



Capacity Building Workshop on **Smart and Seamless Transport and Trade Connectivity along Trans-African Corridors**

Theme: "The Application of Smart Technology for Seamless Cross-borders"

14 and 15 May 2022, Dakar, Senegal

1. From the transport perspective, COVID-19 not only poses a severe global health threat, it also represents a supply and a demand shock. Moreover, different transport-related policy measures undertaken by countries to contain the pandemic pose operational challenges of movement of goods on both national and international level, disrupting international transport connectivity and the overall logistics of the supply chain network. Efficient flow of goods and services within and across countries are critical to defeat the pandemic, notably to ensure delivery of essential products such as foodstuff and medical supplies, as well as to ensure speedy and sustainable recovery.
2. Unfortunately, freight transport can also contribute to the spread of the virus, especially if it is not fully computerized. As documents and goods continue to be subjected to physical checks for customs and other regulatory purposes, crew members and staff at border-crossing points and control terminals are exposed to the risk of contagion by the nature of their work. In this context, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and intelligent transport systems (ITS) is directly relevant to the current and future pandemic response and recovery policies and optimization of automation and digitalization can reduce the need for human interaction, making cross-borders transport safer and more resilient to disruptions.
3. Moreover, seamless connectivity between ICT, trade, and transport can play an instrumental and vital role in the socio-economic development of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing states (SIDS) and provide great support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063. However, the 16 landlocked countries in the Africa region face many challenges. Given connectivity deficits between countries, a smart corridor approach is



proposed to link the countries and sub-regions, noting the role that topography, climatic conditions, disaster proneness, pandemic, and other specificities of the region play.

4. The Capacity Building Workshop on **Smart and Seamless Transport and Trade Connectivity along Trans-**

**African Corridors** was held in Dakar-Senegal on 14 and 15 May 2022 with the theme “The Application of Smart Technology for Seamless Cross-borders”, on the sidelines of the fifty-fourth session of the Conference of African Ministers (CoM) of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.



5. The workshop focused on road transport in countries along African transport corridors in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted new operational challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on the regional transport industry and the emerging trends in road transport, such as digitalization of cross-border transport operations and greater use of technology. The training also focused on the application of technology for smart and seamless cross-borders in Africa, showcasing a wide range of proven solutions that make road transport less reliant on physical contacts (contactless/smart solutions) and less exposed to interruptions and costs of documentary and other checks.

6. The workshop was well attended, with over 45 delegates from diverse African countries and some other parts of the world, comprising sponsored and non-sponsored participants, making the training sessions vibrant. These included the African Union Commission (AUC), Experts from Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Senegal, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Kenya, etc., North Corridor Transit Transport Coordination Authority (NTTCA), Regional Economic Communities – Transport Coordination Committee (REC-TCC), Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG), New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD), Trans Kalahari Corridor (TKC) Secretariat, Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency (CCTTFA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African



(COMESA); the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Comité de Liaison de la Route Transaharienne (CLRT).

7. The capacity training workshop brought together stakeholders and experts in the field of transport and cross-border trade from the public and private sectors of African countries. The workshop underlined the use of new technologies and smart road solutions to preserve regional transport connectivity in the time of pandemics and other similar disruptions. It was opened by Ms. Grace Obat, Director of Private Sector Development and Finance Division of UNECA; the representative of AUDA-NEPAD, Ms. Kisa Nkhoma; from the AUC Department of Trade and Industry, Ms. Luisenda Neto; and the AfDB representative, James Austere, Principal Ports and Maritime Transport Officer.
8. All the speakers underscored the importance of the application of technology for smart and seamless cross-border transport and trade for the efficient flow of goods and services within and across African countries. This is critical to defeating the pandemic, notably to ensure delivery of essential products such as foodstuffs and medical supplies, as well as to ensure speedy and sustainable recovery from COVID-19. In their remarks, the representatives from AUDA-NEPAD emphasized the policy responses to the obstacles to seamless transport and trade logistics, which are evident on the corridors in many African countries, and then proposed technology improvements to enhance efficiency and resilience to disruptions.
9. It was noted that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement presents an incentive to coordinate at a continental level and an opportunity for dispute settlement as State Parties have made binding and cooperative commitments under the Agreement's annexes on customs, trade facilitation, and transit, including on cross-border paperless trade. Challenges such as addressing the skills gap to implement these solutions and opportunities such as monitoring emissions using technology were raised. Questions were posed on interoperability vs. harmonisation, integration of systems, inclusive design, and upskilling.



10. The core content of the training was delivered on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of May in four technical sessions comprising discussions with delegates on different aspects/topics of the project (knowledge products) with the aim of enhancing the capacity and practical skills of policymakers and other respective stakeholders, including regional corridor institutions, ports authorities, border/customs/revenue officials, transport companies, trade facilitation stakeholders, IT/digital sector companies, and cross-border traders' and business associations. Paper presentations were also interspersed with discussions of country experiences, the perspective of the corridor management institutions (CMIs), and the derivation of major recommendations for leveraging the opportunities in digital technology towards improving the lives of millions of Africa's populations and businesses through seamless connectivity.
  
11. On the second day, participants attended a side-event session of the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of Ministers, where the topic of the implications of the AfCFTA for the transport sector was discussed, among other areas. The session gave participants an opportunity to reflect and engage on potential areas for future investments in transport infrastructure and services.
  
12. Critical reports and studies from trade, transport, and customs experts, CMIs, and RECs were presented alongside shared experiences on best practices in smart systems. Lessons learned from country-cases were discussed, and recommendations were offered at each session. Participants suggested concrete actions as next steps for themselves as well as for ECA and partners in advancing smart and seamless transport and trade connectivity.
  
13. The meeting resolved and recommended that:
  - I. ECA be commended for making great inputs into transportation and trade policies and capacity development in Africa since its inception.
  - II. It is necessary for corridor management institutions to use seamless and smart solutions to prepare for and manage increased demand on transport services and infrastructure as a result of the AfCFTA.



- III. It is pertinent for Africa to leverage on facilitation solutions along TAH to develop Inter-African connectivity and trade seamlessly.
- IV. CMI's must be ready for the present and future needs of more and more digitalized world, where digital infrastructures communicate with other digital infrastructures via the Internet, while countries/corridor states need to be prepared to respond to this need in timely and in a comprehensive manner.
- V. It is imperative for corridor states to establish new governance structures (procedural legal) and split responsibilities between the regional and corridor state institutions to minimize overlaps, resulting in uncoordinated initiatives and a lack of harmonization in policy decisions between the Corridor States within the economic/digital corridors.
- VI. CMI's must be financed, capacitated, and linked within the transport, trade, and digital ecosystems, with innovative funding mechanisms and PPP models being considered for the authorities as well as smart and seamless projects. They can take the role of harmonising regulations at the corridor level, creating a data observatory to support evidence-based decisions, supporting private sector development through training of trainers, and providing management, control, and surveillance systems.
- VII. While seamless cross-border transport and trade require a regulatory framework and new management structures in most African countries, they still require technology support to make it a reality. Therefore, corridor states should harness technological innovation and pave the way for local digital economies and corridor development.
- VIII. Simplification and harmonization of customs procedures based on global standards is a catalyst in the framework of RECs and CMI's in Africa.
- IX. Member Countries need to consider the adoption of digital tools/ICT methods/ simulation model such as appointment virtual queue system and route planning and monitoring in order to address the management challenges emanating from corridors, urban mobility and road safety issues in the Continent.
- X. Laying a foundation for the continent's current and future workforce in seamless connectivity requires a deliberate policy



approach, private sector commitment, and institutional reforms. It is vital for the trade and transport sectors to invest in building skills, not just for today, but to establish a sustainable pipeline of talent to meet future skill needs.

- XI. Participants called on ECA to revitalise the information sharing mechanism between corridors to both learn from successes and avoid and address challenges, including looking at model laws. This could extend to the experience of harmonisation between regional economic communities such as the tripartite arrangement between COMESA, EAC, and SADC. This could be in the form of the revitalisation of ACMA and raise from the latter, a minimum of engagement in the area.

**In addition:**

- XII. A regulatory framework for improved trade and transport should be established for the creation of seamless and smart connectivity and technology systems to play an important role in helping to achieve the economic growth objectives of the corridor states.
- XIII. Corridors themselves must be viewed not only as conduits to growth and regional integration but also as engines of regional and local economic development, thus harnessing the huge resource potential of the continent. The role that the CMIs play in the trade and transport facilitation agenda on the continent is considerable; hence, deliberate cooperation between authorities at adjacent borders is a must.
- XIV. The tracking of cargo solely by using electronic seals has limited ability to ensure security. Hereafter, the use of electronic seals should form part of the overall system to support and incentivize approved economic operators to comply with regulations voluntarily and enjoy tangible benefits if compliance can be proven.
- XV. The COVID-19 pandemic not only poses a severe health threat, it also represents a supply and a demand shock - both aspects influencing intra-African trade in goods and services. Hence, African governments must urgently adopt common approaches and smart solutions to addressing these issues across the network of supply chains to avoid widespread economic collapse in Africa.





- XVI. The experts asked ECA, AfCFTA, and AUDA-NEPAD secretariats to develop a unified information platform with automation and modeling modules to determine compatibility, cost-effectiveness, and determine infrastructure projects that are suitable for ICT deployment in identified corridors.
- XVII. Participants recommended a showcasing of systems in place and assessment of the options. They also suggested to categorise member countries by progress and identify policy solutions and pace on that basis. Finally, they mentioned integrating with existing international frameworks on standards, models, and improved coordination and leveraging global efforts to create a “package” of legal issues, procedural requirements, and systems when it comes to implementing seamless and smart solutions.
- XVIII. There is a need to continue the harmonisation of transport/transit toward a unique platform of logistic on the continent to support the AfCFTA.
- XIX. The meeting also recommended that the recommendations of the study be translated into an action plan to be implemented by stakeholders. As such, ECA should collaborate with relevant institutions such as the AfCFTA secretariat to get it adopted by decision makers and help with its implementation.

## **Conclusion:**

14. The training ended with the emphasis on continuous training of corridor officials and/or states and non-state actors to ensure a better understanding of the smart technology application concept for seamless transport across African countries’ corridors. These adopted recommendations will serve as resource materials for capacity building and training (knowledge products) on the application of technology for smart and seamless cross-borders in Africa.
15. The workshop commended UNECA for its continued support for smart and seamless trade and transportation development in Africa. Finally, Mr. Robert Lisinge, Chief, Energy, Infrastructure, and Services Section of UNECA, reiterated ECA’s appreciation to the experts for their active



participation, valuable contributions, and interventions in the discussion of the different sessions and declared the workshop a close.