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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 26th May 2023**

**LAUNCH OF COMESA BUSINESS E-ACADEMY TO PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE REGION’S DIGITAL AND FINANCIAL LITERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION**

COMESA Business Council launched a game-changing e-learning portal in Livingstone, Zambia, on Friday 26th May 2023, where over 50 women-run Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) were awarded certificates for their completion of the three-day training workshop on Digitalization Toolkits for Greater Financial Inclusion that preceded the launch.

The e-Academy, which is an initiative by CBC’s Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) Program, is in response to a study conducted on the state of national and regional payment systems, that found that due to little or no knowledge, informal traders experience great difficulty in carrying out digital transactions that are transparent, affordable, secure, and that provide access to formal working capital. The Academy therefore aims to stimulate the entrepreneurial efficiencies and enterprise competitiveness of MSMEs in the region, towards driving more intra-COMESA trade.

“Today about 400 million adults in Africa, 60% of whom are women, remain financially excluded. Failing to provide financial services to millions of African adults means limiting their opportunities to escape poverty and increasing their vulnerability to economic shocks,” noted Mr. Teddy Soobramanien, CBC’s CEO in his opening remarks at the launch. He went on to expound that it was for this reason that the DFI Program particularly had a keen focus on the empowerment of women and youth in trade, and the customers they transact with at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

In alignment, Her Worship, Ms. Constance Nalishebo Muleabai, Mayor of Livingstone, and the Guest of Honour at the launch, called for the workshop’s participants to take full advantage of the e-Academy and champion the implementation of the knowledge and skills acquired therefrom, to achieve a network effect of more MSMEs taking up digital financial services and participating in cross-border trade. “The information acquired through this platform will demystify the classical norms of operating small-scale businesses, particularly for those who wouldn’t otherwise get equal access to regional markets due to lack of access to knowledge,” she stated.

The e-Academy’s content has been created in a beginner-friendly, compact, and well-structured approach, that will complement the traditional in-person training courses. The modules are designed to provide instructive, professional, and enjoyable learning experiences, focusing on the thematic areas of, among others, financial literacy, e-commerce, business plan development, negotiation, and sales technique skills development.

More modules, which will be tailored to address the knowledge-gaps of various participants of the COMESA Digital Retail Payments Platform, are on course to be developed.

***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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