

AFRICAN UNION

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Call for Papers

7th Congress of African Economists

"Investing in Infrastructure for Productive Transformation in Africa".

December 2025

Background and rationale

Africa's infrastructure deficit remains one of the most significant barriers to achieving sustainable economic growth, productive transformation, and regional integration. Given that Africa faces more severe infrastructure gaps compared to other regions, investments in infrastructure offer the potential for the most significant relative gains. The African Development Bank estimates that Africa requires approximately USD 130-170 billion annually to bridge its infrastructure gap, with a financing gap of up to \$108 billion¹. By 2040, the annual infrastructure needs are projected to reach \$240 billion. However, projections based on current investment trends fall short of this target by 39%². Despite progress in some sectors, the continent continues to face substantial gaps in transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure, especially in low – income, landlocked and fragile states, hindering trade, industrialization, and the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Infrastructure development is crucial for Africa to enhance its productive transformation, promote growth, improve trade, create jobs, and increase firm productivity by enabling productive activities and access to goods and services for households and firms.

Real investment needs are expected to increase in the coming years due to heightened vulnerability to climate change and population growth. Climate-resilient infrastructure is becoming an urgent priority to mitigate economic losses and reduce future investment needs. Infrastructure development will achieve better overall outcomes if the environmental and social sustainability impacts are adequately considered³.

Despite the imperative for infrastructure development, there are significant challenges related to financing, planning, and sustainability. Infrastructure projects necessitate substantial upfront investments and long completion periods, often beyond the capacity of private enterprises. From 2016 to 2020, the public sector accounted for 89% of total infrastructure commitments in Africa, with 42% coming from African governments and

¹ African Development Bank. (2018). Africa Economic Outlook. [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African Economic Outlook 2018 - EN.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Economic_Outlook_2018_-_EN.pdf)

² Oxford Economics. (2017). Global Infrastructure Outlook. <https://oeservices.oxfordeconomics.com/publication/open/283970>

³ OECD. (2024), Infrastructure for a Climate-Resilient Future, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a74a45b0-en>.

the rest provided by bilateral and multilateral stakeholders.⁴ There is the need for strategic efforts to address these challenges while pursuing essential infrastructure growth.

Additionally, the urgency of infrastructure for the continent is also a key demand from Africans of their governments and remains a top priority⁵. This urgency is also reflected in Agenda 2063, the African Union's blueprint for inclusive and sustainable development, which envisions infrastructure to "support productive transformation, trade, and integration. Similarly, the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) of the African Union Commission (AUC) emphasizes the need for accelerated infrastructure development, particularly under Strategic Objective 2, which focuses on improving transport connectivity to enhance mobility, reduce trade barriers, and strengthen regional integration⁶.

The 7th Congress of African Economists, organized under the auspices of the African Union (AU) and its partners, will focus on the critical role of infrastructure investment in driving productive transformation, trade and regional integration across the continent. The Congress will bring together policymakers, economists, development practitioners and academics to discuss strategies for mobilizing resources, improving infrastructure quality, and ensuring that investments contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Key themes and topics

Referencing the various African Union Charters, policy instruments and strategies relevant to the sector as well as other documented pronouncements and actions by the African Union, and in line with the theme of the 7th edition of the AU Congress of African Economists, **"Investing in Infrastructure for Productive Transformation in Africa"**, interested parties are hereby called upon to submit, incisive and evidence based articles on the potential and progress made in the following subthemes, as well as innovative recommendations that are being and/or can be undertaken at institutional, country and

⁴ Infrastructure Consortium for Africa Secretariat. (2022). Infrastructure Financing Trends in Africa 2019-2020. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/infrastructure-financing-trends-africa-2019-2020>

⁵ Afrobarometer. (2023). Merged Round 9 (database), <https://www.afrobarometer.org/data/merged-data/>

⁶ African Union Commission (AUC). (2015). Agenda 2063: The Africa we want. African Union. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf
African Union Commission (AUC). (2023). Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) of Agenda 2063 (2021–2030). African Union. <https://www.nepad.org/publication/agenda-2063-second-ten-year-implementation-plan-2024-2033>.

continental level to promote financing of Africa's development agenda. The subthemes are:

- Infrastructure Financing and Investment will focus on strategies to address the triple financial crunch facing African governments, including high debt levels, declining bilateral aid, and limited private sector participation.
- Innovative financing instruments, such as blended finance and local currency financing, and their role in de-risking projects and attracting institutional investors. The theme will also address the challenge of balancing infrastructure investment needs with fiscal constraints and debt management.
- Infrastructure Quality and Sustainability will examine ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure projects through better planning, feasibility studies, and impact assessments.
- Regional Integration and Development Corridors will highlight the importance of cross-border infrastructure, such as regional transport networks, and connective infrastructure, in facilitating intra-African trade and economic integration.
- Capacity Building and Skills Development will address the shortages in managerial, digital, and green skills throughout the infrastructure lifecycle, from project preparation to operations and maintenance. It will also discuss the need to enhance the capacity of governments to design and implement PPPs, including the creation of special purpose vehicles (SPVs) and project development funds (PDFs).
- Urban and Rural Infrastructure Development will focus on the role of cities in driving infrastructure investment and economic growth, with an emphasis on coordinated planning across sectors. Discussions will address the challenge of expanding access to energy, water, and digital infrastructure in underserved rural and peri-urban areas.
- Accelerating Energy Infrastructure Development for Sustainable Growth: This theme will explore the critical role of energy infrastructure, including renewable energy, in meeting Africa's growing energy demands and supporting productive transformation.
- Digital Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth in Africa will focus on the significance of digital infrastructure in driving economic growth, innovation, and inclusive

development. Discussions will address ensuring equitable access to digital infrastructure, innovative investment models, and the role of digital skills and .

Format

The seventh edition of the Congress of African economists will be held physically or virtual. The conference will include: plenary sessions (with experts' speakers), parallel sessions (presentation of original research), discussion panels (with representatives from various fields) or exhibition and poster presentations by researchers and practitioners.

Paper submission guidelines

Applicants are invited to submit full articles of 7,000 to 12,000 words. All manuscripts will be reviewed and evaluated by a Scientific Committee of the African Integration and Development Review based on the clarity of the methodology applied, content, and recommendations/concrete proposals for action.

The full paper must include an abstract of no more than 250 words and must be received by the Commission by **05 September 2025**. The papers should be sent to the African Union Commission through Dr. Patrick Ndzana Olomo, E-mail: Olomop@africa-union.org copying Ms. Rumbidzai Manhando, E-mail: ManhandoR@africa-union.org.

Full paper must be written using Times New Roman (normal style and font size 12) and in MS-Word. Page size should be A4, single column with 2.5 cm margin on both sides with single line spacing. The Harvard style of referencing is used (author's name and date of publication bracketed in the text) and all works cited should be listed alphabetically by the author after the main body of the text. All pages of the manuscript (including Tables and Figures) should be numbered. The cover page should include: Title, Author/s of the article: name, function, and Country to which the author belongs.

Authors are requested to specify the sub-theme that best fits their paper at the time of submission. Applications are open to all researchers, academics, practitioners, consultants, scholars, policy makers and university students at the Master's degree or doctoral studies levels. Young researchers across the continent and from the diaspora are particularly encouraged to apply.

Submission deadlines

Description	Deadline
Call for papers	March 2025
Deadline for paper submissions	05 September 2025
Conference dates	10 th - 12 th November 2025- Libreville, Gabon.

Among the scientific articles received and evaluated, three (3) best articles will be awarded during the Congress of African Economists scheduled from December 2025. The three articles will be published by the African Union Commission in the African Integration and Development Review. Other top pertinent articles retained will be published in the Acts of the Congress.

The costs related to the participation of the three successful authors of the selected papers in the Congress will be covered by the African Union Commission. If an article is authored by a group of people, then the AU Commission will consider the possibility to cover the participation of one author.

For more details, please contact:

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