



**PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**COMESA, in Partnership with ITC, Spearheads SMEs' Participation in the AfCFTA Through Market Analysis Capacity Building**

**Lusaka, Zambia, Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2022**.....COMESA Business Council (CBC) in partnership with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry has set the tone for implementation of one of the five operational instruments of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) through embarking on training of over three hundred (300) export-ready Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Business Support Institutions, over the next few months, on market analysis using the African Trade Observatory in Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia and Egypt. This capacity building initiative is supported under the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) funded by 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund.

The African Trade Observatory (ATO) dashboard is an integrated digital platform critical for helping businesses identify and compare emerging opportunities across the continent by providing integrated and reliable trade intelligence on trends and market access conditions. With Africa positioning itself for the start of commercially meaningful trade under the AfCFTA, the ATO is now ever more so pertinent.

Speaking on the side-lines of the training, COMESA Director Industry and Agriculture, Ms Providence Mavubi, noted that the training is imperative as it will contribute to unlocking new market opportunities for MSMEs in Zambia.

She added that lack of access to market information limits MSMEs' innovative edge to value add and produce quality goods as they remain unaware of key market requirements and trends.

"This capacity building initiative has come at the right time when we need to reinvigorate our market linkages more so with the ravaging effect that Covid 19 has had on them" she stated.

"Let me assure all MSMEs present today that this training programme will prove to be a game changer in their way of accessing market opportunities locally, regionally, and international and will complement other initiatives that we as COMESA are promoting such as the BIZNET, Sokokuu and 50 million African Woman speak platforms" she said.

And COMESA Business Council Acting Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Dickson Poloji, noted that market access and the availability of relevant and good quality data is critical for business success.

"We receive a lot of enquiries about market access information; the ATO is therefore an important resource that will drive the private sector, especially SMEs, to more actively and competitively participate in the AfCFTA. I implore businesses to take advantage of this unique opportunity to capture value from

the regional market, towards not only recovery from the adverse effects of the pandemic, but also for long-term strategic growth.” he stated.

Meanwhile, Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry Executive Director, Phill Daka, stated that the training of export-ready SMEs on market analysis using the African Trade Observatory is timely as it will help in unlocking SME potential to value add and trade competitively both at national and global markets.

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### **About COMESA Business Council**

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization bringing together a diverse group of businesses and associations in the region from 34 sectors in 21 countries of COMESA. CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector in the region. CBC as the key advocacy driver for business, provides a link between the private sector and organs of the Common market. We seek to improve the competitiveness and deepen the participation of the private sector in regional and global trade, through advocacy, business facilitation and enterprise development. This includes prioritizing and taking specific advocacy strategies to address key business impediments and measures that affect our industries and have a direct bearing on the participation of our businesses in trading in the COMESA region.

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### **Background Information on the Training**

Spanning 54 countries, supporting a market of over one billion people and contributing over US\$3 trillion to global GDP, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents a game-changing opportunity to create a unified continental market and increase regional integration.

According to ITC research, there is an estimated room for intra-African export growth of 22 billion dollars by 2026. Firms need access to relevant and timely trade and market information to take advantage of these emerging opportunities. But, as shown by an ongoing ITC business consultation, one in two respondents are unaware of the AfCFTA and, therefore, of the benefits, it can bring them. Firms continue to lack information on where to find suppliers for their inputs on the continent or build their regional networks of business partners. Bearing this in mind, the African Trade Observatory (ATO) dashboard (<https://ato.africa/en>), an operational instrument of the AfCFTA, was released in July 2019. This online portal aims to empower firms to identify and compare markets for their products and access detailed market information to help them enter new markets.