



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting
Leveraging Regional Trade in a Changing Global
Order

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Regional Office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA)

2nd October 2025; 10H00-12H00

Rwanda, Kigali: Virtual Participation

Concept Note and Programme of Work

I. Concept note

1. Background

Global trade tensions have intensified following an executive order issued by the US President on February 1st, 2025, introducing 25% tariffs on most imports from Canada and Mexico. These tariffs, previously near zero, prompted swift reciprocal measures from Canada and later similar responses from China and other trading partners, contributing to a broader rise in global trade frictions, with notable implications for Africa.

For African countries, the universal 10% U.S. tariff, imposed on nations with a trade surplus with the United States, continues to apply to nearly all African economies, including Eastern Africa states. In addition, country-specific reciprocal tariffs, which were initially introduced at significantly higher rates for selected countries were temporarily paused earlier this year and then slightly reduced, on the 1st of August U.S. tariff update, rather than being fully removed. These measures have effectively dismantled Africa's preferential market access to the U.S., eliminating key duty-free provisions under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

In addition to tariff escalation, other international policy shifts pose new risks to African manufacturing and structural transformation. These include the European Union's sustainability regulations on deforestation and carbon-border adjustments, persistent logistical disruptions in the Red Sea, and newly implemented industrial policies in advanced economies¹, which offer significant subsidies to domestic manufacturing sectors, thereby distorting global competition. These, added to the well-known intra-African trade constraints, could hamper efforts made up to now by African countries to boost their export performance.

The negative effects of these new developments of the global trade landscape might be limited if the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is accelerated by members states². It is true that Eastern Africa's export basket remains highly concentrated in a narrow range of primary commodities and low-complexity manufactured goods, leaving the region vulnerable to external shocks, preference erosion, and non-tariff barriers related to standards and regulations. However, the AfCFTA offers a platform to advance industrialization, economic diversification, and structural transformation³. Without a strategic shift toward regional integration and trade, Eastern African countries risk slower economic growth, missed opportunities for industrialization, and weaker resilience to global policy shocks. Recent studies by the United

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٢٢٣/١٢٢٤/١٢٢٥/١٢٢٦/١٢٢٧/١٢٢٨/١٢٢٩/١٢٣٠/١٢٣١/١٢٣٢/١٢٣٣/١٢٣٤/١٢٣٥/١٢٣٦/١٢٣٧/١٢٣٨/١٢٣٩/١٢٤٠/١٢٤١/١٢٤٢/١٢٤٣/١٢٤٤/١٢٤٥/١٢٤٦/١٢٤٧/١٢٤٨/١٢٤٩/١٢٥٠/١٢٥١/١٢٥٢/١٢٥٣/١٢٥٤/١٢٥٥/١٢٥٦/١٢٥٧/١٢٥٨/١٢٥٩/١٢٦٠/١٢٦١/١٢٦٢/١٢٦٣/١٢٦٤/١٢٦٥/١٢٦٦/١٢٦٧/١٢٦٨/١٢٦٩/١٢٧٠/١٢٧١/١٢٧٢/١٢٧٣/١٢٧٤/١٢٧٥/١٢٧٦/١٢٧٧/١٢٧٨/١٢٧٩/١٢٨٠/١٢٨١/١٢٨٢/١٢٨٣/١٢٨٤/١٢٨٥/١٢٨٦/١٢٨٧/١٢٨٨/١٢٨٩/١٢٩٠/١٢٩١/١٢٩٢/١٢٩٣/١٢٩٤/١٢٩٥/١٢٩٦/١٢٩٧/١٢٩٨/١٢٩٩/١٣٠٠/١٣٠١/١٣٠٢/١٣٠٣/١٣٠٤/١٣٠٥/١٣٠٦/١٣٠٧/١٣٠٨/١٣٠٩/١٣١٠/١٣١١/١٣١٢/١٣١٣/١٣١٤/١٣١٥/١٣١٦/١٣١٧/١٣١٨/١٣١٩/١٣٢٠/١٣٢١/١٣٢٢/١٣٢٣/١٣٢٤/١٣٢٥/١٣٢٦/١٣٢٧/١٣٢٨/١٣٢٩/١٣٣٠/١٣٣١/١٣٣٢/١٣٣٣/١٣٣٤/١٣٣٥/١٣٣٦/١٣٣٧/١٣٣٨/١٣٣٩/١٣٤٠/١٣٤١/١٣٤٢/١٣٤٣/١٣٤٤/١٣٤٥/١٣٤٦/١٣٤٧/١٣٤٨/١٣٤٩/١٣٥٠/١٣٥١/١٣٥٢/١٣٥٣/١٣٥٤/١٣٥٥/١٣٥٦/١٣٥٧/١٣٥٨/١٣٥٩/١٣٦٠/١٣٦١/١٣٦٢/١٣٦٣/١٣٦٤/١٣٦٥/١٣٦٦/١٣٦٧/١٣٦٨/١٣٦٩/١٣٧٠/١٣٧١/١٣٧٢/١٣٧٣/١٣٧٤/١٣٧٥/١٣٧٦/١٣٧٧/١٣٧٨/١٣٧٩/١٣٨٠/١٣٨١/١٣٨٢/١٣٨٣/١٣٨٤/١٣٨٥/١٣٨٦/١٣٨٧/١٣٨٨/١٣٨٩/١٣٩٠/١٣٩١/١٣٩٢/١٣٩٣/١٣٩٤/١٣٩٥/١٣٩٦/١٣٩٧/١٣٩٨/١٣٩٩/١٤٠٠/١٤٠١/١٤٠٢/١٤٠٣/١٤٠٤/١٤٠٥/١٤٠٦/١٤٠٧/١٤٠٨/١٤٠٩/١٤١٠/١٤١١/١٤١٢/١٤١٣/١٤١٤/١٤١٥/١٤١٦/١٤١٧/١٤١٨/١٤١٩/١٤٢٠/١٤٢١/١٤٢٢/١٤٢٣/١٤٢٤/١٤٢٥/١٤٢٦/١٤٢٧/١٤٢٨/١٤٢٩/١٤٣٠/١٤٣١/١٤٣٢/١٤٣٣/١٤٣٤/١٤٣٥/١٤٣٦/١٤٣٧/١٤٣٨/١٤٣٩/١٤٤٠/١٤٤١/١٤٤٢/١٤٤٣/١٤٤٤/١٤٤٥/١٤٤٦/١٤٤٧/١٤٤٨/١٤٤٩/١٤٥٠/١٤٥١/١٤٥٢/١٤٥٣/١٤٥٤/١٤٥٥/١٤٥٦/١٤٥٧/١٤٥٨/١٤٥٩/١٤٦٠/١٤٦١/١٤٦٢/١٤٦٣/١٤٦٤/١٤٦٥/١٤٦٦/١٤٦٧/١٤٦٨/١٤٦٩/١٤٧٠/١٤٧١/١٤٧٢/١٤٧٣/١٤٧٤/١٤٧٥/١٤٧٦/١٤٧٧/١٤٧٨/١٤٧٩/١٤٨٠/١٤٨١/١٤٨٢/١٤٨٣/١٤٨٤/١٤٨٥/١٤٨٦/١٤٨٧/١٤٨٨/١٤٨٩/١٤٩٠/١٤٩١/١٤٩٢/١٤٩٣/١٤٩٤/١٤٩٥/١٤٩٦/١٤٩٧/١٤٩٨/١٤٩٩/١٥٠٠/١٥٠١/١٥٠٢/١٥٠٣/١٥٠٤/١٥٠٥/١٥٠٦/١٥٠٧/١٥٠٨/١٥٠٩/١٥١٠/١٥١١/١٥١٢/١٥١٣/١٥١٤/١٥١٥/١٥١٦/١٥١٧/١٥١٨/١٥١٩/١٥٢٠/١٥٢١/١٥٢٢/١٥٢٣/١٥٢٤/١٥٢٥/١٥٢٦/١٥٢٧/١٥٢٨/١٥٢٩/١٥٣٠/١٥٣١/١٥٣٢/١٥٣٣/١٥٣٤/١٥٣٥/١٥٣٦/١٥



Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2025⁴) show that the largest gains from AfCFTA will accrue in processed and value-added goods.

2. Purpose of the Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

This Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will assess how Eastern Africa can accelerate intra-African trade under the AfCFTA framework, and leverage it as a catalyst for industrialization, job creation, and structural economic transformation in the context of global trade dynamics. More specifically, it will discuss the following:

- **Trade Trends and Performance:** Examine recent developments in global trade and analyze Eastern Africa's trade performance, particularly with the United States, under AGOA or other trade regime. Assess trends in merchandise and services trade and explore the expansion of intra-regional trade under emerging global dynamics.
- **Regional Value Chain Integration:** Identify opportunities to strengthen and integrate regional value chains in key sectors such as agro-processing, food trade, textiles and apparel, and other priority industries with high potential for regional competitiveness.
- **Trade Infrastructure:** Explore strategies to improve trade-related infrastructure, including trade corridors, ports, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and digital trade facilitation tools aimed at reducing costs and improving regional connectivity.
- **National Measures and Strategic Responses:** Review country-specific measures adopted across Eastern Africa to mitigate the negative effects of recent global trade disruptions and to fully capitalize on opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.
- **AfCFTA Implementation and Regional Integration:** Assess the progress of AfCFTA implementation in the region and the complementary role of the regional economic communities in advancing deeper regional integration, promoting export diversification, and building resilience to external shocks.

3. Participants

This AEGM is expected to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including Government representatives from the Ministries of Trade and related ministries; regional economic communities, think-tanks, private sector and civil society.

4. UNECA focal point

For further information and clarification, please contact Ms. Simone Assah Kuete, Economic Affairs Officer, e-mail: simone.assahkuete@un.org

II. Programme of Work

The AEGM will last for 2 hours. The times below are in GMT+2. Please adapt to your time zone.

Opening Session: Wednesday, 1 st October 2025	
10.00-10.10	Opening remarks: By: UNECA, SRO-EA Director, Mr. Andrew Mold
Background Paper presentation	
10.10-10.30	Recent trade performance of Eastern Africa By: UNECA Economic Affairs Officer, Mr. Rodgers Mukwaya
Round table discussions	
10.30-11.15	Moderator: UNECA Communication Officer, Mr. Didier Habimana <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Trade Madagascar • Ministry of Trade Djibouti • Ministry of Trade Tanzania • Ministry of Trade Rwanda • Regional representative • Think-tank representative
11.15-11.45	Open discussions
Closing	
11.45-12.00	Closing remarks By: UNECA, SRO-EA, Director, Mr. Andrew Mold