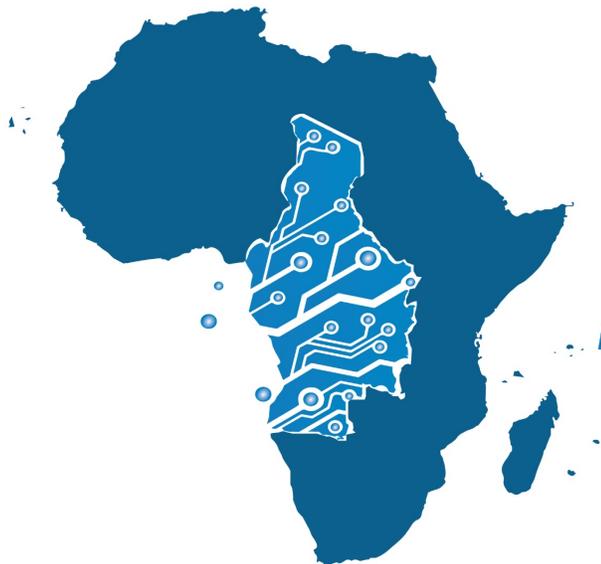




United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



ICE 2019

35th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior
Officials and Experts for Central Africa (ICE)

*Digital Transformations and Economic Diversification in
Central Africa: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities*

MALABO | 23 - 27 September 2019

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE

23 September 2019

High-Level Dialogue on the Digital Economy in Central Africa

Concept Note for the Moderator

Moderator

1. Introduction of panelists (short bibliography with name, function, institution and benchmarks, where applicable)

2. Initial remarks on the general theme of the ICE

We are all witnesses to the emergence of the 4th Industrial Revolution which, with many risks, opens up enormous opportunities to increase growth, boost productivity and improve competitiveness. In Central Africa, the digital economy can help meet the development challenges of economic diversification and industrialization. However, despite some efforts, the digital economy in the sub-region is still in its infancy and is only just beginning to attract the attention of policymakers, both public and private. Indeed, in terms of regional and international data, connectivity levels are very low, Internet costs are among the highest, and bandwidth is one of the lowest. In addition, there is a hype about the availability and opportunities of the 4G, while speed users generally get a 3G and even a fragile 2G. This situation is aggravated in the case of poor urban households and rural populations in general. You can imagine lost opportunities for farmers in terms of access to markets, suppliers, services, technologies, financing and real-time market prices for their products, among others. If you multiply this opportunity cost for all farmers and businesses, you can imagine the extent of losses in the sub-region in terms of employment, income, fiscal resources, productivity, competitiveness, technological development and well-being. Now that the world is about to move to Generation 5G, what must governments and the private sector do to rapidly migrate the infrastructure and acquire the underlying technical know-how that will shape the future of production, services and consumption?

3. Panel 1: *This panel will deal with the strategic importance and implications of the digital economy for economic diversification and industrialization for Central Africa.*

3.1. Questions to ask and which panelists could answer / refer to:

- *What is the importance of the digital economy for Central Africa in the face of its economic diversification and industrialization promotion programme?*
- *Can Central Africa move to the 4th industrial revolution? What are the issues and risks?*
- *What conditions must be fulfilled for this purpose?*
- *What roles should States play?*
- *Do we need new models of policy development and partnerships?*
- *What should be the role of regional and sub-regional organizations?*

3.2. Q & A involving all experts and panelists

4. PANEL 2: *This second part of the dialogue will focus on the experiences and approaches used to harness the digital economy for economic diversification and industrialization.*

4.1. Questions to ask and which panelists could answer / refer to:

- *What contributions has your organization or institution made to the promotion of the digital economy in Africa, and more particularly in Central Africa?*
- *What impact or support do you bring to economic diversification and industrialization?*
- *What are the constraints identified and how can they be overcome?*
- *Given the comparative advantages of Central Africa, what can be done to better use them through the digital economy?*
- *Given the potential and nature of the digital economy, how can it be harnessed to further diversify the economies of Central Africa?*

4.2. Possible topics of discussion: Agriculture, urban services, export free zones, technology parks, financial services, STEM, new computer services, electric cars, etc.

High-Level Dialogue on the Digital Economy in Central Africa

Concept note for panel members

Introduction

The digitalization of the economy through the increasing use of digital technologies is transforming the global landscape of production, consumption and governance, among others, and ushering in what is now known as Industry 4.0. Over the years, ECA has reiterated the need for Central African countries to industrialize and diversify their economies. History shows that no country has reached an advanced stage of economic and social development without an advanced and diversified economy that places a premium on the industrial sector. In the Douala Consensus (2017), Central African Member States acknowledged that the current growth and development model has not been able to generate a virtuous circle of inclusive growth, mainly because of the strong concentration of factors of production and resources in low productivity activities. The region has no choice but to engage in the digital economy and prepare for this new technological era by investing heavily in the Internet, digital technologies, targeted skills development and innovation and the development of goods and services revolving around this new economy. The main problem concerns the technological advances in favour of inclusive and sustainable development.

How can Central Africa industrialize and diversify its economies in the context of the increasing digitization of the global economy and the next 5G revolution?

Panel 1: This panel will focus on the strategic importance of digital transformation for the economic diversification and industrialization of Central Africa. It will address issues of the opportunity cost of not investing in the digital economy and opportunities to meet its challenges of economic diversification and industrialization.

Issues you may want to discuss

- *What is the relevance of the digital economy for Central Africa in terms of its economic diversification and industrialization promotion programme?*
- *Can Central Africa move to the 4th industrial revolution? What are the issues and risks? What conditions must be fulfilled for this purpose?*
- *What roles should States play?*
- *Do we need new models of policy development and partnerships?*
- *What should be the role of regional and sub-regional organizations?*

Panel 2: This panel will focus on approaches, policies and strategies for developing a digital economy that contributes to economic diversification and industrialization in Central Africa.

Issues you may want to discuss

- Given the comparative advantages of Central Africa, what can be done to better use them through the digital economy?

- Given the potential and nature of the digital economy, how can it be harnessed to further diversify the economies of Central Africa?

- What contributions has your organization or institution made to the promotion of the digital economy in Africa, and more particularly in Central Africa? What are the constraints? What could be done to curb them and accelerate progress on the whole, and in more specific sectors such as agriculture, services, manufacturing, computer services, transport, access to basic services, electric cars, etc.