



2025

13th Continental Essay Competition

Concept Note

The role of harmonised standards in reducing Technical Barriers to Trade and in promoting fair and just trade within the Intra-African and Global Trade

Introduction

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 13th Continental Essay Competition. This year, we delve into the crucial theme: "The role of harmonized standards in reducing Technical Barriers to Trade and in promoting fair and just trade within Intra-African and Global Trade."

This vital initiative is meticulously coordinated by the ARSO Central Secretariat, working in close collaboration with National Standards Bodies at the national level.

This Concept Note has been prepared to provide you with comprehensive and clear details on how to effectively organize and participate in this significant competition.



Dr Hermogene Nsengimana
SECRETARY GENERAL

12+

Years of the competition

20+

African Countries Represented

902+

Students Participation from the 1st to 12th Continental Essay Competition



Join the 13th  Continental Essay Competition and explore how harmonized standards are building a fairer, more prosperous Africa. Your ideas can make a difference!

Learn more and participate



Organiser Overview

About Us

ARSO is an intergovernmental body, established by the African Union and UNECA in 1977 with the principal mandate to harmonize African Standards and conformity assessment procedures in order to reduce Technical Barriers to Trade and therefore promote intra African and international Trade as well as enhance the industrialization of Africa.

Part of ARSO mandate is to ensure the well-being and safety of the African Community. Thus being an African organization, all the efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure the youth are enlightened and create a culture of quality among the youth is in line with its vision and mission.

Our Secretary General

Dr Hermogene Nsengimana



Theme in Brief

Essay Theme

The role of harmonised standards in reducing Technical Barriers to Trade and in promoting fair and just trade within the Intra-African and Global Trade



Theme in Brief

The core theme is the crucial role of harmonized standards in facilitating fair and just trade across Africa, especially in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). We note that while traditional trade barriers like tariffs have been reduced, new "Technical Barriers to Trade" (TBTs) have emerged. These TBTs, which include varying product standards, regulations, and certification procedures, significantly hinder intra-African trade. By adopting a unified, continent-wide approach to standards, Africa can dismantle these barriers, making it easier for goods to move between countries and boosting economic integration. This is directly tied to the broader African Union 2025 theme of **"Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations,"** as it seeks to create a more equitable and prosperous economic environment for all.

A key point to highlight is the negative impact of diverse regulatory policies and standards across Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The current low volume of intra-African trade, which stands at only 16% compared to other continents, as a direct result of these inconsistencies. Companies, particularly micro small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), face high costs and complexities when trying to navigate different regulations in each country. Harmonizing standards, therefore, is not just a technical fix; it's a strategic imperative to unlock the immense potential of the AfCFTA. Reducing TBTs could double the increase in intra-African trade, far exceeding the gains from tariff reductions alone.

Furthermore, we link the use of harmonized standards to the effective management of value chains. Globally, harmonized standards are recognized as essential tools for companies to participate in complex supply chains. The current "heterogeneity" of standards in Africa makes intra-African value chains costly and contentious. By adopting a coherent regulatory framework, Africa can create a more predictable and efficient trading environment. This enables African enterprises to more easily join regional and global value chains, increasing their competitiveness and driving economic growth. The goal is to move from a fragmented market to a unified one, where economies of scale can be exploited and trade flows increase.

The commitment to standard harmonization is embedded within the AfCFTA agreement itself, underscoring its importance to Africa's integration agenda. We further note the AfCFTA Agreement; TBT Annex under Article 5, SPS Annex under Article 8.1 and Article 6.2 b, c, d and f respectively, calls on the State parties to adopt the harmonised African standards by African Organisation for Standardization (ARSO) and AFSEC that mandate cooperation on standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures. We highlight the role of ARSO in developing and implementing harmonized African standards through the alignment of these provisions, African nations are not just fulfilling a policy requirement; **they are actively working to build a fair and just trading system that empowers African businesses and accelerates economic prosperity across the continent.**

About the Competition



Theme



“The role of harmonised standards in reducing Technical Barriers to Trade and in promoting fair and just trade within the Intra-African and Global Trade”

Winners Categories



- National (Coordinated by **National Standards Bodies - NSBs**),
- Regional (Coordinated by **the ARSO Central Secretariat**) and
- Continental (Coordinated by the **ARSO Central Secretariat**)

National Standards Body Participation



...send out the relevant documents to **Colleges/ Universities**, receiving the essays from the participants, Assessment of the Essays Received, and awarding or recognition of the winners as appropriate to the National Standards Body.

Please confirm the **deadlines for submission of essays your respective National Standards Body**.

We the Organisers are



Inviting students (**Refer to the Terms and Conditions Page**) in institutions of Higher Learning in Africa (Colleges/ Universities) to submit their essays on the theme: “The role of harmonised standards in reducing Technical Barriers to Trade and in promoting fair and just trade within the Intra-African and Global Trade” to their National Standards Bodies email addresses posted on NSB Websites and Social Media Pages.

Submission to the Continental Level



Minimum of **25 participants*** should be registered and evaluated by participating National Standards Bodies in order for Countries to be considered for the Regional | Continental Competition.

The Country Reports Submission Deadline for Submission of **Top Five Winners** by NSBs is **Friday 17th April 2026** through the following email - arso@arso-oran.org



What are the Organisers looking for



① Introduction

We are looking for an introduction that goes beyond simply stating the topic; including **clear, concise, and compelling opening statement** and demonstrate a deep understanding of the theme's significance

② Problems Towards the Theme: A Detailed and Evidence-Based Analysis

Comprehensive grasp of the challenges. We are looking for **a grounded analysis, supported by data and specific examples**, not just general statements; can you identify the root causes of the problem and understand its multifaceted nature

③ Solutions and Policy Framework: A Strategic and Action-Oriented Proposal

We would like to read a clear path forward; **outlining concrete, actionable solutions and demonstrate an understanding of the existing institutional framework.**

④ Conclusion: A Forward-Looking and Impact-Driven Summary

Provide **a precise, powerful and inspiring final personal statement**, reinforcing the importance of the theme and its potential for transformational change.

Basic Essay Requirements *

- Length of essays : Essays should be between **1000 and 1200 words**
- Presentation: **Essays should be double spaced and presented in Century Gothic, size 12**
- Language of essays: Essays must be submitted in **English or French**
- Information on the author: Authors may use up to 50 words to describe themselves. Information should include their names, course and year of study, name, town and country in which their university is located. N/B: this will not be part of the 1000- 1200 words
- Contacts of authors: **Authors should provide us with their postal, physical, telephone and email addresses** on the first page of the essay together with the title of the essay and information on the author.
- Kindly attach a copy of the **Identity Card or Passport** and a completely filled Registration Form (ARSO/CACO/EC/Form 1/2025)

Terms & Conditions



Read the
Concept Note



Research and
Analyse
Information



Draft the
Essay for
Submission



Fill the Registration
form & Submit it
together with the
Essay to the **NSB**

Eligibility to Participate

Open to Citizens of all African Countries Only **below the age of 35 years living in Africa and studying in a university/college recognised by the local commission for university education** or equivalent body in their countries

Selection of Winners in Regions

The selection of winners at regional level will be done according to the **UNECA clustering of African states** as follows: Central Africa, Eastern Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa please refer to www.uneca.org

Announcement & Selection of Winners

Winners will be selected through a **fair and impartial selection process by the organizer**. The decision of the judges shall be final, on the awarding procedures and process.

Continental Winners

Continental winners will be announced during the Africa Standards Day Celebration held yearly during the **32nd ARSO General Assembly Events in Kampala, Uganda — June or July 2026**

Continental Winner Prices



1st Continental Winner

\$1,000

- ✓ Economy Class Return Air Ticket and Accomodation to the General Assembly in Uganda in June | July 2026
- ✓ Recognition and Awarding During the General Assembly
- ✓ Publishing of the Essay on the ARSO Website



2nd Continental Winner

\$800

- ✓ Recognition and Awarding During the General Assembly
- ✓ Publishing of the Essay on the ARSO Website



3rd Continental Winner

\$500

- ✓ Recognition and Awarding During the General Assembly
- ✓ Publishing of the Essay on the ARSO Website

Copyright and Eligibility

1 Copyright Statement

Please note that by entering the competition, you have assigned copyright of your essay to the organizers of this event who may publish it in whole or in part on their respective websites, websites of national standards bodies, a wide range of publications for circulation both inside and outside Africa.

Ensure that your essay is **eligible** by ensuring the Essay Submitted has **never been published in any form or shown or accepted for other competitions.**

Note that Participants are only allowed to submit one essay.

2 Plagiarism Note **

Please note that **AI Generated Essays upon review on the AI Checker will be in admissible and will be automatically disqualified if the Score is more than 20% as per the AI Plagiarism Checker Software.**

** Kindly note that you shall sign the Disclaimer Notice as you Registration Form for the Essay.





African Organisation for
Standardisation

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Social Media



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<https://www.linkedin.com/company/african-organisation-for-standardisation>



<https://www.facebook.com/AfricanOrganisationforStandardisation>