

**COMESA 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Forum**  
**ACBF Opening Remarks, delivered by**  
**Prof Sylvain Boko, Director of Programs and**  
**Regional Director for West and Central Africa**  
**12/9/2022**

Honorable Minister of Trade and Industry, Arab Republic of Egypt  
Distinguished Representatives of Member States  
Madam Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General, COMESA  
Representatives of Development Partners  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
All Protocol Observed

Good morning,

It is with profound gratitude that I make these remarks on behalf of Mr Mamadou Biteye, Executive Secretary of the African Capacity Building Foundation, who, due to conflicting engagements, could not be present at this important gathering. He however conveys his very best wishes to COMESA for a very successful event.

Since its creation, the African Capacity Building Foundation has been a champion for knowledge creation and dissemination in Africa, and this has been demonstrated particularly through its collaboration and partnership with COMESA.

Indeed, in the early 2000s, ACBF provided capacity support to the COMESA Research unit, at the time, to improve the dissemination of knowledge for the Secretariat and COMESA member states on pertinent trade related issues. It is therefore with great joy that ACBF has accepted the kind invitation from the Secretariat to join you today to witness COMESA deliver its ninth Annual Research Forum.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

The COMESA Annual Research Forum has become an important event on the continent's global development calendar not only because it presents an opportunity to share knowledge on emerging issues in regional integration, but also it presents an opportunity to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to lead debates and discussions.

2022 has certainly been a pivotal year for Africa for a number of reasons. With the apparent ebbing of the Covid19 pandemic, the continent is now facing the challenge of post-Covid recovery, including:

- A financing gap of over \$432 billion (AfDB, 2022)

- Whereas it had been estimated that 43 million people were at the risk of extreme poverty in 2021, new data from the AfDB indicate that the Russia-Ukraine war could add 2.1 million people to this number.
- Supply chain disruptions and rampant inflation
- Severe reduction in access to global ODA funding

Faced with these challenges, Africa will have to look more and more within itself for homegrown solutions. We propose that intensifying intra-Africa trade and Regional Integration are important components of those solutions.

Indeed, the opportunities presented by increasing trade within Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to boost competitiveness and resilience cannot be overestimated. Intra-COMESA trade has grown from US\$1.5 billion in 2000 to US\$ 10.9 billion in 2019 despite non-tariff barriers such as high transport cost, unavailability of market information and low connectivity. And this forum will hopefully help to identify solutions to barriers to intra-African trade so as to build on current opportunities.

### **Distinguished Delegates**

Capacity development has a central role in deepening integration on the continent and paving the way for African states to boost trade with each other and drive economic growth. ACBF believes that strong institutions are the bedrocks of economic transformation on the continent, which is why we have in the last few years provided institutional capacity support and technical advisory services to the COMESA Secretariat to enable it to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of its member states. Even as ACBF designs its new 5-year strategic plan, set to commence in 2023, strengthening capacity for intra-Africa trade continues to place among the top areas of priority.

In addition, we continue to expand our knowledge creation portfolio as a veritable knowledge base for countries and development partners in support of policy-making and implementation in regional and economic integration.

In closing, on behalf of the ACBF Executive Secretary, I wish to once again thank COMESA for this kind invitation, and I look forward to a very fruitful engagement at this 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Forum.

Thank you.