

“In this key forum, businesses are asked to guide governments on how to work together to boost intra-African trade by increasing businesses, cross border trade and creating maximum returns of investment for regional and international players in our markets,” said Mr Mathews Chikhankeni, Chairperson of the COMESA Business Council at the opening of the COMESA Business Council meeting on 19 November 2012 in Kampala, Uganda.

Under the management of COMESA Business Council, the Business Forum has evolved into an open door for potential investors and traders to explore COMESA markets and also to meet various high level policy makers from the region. It also addresses the challenges that businesses and the private sector face within and across borders in the COMESA region.

COMESA is working hand in hand with governments and the private sector to ensure that informal trade is revitalised, formalised, upgraded and standardised for quality products and eventually linked to markets.

Through the Business Forum, it is hoped that this year businesses will provide practicable solutions to the constant challenges of importing products, valuing and actually produce within the COMESA region and Africa.

COMESA has set up various regional facilitation mechanisms such as the Regional Virtual Trade Facilitation Mechanism, the Regional Payment and Settlement System and also set up key institutions such as the COMESA Business Council to support advocacy, capacity building, business and market linkages within COMESA and across Africa.

Mr Chikankeni urged delegates to own and utilise these systems in order for them to fulfil their objectives.

“I therefore implore the business community to extensively discuss how they can support small and medium enterprises in this region, boost intra-COMESA trade and create an overall competitive environment to do business,” he added.

In conclusion, Mr Chikankeni implored the meeting to ensure that the recommendations presented to the 16th Heads of State Summit carry forward a unified voice of business on improving COMESA as a region and promoting the regional integration agenda with complete ownership and commitment to the private sector.