification. In terms of critical minerals, what particular attention can be paid to cobalt for in the 8.8 trillion-dollar battery and electric vehicle value chain by 2025, as a matter of urgency to avoid a scenario of it becoming a stranded asset? How should governments improve their game as developmental states by providing incentives (e.g. on taxes and or enrolment into STEM educational fields) and institute local content instruments in the short term?

**2) POLICY MIXES AND KEY ACTORS:** What are the policy mixes to be worked out to support the kinds of transitions mentioned above? Who are the key actors of the system (such as political leaders, private sector leaders, women, young entrepreneurs, academics, media personalities and civil society champions) and how should they be brought under the 'palaver tree' with change agents to work a way out for '**motors of creative destruction**' which embrace but modify old ways of doing things while introducing other disruptions?

**3) DEMISTIFYING GOVERNANCE:** How should the debate on governance be recalibrated away from naming-and-shaming to incentivising and eliminating red tape; and broadened to address procedures for creating productive spaces for economic diversification such as Special Economic Zones without creating spatial poverty, for instance? In other words, how should governance be everyone's 'cup of tea' in order to create a wellbeing economy of job creation, poverty alleviation and gender equality (as Mebratu and Swilling 2019, eds; have postulated)? How can the risks of not pursuing transformational change through governance be clearly demonstrated to avoid 'lock-ins' to the old dispensation?

**4) NATURAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTING:** How should the question of natural capital accounting be made to gain currency among Central African Member States and development partners in order to rebase their wealth and broaden their fiscal space for pursuing transformational change enhanced by transformative leadership?

**5) DRAWING LESSONS OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS:** What are the clear lessons of failure and successes on leadership-induced transformational change in economies of similar levels as those of Central Africa (for instance state directionality and agro-industrial parks in Ethiopia; Rwanda and its rapid transitions into ICTs and tourism; South Africa and its Operation Phakisa established in to foster rapid change by 2030 in seven development sectors including the ocean economy, health, biodiversity, education, mining, agriculture and land, chemical & waste economies)?

**6) INFRASTRUCTURES FOR CHANGE:** What are the physical, institutional, ecological and human infrastructures to be leveraged for rapid economic diversification? How should these neatly come together?

## Objectives of the Session

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The overall objective of the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of Central Africa is to thoroughly review the state of leadership and transformational change in Central Africa, identify gaps and propose practical ways of bolstering the understanding and practice of both interlaced concepts to accelerate economic diversification in Central Africa.

The specific objectives of the session are to:

- i. Debate on the state of leadership and transformational change in Central Africa in order to identify gaps in these areas to be plugged to support economic diversification in the subregion;
- ii. Identify champions, change agents, and key societal stakeholders to promote the precepts of leadership and society wide engagement in transformational change to foster economic diversification in the subregion;
- iii. Recommend ingredients for a sweeping movement of change including practical steps to take to engender a revolution in both transformative leadership and transformational change as propellers of economic diversification in Central Africa;
- iv. Thoroughly examine how well calculated public-private partnerships can engender the leadership and societal changes needed as bedrocks of economic transformation in Central Africa; and
- v. Capture examples from elsewhere which demonstrate that achieving economic diversification through leadership and transformational change is not farfetched and can be done in Central Africa

Participants of the 2021 ICE session will also examine statutory issues relating to the work of ECA/SRO-CA, notably: (i) an activity report of the Office for the period 2021; (ii) a progress report on regional and international programmes and other special initiatives in the sub-region; as well as (iii) a report on the implementation of sub-regional initiatives in Central Africa.

## Expected result of the session

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In line with the *2021-2030 Decade of Economic Diversification* in the sub-region, the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICE will set in motion the process towards an accelerated structural transformation and economic diversification in Central Africa, and clarify the pathways and the role of leadership and transformational change in achieving it.

## Format of the session

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With the prospects of progress in vaccinating communities across Central Africa against COVID-19 and checking the spread of the virus before the last quarter of 2021, the session is projected to be in-person with the possibility of remote (virtual) participation. Below, is a description of how it will play out.

### BEFORE THE SESSION

**Discussions in a community of practice:** ECA/SRO-CA Knowledge Management unit will identify and rally experts around various components/sub-themes/pillars of transformative leadership and transformational change in Central Africa for continuous sharing of insights and resources on the theme and how it relates to Central Africa. A summary of the discussions will help enrich the ICE debates and recommendations of November 2021.

Some **media interviews** to discuss the thematic of the event will be arranged for and executed.

**Communication and advocacy:** Highlights of the foregoing activities will be covered and disseminated via various channels (including social media) by ECA's communication professionals.

## DURING THE SESSION

**Addresses and ICE Bureau Change:** There will be address by ECA, the host country Congo, the outgoing chair of the ICE, followed by the election of a new ICE Bureau.

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**Keynote address:** A world class figure in leadership, such as any of the winners of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership should be invited to deliver an address that would challenge leaders and individuals in Central Africa to embrace transformational change as the surest percussor of economic diversification in Central Africa.

**High-level Policy Dialogue on why and how a leadership and transformational change revolution can catalyse Central Africa's economic diversification:** This debate will draw high-level speakers such as ministers, recognized experts in the area of leadership and transformational change, captains of industry and civil society leaders to set the tone for the ICE. It will nudge participants in various sessions to come up with clear, implementable recommendations for member states.

**Presentation of the ICE Background study** on "A trip to 2030: Fostering leadership and transformational change for economic diversification in Central Africa": Detailed research on the theme and recommendations for change will be presented to the delegates during the ICE session. It will be reviewed and rendered better for publication.

**Review of statutory issues:** This will include a progress report on the work of ECA/SRO-CA, a report on progress of international agendas such as the SDGs and building forward better from COVID-19, and review of themed reports of ECA/SRO-CA as outlined in its 2021 programme of work.

**Breakout sessions:** It is proposed that the plenary session breaks into five main groups to develop recommendations on the proposed pillars on fostering leadership and transformational change for economic diversification in Central Africa

**Review of debates and session recommendations:** Records and recommendations of the debates in plenary and in breakout sessions will be presented to all participants for adjustments and endorsement, then shared with them, governments and other stakeholders once finalized.

**Communication and advocacy:** Highlights of the foregoing activities will be covered and disseminated via various channels (including social media) by ECA's communication professionals.

## AFTER THE SESSION

**Film premiere: A walk from 2030:** A 60-minute film which captures the essence of the ICE background study in a creative way, to include a documentary style narration and acting from a flashback perspective. It will situate where Central Africa 'is' ideally in the year 2030 thanks to leadership and transformational change. There will be an online ceremony to premiere it and stimulate discussions which should prepare the grounds for well carved out debates during the ICE session.

**Communication and advocacy:** Highlights of the foregoing activities will be covered and disseminated via various channels (including social media) by ECA's communication professionals.

## Stakeholders/participants of the session

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Ministers/senior civil service officials and policy advisors of governments across the Central African subregion, experts in the field of leadership and change, economists and other academic heavyweights, representatives of the regional economic communities of Central Africa (the CEMAC and ECCAS commissions and their relevant statutory bodies), representatives of UN agencies and other development institutions (AfDB, World Bank, Afreximbank, African Finance Corporation, etc.) in the subregion, private sector actors, media, and civil society leaders.

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## Date and place of the Session

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The 37<sup>th</sup> session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts of Central Africa (ICE) will be held in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, from 23 to 26 November 2021.

## Working languages of the Session

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The session will be conducted in the official working languages of member States of the Central African subregion, notably: English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, with the aid of simultaneous interpretation.

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