



Concept Note

And

Call for Papers

SWAZILAND ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2017

Economic Recovery and Sustainable Growth in Swaziland

Mbabane, Swaziland, October 25 – 27, 2017

The Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SEPARC) in collaboration with the Central Bank of Swaziland (CBS) and the University of Swaziland will host an economic conference in Mbabane on October 25 – 27, 2017. The Conference will serve as a platform to enhance the national development dialogue on the path to economic recovery and growth in Swaziland and will highlight implementation challenges and how to address them. It will bring together academics, policymakers, the private sector, development partners, and other development practitioners. The Conference will be held in the wake of the country's 50 years of independence, and will focus on efforts made towards economic recovery and sustainable growth in Swaziland. The conference is set to anchor the development agenda and further refine the building blocks for an implementation framework for the country's National Development Strategy. Furthermore, the insights and analyses presented in the Conference will provide important analytical milestones for Vision 2022 deliberations, as the country enters the remaining 5 years of its implementation.

I. Introduction

The theme for the 2017 Swaziland Economic Conference (SEC) is “Turning the Key: Path to Economic Recovery and Sustainable Growth in Swaziland”. It derives from the undisputable fact that economic recovery and sustainable growth are key to the country’s ability to eradicate poverty, overcome hunger and chronic food insecurity, create decent jobs, and attain the ‘First World Status’ alluded to in the Kingdom’s “Development Unusual” policy document.

Despite large scale investments into pro-poor infrastructural projects and numerous economic strategies geared towards reducing poverty including the poverty reduction strategy and action plan, poverty levels remain very high in Swaziland. Out of about 1.1 million¹ people, 63% were poor in 2010 while approximately 89% of all rural households were living in abject poverty during the same period. The Swaziland Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2010 indicates that one in two people in rural areas were also food poor. Studies have also shown that few rural households produce food production², although rural areas are home to about 75% of the population of Swaziland.

Unemployment in Swaziland is high, estimated at 28.1% using the official definition, but is about 41.7% when another common definition is used³. Unemployment affected 51.6% of all young people aged between 15 – 34 years in 2014⁴. Economic growth is proving very elusive. The Government of Swaziland reports that growth decreased from an average of about 3.1% between 1990 and 2000 to about 2.1% between 2001 and 2010. In 2016, the economy is expected to contract by 0.6%. This is far lower than the 5%⁵ required to jump-start economic recovery, create jobs, and eradicate poverty.

A question of general policy interest for the Conference is: How can Swaziland eradicate poverty and hunger, and jump-start its economic recovery? A credible answer could be through the improvement of the country’s agricultural productivity, improved market access for smallholder farmers; creation of off-farm employment opportunities in the rural areas, expansion of local production of goods and services, increasing exports; strengthening service delivery, and providing an enabling environment for businesses to thrive and create jobs. Swaziland has a number of potential opportunities in all the above areas and it is difficult to explain why its recovery has remained elusive. As a precondition to jump-starting economic recovery, Swaziland needs to better manage the economy to increase investor confidence, improve ease of doing business, and attract foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country⁶.

II. Strategy for Swaziland’s Development

In order for Swaziland to achieve its goal of making poverty and hunger a thing of the past and noting the free-enterprise nature of the Swazi economy; the country needs to assess its economic performance and acquire a good understanding of the opportunities and challenges that exist, and how they can be addressed. This is necessary as a means of triggering the economic recovery that the country needs as it enters the last five years of the NDS.

¹ See CSO (2007)

² See for instance Manyatsi *et al.* (2013).

³ The relaxed definition describes persons who are without work and available for work but are not seeking work (ILFS, 2014).

⁴ See the Integrated Labour Force Survey (2014)

⁵ See World Bank (2015)

⁶ See Strategy for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth (2014)

The revised draft National Development Strategy (NDS) is the over-arching framework that provides a platform for the conduct, and attainment, of sustainable development in Swaziland. It focuses on stimulating inclusive sustainable growth and prosperity in the medium to long term, through promoting investments into agriculture and mining, rural development, finance, manufacturing, services, and tourism and hospitality. Other areas of macroeconomic strategic importance include improving the efficiency of financial, and monetary, institutions; establishing science, technology, and innovation (STI) driven industries; improving economic competitiveness; strengthening the quality of education, and encouraging good governance (constitutionalism, legitimacy, accountability, transparency, participation, rule of law, and predictability) and sound economic management. The Conference will probe the extent to which the thrust of the NDS is yielding results, and the extent to which the priorities of the country, such as poverty reduction have been met.

III. Objectives of the Conference

The 2017 Swaziland Economic Conference will bring together economic policy-makers, researchers, development practitioners, captains of industry, and development partners to dialogue on economic policy issues in Swaziland. In addition, the conference will provide a platform to discuss successes, lessons learnt, and identify remaining gaps on a variety of issues, including the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (PRSAP); deregulating the insurance industry; transitioning from Customs and Excise to a revenue authority; the relevance of agricultural marketing boards; developing and sharing economic datasets, and public health policy issues. The specific objectives of the Conference are as follows:

- Promote policy dialogue and evidence based policy planning and implementation;
- Provide an environment to foster dialogue and the free exchange of ideas and innovative thinking amongst local researchers, policy-makers, captains of industry, development partners and the broader Swazi community.
- Stimulate and increase research on economic and policy issues related to the development of the Kingdom of Swaziland;
- Provide an opportunity for young Swazi researchers, postgraduate students, and Swazi's in the Diaspora, to disseminate their research findings as well as share information with local policymakers and the broader Swazi society on the work they do about the country.

IV. Format of the Conference

The conference will be jointly organised by the Swaziland Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre, the Central Bank of Swaziland, and the University of Swaziland and will be held on 24 – 26 October, 2017, in Swaziland. Key discussions topics will focus on the broad theme of the Conference which is “Economic Recovery and Sustainable Growth in Swaziland” and will enable rich deliberations and scholarship on a broad range of economic issues in Swaziland. Furthermore, the 2017 SEC will provide valuable insights for improved policy making in Swaziland.

The two-and-a-half-day Conference will provide a number of plenary sessions on the themes listed in Table 1 below. These will feature presentations and discussions by prominent local academics, policymakers, the private sector, opinion leaders, government officials, and representatives from the country's development partners. Breakout sessions will be used for

more in-depth discussions and technical analyses of prominent topics related to the thematic focus of the Conference.

Table 1: Key Themes for Discussions at the Swaziland Economic Conference 2017

Themes	Sub-themes/discussion
1. Accelerating rural transformation	Increasing agricultural productivity, science and technology policy, information communications technology, innovation, assets, access to finance for women and youth, eliminating slums, access to land, and financial inclusion;
2. Strengthening the financial sector	Financial markets, market regulation, and achieving economic prosperity;
3. Promoting inclusive growth and development	Through agro-allied industrialisation; infrastructure and human capital development, sound macro-economic management, research and development, investment, and institutions
4. Fostering inclusiveness and reducing poverty	Impact of government's strategies for social service delivery, including rural infrastructure.
5. Mitigating weather-related risks and building resilience	Environment, droughts, climate change, and rural agriculture risk insurance.
6. Structural and macroeconomic reforms	Deregulating the insurance industry; transitioning from Customs and Excise to a revenue authority; The relevance of agricultural Marketing Boards; Developing and sharing economic datasets.

V. Submission guidelines and Timeframe

Papers are invited on the topics outlined above and others falling within the scope of the conference. To submit papers, author/s must follow the following instructions:

- Abstract of not more than 300 words should be submitted as soon as possible.
- Submit the abstract by emailing the Conference Secretariat at info@separc.co.za.
- Papers should use:
 - Font - Times New Roman, 1.5 spacing
 - Font size – 12
 - Not more than 6 200 words (excluding references).
 - Use the Harvard Referencing Style to cite information sources.

Contributors and experts submitting papers for the Conference must observe the key deadline dates stated below:

VI. Annotation Deadline Date

- Deadline for submission of Abstracts - March 18, 2017

- Notification of Abstract acceptance - April 18, 2017
- Deadline for submission of full papers - June 30, 2017
- Notification of final acceptance - August 30, 2017
- Conference dates - **October 24 – 25, 2017**

Priority will be given to the submission of full papers. We also encourage the submission of policy oriented papers with strong empirical work.

VII. Outputs

The expected outputs from the 2017 SEC include:

- A Conference Report summarising key findings as well as important policy recommendations extracted from conference papers and keynote speeches;
- Conference proceedings in the form of a special issue focusing on innovative articles of policy and operational relevance as well as an inaugural issue of the Swaziland Journal of Economics and Development Review (SJEDR) that will publish a selection of relevant papers with a strong empirical basis.