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## CONCEPT NOTE

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**AU 5<sup>th</sup> Symposium on SEZs**

**And**

**AEZO 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

**November 30<sup>th</sup> – December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**

**“African Special Economic Zones: Engine for Resilience and Accelerator for Sustainable Industrial Value Chains Development”**



## A. BACKGROUND

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African Special Economic Zones are considered as one of the main instruments that stimulate economic reforms, promote quality FDI and accelerate industrialization across the continent.

According to the [African Economic Zones Outlook \(Edition 2021\)](#), more than 200 SEZs are operational in Africa and 73 projects have been announced for completion in the 47 of the 54 countries.

The total area dedicated to the development of SEZs exceeds 146 372 hectares of land, mobilizing more than \$2.6Bn investments dedicated to agro-processing, manufacturing and services.

African policymakers seek to develop SEZs with the aim of attracting investment, creating jobs, boosting manufacturing production, exports of processed goods and much-needed industrial and economic diversification and Regional Value Chains Development. Indirect economic benefits range from upgrading of the local industrial base to being catalysts for innovation, knowledge and technological spillovers as SEZs can plant the seeds for not just the generation of significant direct employment, but also the transfer of knowledge and skills that can ignite enhanced innovation, productivity and economic growth.

Research and empirical evidence suggest that many African SEZs are still far from achieving their objectives even considering the most direct economic gains usually expected, such as increased FDI, exports and jobs (Farole, 2011). Moreover, many African SEZs have remained isolated enclaves, and failing to dynamize the surrounding industrial context. The reasons for such shortcomings frequently relate to the design and implementation of SEZ policies and programs.

It is also a fact that, when dealing with SEZs investment, African countries inevitably interact with foreign investors, this has meant that African governments compete with one another to provide greater incentives to foreign investors, racing to the bottom.

African SEZs are also entitled to promote knowledge transfer, peer to peer learning, and technical cooperation in the design and implementation of sustainable SEZs project.

The unfolding of the fourth industrial revolution, the heightened focus on sustainable development and the new wave of global value chains will require greater adaptability and resilience in developing SEZ project.

In this context, the African Union Commission (AUC)'s Department of Trade and Industry and Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) are joining efforts to organize the **5<sup>th</sup> AU Symposium on SEZs** and the **7<sup>th</sup> edition of the AEZO Annual Meeting** under the theme: ***"African Special Economic Zones: Engine for Resilience and Accelerator for Sustainable Industrial Value Chains Development"***.

This year's edition will pave the way for the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Special Economic Zones scheme in Nigeria, and will gather prominent government officials, ministers, and heads of international organizations.

This event will offer the opportunity to +400 participants to follow the deliberations and interact with eminent experts, academia, policy makers, financial institutions and C-level representatives from Economic Zones and Investment Promotion Agencies.

## **B. AEZO 7<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING AND THE 5<sup>TH</sup> AU SYMPOSIUM**

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The AEZO Annual Meeting and the 5<sup>th</sup> AU Symposium on SEZs will provide guidance on cross cutting issues related to the contribution of SEZs in accelerating sustainable industrial value chain development.

- The impact of circular economy on SEZs development, global trade, and supply chains;
- Deployment of international standards in implementing SEZ projects;
- Value creation in SEZs, building stakeholders resilience;
- SEZs as a catalyst for economic corridors and industrial upgrading;
- Road map to attract quality FDI, industrial upgrading and green energy transition;
- Integration of African SEZs in underlying development features, mobilizing financial resources, deepening continental economic integration, and promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development;
- Role of African SEZs in facilitating regional integration through AfCFTA;
- Major challenges in implementing sustainable industrial policies in Africa;
- General updates on the ongoing process of drafting and implementing AU SEZ Model Law along with the AfCFTA SEZ Regulation
- Innovation driving new policy reform to improve SEZ performance;
- Skillful leveraging on SEZ business models and market forces to support technological transition and sustainable development;
- Involvement of SEZ ecosystem to support green energy transition and establish inclusive and innovative frameworks;
- Prioritizing digital transformation to enhance productive capacities and sustain long-term competitiveness of African SEZs;
- Investment in capacity building and peer to peer learning to encourage expertise transfer and industrial upgrading;
- Understanding African SEZs, and its changing dynamics.

### C. STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE EVENT

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The event will include a high-level opening followed by thematic panel discussions along with industrial & expert outlook. The deliberation will address of the following:

- Introduction to the theme of this year’s edition;
- Presentation of the key findings of African SEZs surveys;
- Raise awareness on impact of the circular economy on SEZs development;
- Discussion on the role of AfCFTA in promoting exports and industrial upgrading in African SEZs;
- High-level conversation with international experts on key trends in promoting sustainable development and moving towards green growth;

The event’s agenda will also include get together event, celebration of 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SEZ scheme in Nigeria, site visit and AEZO general assembly.

### D. HOST COUNTRY PARTNERS

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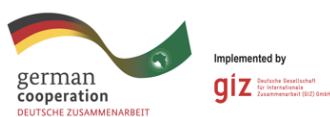
The AEZO 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting will be hosted by the Nigeria Economic Zones Association (NEZA) in collaboration with the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA) and Oil & Gas Free Zone Authority (OGFZA).



### E. PARTNERS

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The event will be organized in collaboration with the following main partners:



## F. PARTICIPATION

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This year's edition will gather more than 400 participants to follow the deliberations and interact with eminent experts, academia, policy makers, financial institutions and C-level representatives from Economic Zones and Investment Promotion Agencies.

To register, please click on the following link: <https://forms.gle/oraytQJLaHtp72Ym7>

## G. DATES AND VENUE

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**Dates:** November 30<sup>th</sup> - December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

**Venue:** International Conference Center (ICC), Abuja – Nigeria.

Abuja is the eighth most populous city of Nigeria and located in the center of the country within the Federal Capital Territory. The fastest-growing city, it boasts newly developed commercial, residential, and tourism products and remains on the cutting edge of infrastructural and technological activities with several plans and policies at various stages.

## H. CONTACT

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## J. ABOUT AFRICA ECONOMIC ZONES ORGANIZATION (AEZO)

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Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) is a continental association representing leading public and private institutions in charge of the development, management and promotion of Economic Zones in Africa.

Founded in November 2015 by Tanger Med Group - Morocco, Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) is striving to support African Economic Zones projects and strengthen relationships within its ecosystem.

Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO) is guided by its strategic orientations to “foster collective knowledge sharing, provide strategic and technical assistance, connect with international business network and promote sustainable economic models and practices”.

AEZO comprehends today 82 members representing 42 countries.

**K. AEZO ANNUAL MEETING EVENT SUMMARY**

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Held annually, AEZO Annual Meeting is the Flagship event of Africa Economic Zones Organization (AEZO), bringing together governmental representatives, international experts and senior executives to offer broad-based insights on critical issues related to the development of Economic Zones in Africa.

Through the get together initiatives, AEZO provides its members a unique opportunity to develop networking, build strong business alliances and access to key international decisions makers.




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**African Union 5<sup>th</sup> Symposium**

**&**

**AEZO 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**



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