

GOMUN 2026 OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

Study Guide

African Union

Dorota Cejpek, Diana Ides

Released October 2026, 1st Edition

COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

The African Union (AU) is a continental union of 55 Member States located on the continent of Africa, with its headquarters located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The intention of the AU was to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). It was established in 2002 to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), with the aim of creating greater cooperation and integration between African countries. The AU seeks to promote peace, security and stability across the continent, while also supporting economic and social development, protecting human rights and strengthening Africa's position in global affairs. It provides a platform for member states to work together on shared challenges and coordinate their policies and interests.

The most important decisions of the AU are made by the Assembly of the African Union, a semi-annual meeting of the heads of state and government of its Member States. Economically, the AU aims to increase regional integration by encouraging trade and reducing barriers between African countries, particularly through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Overall, the purpose of the AU is to encourage African countries to work collectively towards greater political stability, economic growth and sustainable development, while allowing individual states to maintain their sovereignty.

First Topic: Discussing the impact of building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Dorota Cejpek

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a $5 billion hydroelectric project on the Blue Nile, is one of the most contentious geopolitical flashpoints in modern Africa. It was completed in early 2026 and it represents a monumental leap for Ethiopia, promising to lift millions out of energy poverty and transform the nation into a regional power exporter.

However, the project poses an existential challenge downstream. Egypt, which relies on the Nile for over 90% of its freshwater, fears severe water scarcity and threats to its food security. Sudan occupies a complex middle ground, balancing the benefits of flood control against risks to its own infrastructure. With a binding legal agreement still elusive and renewed U.S. mediation efforts in 2026 sparking fresh debate, the GERD remains a critical case study in hydropolitics.

KEY TERMS

Hydropolitics – The study of how water access and water resources intersect with political power, conflict, and interstate cooperation.

Abd al-Fattáh as-Sísí – Egyptian President Abdel al-Fattáh as-Sísí treats the GERD as an existential threat to his nation´s freshwater security. His administration is characterized by a strategy of aggressive internationalization, deliberately elevating the water dispute to the UN SC. By calling on the United States and the wider international community to intervene, he actively works to counter what he describes as Ethiopia's “erratic and irresponsible approach” to unilateral river management.

Riparian states – Riparian states are countries or political entities whose territory is bounded by shared watercourse, such as an international river, lake, and other water bodies.

The Horn of Africa (HOA) – Also known as the Somali Peninsula, is a large peninsula and geopolitical region located in the easternmost part of mainland Africa. It includes four core countries: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

White Nile – One of the two primary tributaries of the Nile River that serves as a critical geopolitical and hydrological counterweight to the project. Independent alternative source.

Blue Nile – The primary hydrological artery and the absolute epicenter of the conflict. The very river being harnessed and regulated by the project.

OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), constructed on the Blue Nile in the Benishangul-Gumuz region of Ethiopia, stands as Africa's largest hydroelectric facility. Funded entirely through domestic resources to bypass international financing blocks, the $5 billion mega-dam spans 1.8 kilometers wide and 145 meters high. The project is engineered to generate over 5,000 megawatts of electricity, effectively doubling Ethiopia´s national power output to alleviate energy poverty for more than half of its population. However, because the Blue Nile supplies approximately 80% to 85% of the total water volume reaching the main Nile trunk, the dam´s operation has triggered a severe, decade-long standoff between Ethiopia and downstream nations.

The core legal and diplomatic conflict stems from competing national positions and historical frameworks of international water law. Egypt views the GERD as an existential threat to its national security, agriculture, and drinking supply. Cairo relies on the Nile for nearly 97% of its total fresh water needs. Conversely, Ethiopia asserts its sovereign right to utilize its natural resources for economic development and firmly rejects colonial-era treaties - specifically the 1929 and 1959 agreements, which allocated virtually all Nile water to downstream states while entirely excluding upper riparian nations.

Sudan occupies a middle ground between the two primary antagonists. On one hand, Khartoum acknowledges clear domestic benefits, including permanent flood mitigation and reduced siltation which extends the operational lifespan of its own infrastructure. On the other hand, because its primary Roseires Dam sits a mere 115 kilometers downstream from the GERD, Sudan fears that uncoordinated water releases or unexpected upstream management could catastrophically overwhelm its domestic river systems. Therefore, Sudan´s primary demand remains the establishment of a mandatory operational data-sharing mechanism to guarantee regional water safety.

TIMELINE OF THE TOPIC

1929 – The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty - the root of the GERD dispute because it established the highly unequal Nile water rights that both nations clash over today.

1959 – The Nile Waters Agreement.

1999 – Nile Basin Initiative (NBI).

2011 – During the Arab Spring, Ethiopia publicly announced plans to build the "Millennium Dam" (later renamed the GERD).

2011 – Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi laid the foundation stone and launched the $4.8 billion project.

2013 – Ethiopian engineers successfully diverted the flow of the Blue Nile to allow for the main body construction.

2015 – Agreement on Declaration of Principles.

2020 – Ethiopia completed the first phase of filling the reservoir.

2022 – Power Generation Begins.

2023 – Ethiopia announced the successful completion of its fourth filling.

2024 – CFA officially entered into force, stripping away historical colonial veto powers and legally reinforcing Ethiopia´s right to utilize the river.

2024 – Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced that the civil construction was 100% complete.

2025 – Formal Inauguration.

PAST ACTIONS

1959 Nile Waters Agreement – Called for the unimpeded flow of Nile waters, but only included Egypt and Sudan in its negotiations and ratification.

Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) – Says that each Nile state is, “entitled to a reasonable share in the beneficial uses of water resources of the Nile system.”

Agreement on Declaration of Principles – Signed by Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to manage cooperation and ease tension regarding the GERD on the Blue Nile.

Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) – All riparian states formed a partnership to foster equitable water utilization, laying the groundwork for upstream countries to eventually challenge Egypt's colonial-era "hydrohegemony".

COUNTRY POSITIONS

The United States of America

Since Donald Trump´s first term, the U.S. proposed an agreement that was acceptable to Egypt but not Ethiopia, and President Trump echoed the Egyptian threat of using military force to destroy the dam.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Maintains that the GERD is a non-negotiable exercise of national sovereignty and the equitable right to develop its natural resources. It also explicitly rejects colonial-era water treaties that historically favored downstream nations.

Arab Republic of Egypt

Egypt, which relies on the Nile as its primary fresh water source, sees the GERD operating at the discretion of Ethiopian authorities as an existential threat to its population.

Republic of the Sudan

Maintains a shifting position on the GERD and balances the benefits of flood regulation and cheap electricity against the risks of uncoordinated upstream water releases.

Federal Republic of Somalia

The Somali government publicly supports Ethiopia´s right to development via the GERD and has repeatedly offered to act as a neutral mediator to ease regional tensions.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION SHOULD ANSWER

- How will Ethiopia modify water releases from the GERD reservoir to support downstream nations during multi-year droughts?
- What mechanisms will be put in place for mandatory sharing of daily operational data?

- What independent body or international tribunal will resolve future disputes when the nations disagree on water allocations:

- How will this agreement impact Ethiopia´s right to build additional dams or projects on the Blue Nile in the future?

- How will the electricity generated by the GERD be integrated into the Sudanese and Egyptian power grids to provide economic benefits to downstream nations?

CONCLUSION

While Ethiopia successfully completed the mega-dam to drive industrialization, downstream nations view the lack of a binding treaty as a permanent threat to their freshwater stability. Egypt´s internationalization strategy and Sudan´s security concerns highlight deep regional anxieties over uncoordinated water management. Ultimately, long-term stability depends on transitioning from diplomatic friction to a mutually accepted framework for data sharing and drought protocols.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / REFERENCES

1. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is designed to trap 100 years of sediment inflowEthiopia - Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)
2. Collaborative management of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam increases economic benefits and resilience | Nature Communications
3. The Danger of Renewed U.S. Interest in the GERD | Council on Foreign Relations
4. Development of The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam | Council on Foreign Relations
5. Disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) | Climate-Diplomacy
6. AU Leadership Absent From Egypt and Ethiopia Dam Dispute | Council on Foreign Relations
7. Sisi urges reaching fair, balanced, legal agreement on GERD
8. El sisi's recent rhetoric on GERD – HORN REVIEW
9. Trump comment on 'blowing up' Nile Dam angers Ethiopia

Second Topic: Strengthening Africa through economic cooperation

Diana Ides

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Africa holds about 30% of the world's mineral reserves, however, intra-African trade is only ~15-18% of total world trade, much lower than Europe (~60%) or Asia (~40%). This is largely due to the colonial-era infrastructure built to export raw materials outward, not to connect individual African markets to each other.

The African Union's main response is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA, working since 2019, trading since 2021) and Agenda 2063, with its 50-year development plan was adopted in 2015. The topic has gained urgency due to the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expiring on the 30th of September 2025 without renewal, which pushed African leaders to argue the continent must rely on itself instead of external trade preferences.

KEY TERMS.

AfCFTA – Continental free trade agreement that has been in force since 2019 and trading since 2021. 53 out of 54 AU states have signed (all but Eritrea).

Agenda 2063 – The AU's 50-year development blueprint ("The Africa We Want") which was adopted in 2015.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – pre-existing regional blocs such as ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, or COMESA, that AfCFTA has to work around, since many countries belong to several blocs at once.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) – Barriers such as customs delays, inconsistent standards, or corruption. They are seen as a bigger obstacle to trade in Africa than tariffs.

Rules of Origin – Rules that decide whether a product counts as "African-made" for tariff-free treatment, however it is still unresolved for textiles, clothing, and cars.

Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) – Launched in 2022. The system lets businesses pay in local currencies rather than touring though the more used currencies like US dollar or euro.

Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) – The AU's continental infrastructure plan which focuses on connecting African nations by developing transport, energy, ICT, and water.

Beneficiation – When you process raw materials domestically (e.g. refining cobalt) instead of exporting them raw.

African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) – Expired US trade preference program for sub-Saharan Africa (ended in 2025). The loss of AGOA is currently driving momentum for AfCFTA.

OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC

In Africa, there are 54 countries with separate currencies, customs, rules, standards, and infrastructure built to export outward rather than trade with neighbouring countries. The result is that it is often much easier and more convenient for African businesses to trade with partners in Europe or Asia than with a neighbouring country.

The AfCFTA was designed as a structural fix for this trade problem. It follows the roadmap which was first laid out in the 1991 Abuja Treaty. This consisted of starting with a free trade area (removing tariffs between members), then moving to a customs union (a shared external tariff), followed by a common market (free movement of goods, services, capital, and later on people), and finally, a monetary union. The World Bank has estimated that full implementation could put tens of millions of Africans out of poverty and substantially increase intra-African trade, however, that outcome is entirely dependent on how completely the agreement gets implemented, not just the percentage of countries that sign it.

There is a gap between ratification and operational trading. As of 2026, 49 out of the 54 AfFCTA signatories have formally ratified the agreement, but only about 25 have promulgated their tariff schedules and can trade under genuine AfCFTA preferences. A shipment moving between a country that has ratified but not yet announced its schedule and one that has, still cannot move duty-free under the agreement.

AfCFTA also has to operate alongside the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and COMESA, which already run their own customs unions and free trade arrangements. Due to this, businesses and customs officials have to navigate multiple, and sometimes conflicting, sets of rules depending on which agreement applies to a given shipment.

The US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which had given duty-free access to the US market for most sub-Saharan Africa since 2000, expired on September 30th 2025 without renewal. Combined with new US tariffs affecting African exporters, this removed a major external trade preference that many African economies relied on. In response, African leaders have pushed to accelerate AfCFTA implementation and expand tools like that Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), reducing the continent's dependence on any single external market or currency.

TIMELINE OF THE TOPIC

1963 – Organization of African Unity (OAU) founded.

1980 – Lagos Plan of Action, a self-reliant industrialization push largely failed due to no funding or enforcement.

1991 – Abuja Treaty established the African Economic Community.

2001 – NEPAD (African Union Development Agency) adopted.

2002 – The AU replaced the OAU.

2015 – Agenda 2063 was formally adopted.

2018 – AfCFTA Agreement was adopted in Kigali.

2019 – AfCFTA was entered into force.

2021 – Trading formally began under AfCFTA.

2022 – PAPSS was launched.

September 2025 – The AGOA expired.

2026 – Approximately 25 out of 54 states operationally trading under AfCFTA.

PAST ACTIONS

Lagos Plan of Action (1980) – First self-reliance push which failed from lack of funding and political will.

Abuja Treaty (1991) – Legal blueprint for staged economic union that the AfCFTA is built on.

NEPAD (2001) – African-designed development planning and governance peer review.

REC-level integration – ECOWAS, EAC, SADC, COMESA already run their own free trade or customs agreements.

AfCFTA launch (2018-2021) – The signing to trade took nearly 3 years.

Response to AGOA's expiration (2025) – African leaders pushed for a US extension while simultaneously pivoting toward AfCFTA/PAPSS as long-term alternatives.

COUNTRY POSITIONS

Nigeria

Has the largest economy and ratified the AfCFTA late (2020) after initially closing their borders to protect domestic industry in 2019. Supports integration but wants safeguards for local producers.

South Africa

Most industrialized economy and strong AfCFTA backer, but is wary the AfCFTA could let cheap, non-African (esp. Chinese) goods enter tariff-free through weaker-regulated states, and therefore pushes for strict rules of origin.

Kenya

Is a vocal AfCFTA supporter and Guided Trade Initiative pilot. Positions itself as East Africa's trade/finetech hub, pushes for faster services and digital trade rules.

Ghana

Hosts the AfCFTA secretariat in Accra and is one of the strongest diplomatic voices for fast, full implementation.

Rwanda

Small market, business-reform model, constantly pushes for deeper and faster integration since it has less to protect domestically.

DRC

Resource-rich (cobalt, critical minerals) but is conflict-affected and wants regional value chains and beneficiation rather than raw ore exports.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION SHOULD ANSWER

- How can the AU turn AfCFTA ratification into actual operational trading for all signatories?
- How should non-tariff barriers (customs delays, inconsistent standards, corruption) be reduced?
- How can AfCFTA help African economies diversify from raw exports towards manufacturing?
- How should the AU respond collectively to losing external preferences like the AGOA?
- How can PAPSS be scaled to reduce reliance on foreign currencies for African trade?
- What protections should extend to informal cross-border traders (often women)?

CONCLUSION

Economic cooperation is central to the AU's founding purpose, but history shows a consistent gap between ambition and actual implementation. From the failed Lagos Plan of Action to the AfCFTA's own current state, where close to universal ratification does not yet mean real trade for most member states. The debate in this committee should focus on at what speed Africa should integrate economically as well as how to spread out the benefits equally instead of favoring the biggest economies. Resolutions should focus on proposing ways to make the AfCFTA function both in theory and in practice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / REFERENCES

1. African Union: Home
2. African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Legal Texts and ...
3. The African Continental Free Trade Area - World Bank Documents
4. How Africa can shape its trade future beyond AGOA
5. Pan-African Payment and Settlement System
6. Economic Development in Africa Report 2024 | UN Trade and ...

7. Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, April 2026
8. African Economic Outlook 2026 - African Development Bank Group
9. African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank)
10. Africa Programme | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank
11. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, UNECA

This is the end of the document.