

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA – The COMESA Innovation Council will be launched on Monday, 08 April 2013, in Kampala, Uganda at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology Headquarters.

His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the President of the Republic of Uganda and the Chairperson of the COMESA Authority, will launch the Council, comprising of eight eminent persons from the Member States.

To reach the high targets for intra-trade volumes in the region by the Authority, COMESA is focusing on an aggressive programme to foster the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). It is envisaged that SMEs will serve as the vehicle for harnessing existing technologies and using them to enhance industrial production and commerce. These SMEs need technology in order to achieve the high potential for growth in the region.

The COMESA Committee of Ministers of Science and Technology recommended the creation of an Innovation Council made up of eminent experts to advise on science and technology; and at their 2012 Summit in Kampala, COMESA Heads of State approved the creation of the expert advisory body.

The creation of the Innovation Council represents a landmark in Africa's institutional history because it is the first major political recognition of the critical role that technological innovation can play in enhancing Africa's global competitiveness.

According to Prof. Juma Calestous, Professor at the Harvard Kennedy School, it is critical that the advisory council is made up of African experts; a break from the past when such advisory functions would normally be performed by consultants or experts from international agencies.

The timing of the creation of the council is particularly strategic given Africa's potential for transforming itself and the world market through emerging technologies.

For example, Africa used mobile phones to create a radically new way of transferring money, thereby restructuring the banking sector. Mobile technology is on the verge of transforming other traditional industries including education and health. In education, Africa can leapfrog into digital books and mobile learning to become a leading source of new educational businesses and industries. In healthcare, mobile technology will transform the very idea of a hospital. Much of healthcare will shift to homes that will in future be redesigned to function as extensions of

hospitals. Similarly, new businesses and industries will grow out of it.

Even in traditional areas such as agriculture, new technologies will make it possible for Africa to meet its future needs with reduced input. Advances in fields such as polymer research already provide new ways to encapsulate fertilizers and pesticides so they are released slowly. This will not only cut down the cost of inputs but will also reduce the adverse environmental impacts of agriculture.

To take advantage of these new opportunities African countries need to strengthen their technical capacity, especially in the [engineering](#) fields.

In addition to creating the advisory council, COMESA is setting up an Innovation Fund, promoting efforts to harmonize intellectual property rights, and continued [infrastructure](#) development to facilitate regional trade.

As COMESA's Chairperson, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, told his counterparts at the Kampala meeting, Africa's future lies in economic and political integration. It is instructive that these forces are the ones that are shaping Africa's science and technology agenda as well as the interests of individual researchers and institutions.

The Members of the Innovation Council are:

1. Dr Dhanjay Jhurry (Mauritius)
2. Dr Jonathan M. Tambatamba (Zambia)
3. Prof. Aggrey Ambali (Malawi)
4. Prof. Lydia Makhubu (Swaziland)
5. Prof. Marie Claire Yandju (DRC)
6. Prof. Meoli Kashorda (Kenya)
7. Prof. Silas Lwakabamba (Rwanda)
8. Prof. Venasius Baryamureeba (Uganda)

The Council will be inaugurated by the Bureau of Ministers responsible for Science, Technology and Innovation in the region; in order for them to get orientation on their terms of reference.

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