# CONCEPT NOTE

## CoSPAL 4TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**THEME:** ***"Enhancing Intra-African Trade and Investment through Legislative Leadership and Parliamentary Cooperation"***

### BACKGROUND

Africa's growing economic momentum presents a historic opportunity for the continent to reposition itself within the global economic architecture. Central to this opportunity is the deepening of trade and investment among African countries, which is critical to accelerating industrialisation, creating employment and expanding economic opportunities. Continental and regional frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Regional Economic Communities and the vision of Agenda 2063, provide an important foundation for a more integrated African market, one in which goods, services, capital and persons can move more freely and regional value chains can be strengthened.[1]

Investment is equally central to translating Africa's ambitions into sustained economic transformation. Larger markets will deliver lasting benefits only if Africa is able to mobilise and retain investment in productive sectors, infrastructure, manufacturing, digital economies and regional value chains. This in turn depends on predictable, transparent and coherent national laws, and on the alignment of overlapping continental, regional and national investment instruments,[2] all of which require ratification, domestication and effective oversight by national legislatures.

Despite the considerable promise of intra-African trade and investment, the continent continues to face structural, legislative, regulatory, infrastructural and institutional barriers that hinder the full realisation of its economic potential.[3] Africa accounts for only about three per cent of global trade,[4] and, according to Afreximbank's African

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[1] African Union, 'African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)', https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area; Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (adopted at Kigali, 21 March 2018; entered into force 30 May 2019)

[2] Regional inбestment instruments include the SADC Protocol on Finance and Inбestment (2006, amended 2016), the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on Inбestment (2008) and the COMESA Inбestment Agreement (2007, reбised 2017)

[3] Afredimbank, Regional Integration and Market Access Insights 1/2026 (April 2026), https://research.knowledge.afredimbank.com/digital-content/regional-integration-and-market-access-insights-1-2026-april-2026, identifying persistent bottlenecks in logistics, trade facilitation and financing.

[4] African Edport-Import Bank (Afredimbank), African Trade Report 2026: Leбeraging Geopolitics for Trade and Industrialisation in Global Africa, https://research.knowledge.afredimbank.com/digital-content/african-trade-report-2026-leбeraging-geopolitics-trade-and-industrialisation-global

Trade Report 2025, intra-African trade represents just *14.4 per cent of the continent's formal trade*,[5] compared with approximately *68 per cent in Europe and 59 per cent in Asia*.[6] This is due in part to fragmented policies, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, weak implementation mechanisms and limited harmonisation of trade-related legislation among African states.

In this regard, African legislatures occupy a uniquely strategic position. As institutions responsible for law-making, representation, oversight, treaty ratification, appropriation and policy accountability, parliaments play a critical role in creating the enabling legal and institutional environment in which continental trade and investment can thrive. For democracy and development to flourish on the continent, this must be a strategic priority for the Presiding Officers of African parliaments.

The 4th CoSPAL General Assembly builds on a series of continental initiatives that have sought to strengthen legislative engagement in Africa's integration and development agenda. In particular, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Afreximbank have convened high-level dialogues and policy forums on trade facilitation, industrialisation, regional value chains and the implementation of integration frameworks. These engagements have consistently underscored the importance of legislative harmonisation, effective oversight and inter-parliamentary cooperation as critical enablers of deeper economic integration and increased intra-African trade.

The Assembly also builds on the outcomes of the 3rd CoSPAL General Assembly, held in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, in December 2025, which culminated in the adoption of the Rabat Declaration on Legislative Leadership and Parliamentary Diplomacy in a Changing Global Order.[7] The Declaration reaffirmed the commitment of African legislative leaders to strengthen legislative leadership, deepen inter-parliamentary cooperation and pursue coordinated legislative action in support of inclusive development and Africa's wider development priorities.

Hosted by the House of Representatives of Liberia, the 4th CoSPAL General Assembly will therefore convene legislative leaders, policymakers, regional institutions, development partners, industry leaders, trade experts and other key stakeholders to deliberate on the legislative imperatives required to unlock the full benefits of intra-African trade and investment and to advance Africa's collective prosperity.

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[5] Afredimbank, African Trade Report 2025: African Trade in a Changing Global Financial Architecture, https://media.afredimbank.com/afredim/African-Trade-Report_2025.pdf

[6] United Nations Conference on Trade and Debelopment (UNCTAD), Economic Debelopment in Africa Report 2019: Made in Africa – Rules of Origin for Enhanced Intra-African Trade, 'Facts & Figures'

[7] Conference of Speakers and Presidents of African Legislatures (CoSPAL), 'The Rabat Declaration on Legislatibe Leadership & Parliamentary Diplomacy in a Changing Global Order', https://cospal-africa.org/resources/the-rabat-declaration-on-legislatibe-leadership-parliamentary-diplomacy-in-a-changing-global-order

**AIM**

The General Assembly aims to strengthen inter-parliamentary collaboration and legislative leadership in advancing intra-African trade, investment and sustainable continental development.

**OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives of the General Assembly are to:

- examine the role of African legislatures in creating an enabling legislative environment for intra-African trade and investment, including the implementation of continental and regional frameworks;
- identify legislative and institutional barriers limiting intra-African trade and investment;
- promote legislative and policy measures that mobilise and facilitate sustainable investment in strategic sectors and regional value chains across Africa;
- facilitate knowledge exchange and peer learning among African legislative leaders; and
- strengthen legislative leadership support for industrialisation, regional value chains and inclusive economic growth.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

At the conclusion of the 4th CoSPAL General Assembly, the following outcomes are expected:

- enhanced understanding by legislative leaders of continental and regional trade and investment priorities;
- increased commitment to the harmonisation of trade-related legislation across African states;
- strengthened collaboration between African legislatures and regional institutions;
- adoption of key resolutions and recommendations in support of intra-African trade; and,
- improved legislative engagement in trade governance and economic integration processes.

For further information, coordination and clarifications, please contact the CoSPAL Secretariat **by email via generalassembly@cospal-africa.org or by telephone via +234 911 444 0144.**