

COMESA Court Moves to Digital Justice System



File photo: COMESA Court of Justice Registrar, Ms Nyambura Mbatia addressing the CCJ publicity seminar in Khartoum, February 2017

The Court of Justice of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is implementing a paperless digital courtroom after signing up with Caselines - the world's leading global provider of digital evidence management. This is in line with the current COMESA theme: 'Towards digital economic integration'.

Caselines is a critical tool that helps nations meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16 by transforming the quality and efficiency of justice across Africa, thus aiding improvements in the rule of Law.

Caselines software eliminates the need for paper in court by introducing an entirely digital platform with tools which allow the creation and presentation of a fully digital bundle including multi-media evidence;

collaboration tools for enhanced pre-trial preparation and secure role validated video conferencing for virtual hearings.

Covering 21 Member States, the supra-national COMESA Court, based in Khartoum, Sudan, sits with twelve judges, each from different Member States with seven Judges in the First Instance Division and five in the Appellate Division. Today, lawyers bring cases to the Court from all the Member States, incurring considerable time and cost to file applications and send paper copies of evidence to the Court. Caselines provides a digital solution to this challenge, helping to increase the efficiency and security surrounding legal proceedings.

Caselines will allow lawyers to file applications and evidence in a secure

environment from their own offices, saving costs of copying and transporting paper files, and at the same time cutting the risk of losing or misplacing files. The system supports efficient pre-trial preparation, especially for lawyers supporting clients in different countries. Judges of the COMESA Court of Justice will now be able to work efficiently from their home offices, improving preparation, cutting unnecessary travel and speeding the process of preparing judgment after a hearing.

Nyambura L. Mbatia, Registrar at the COMESA Court of Justice, said:

“In line with the UN's SDG 16, one of the objectives of the COMESA Court is to eliminate financial and practical barriers to

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justice. By adopting CaseLines, the Court will become more efficient and processes such as physical filing will become obsolete. This will make a huge difference for our Judges and for litigants dealing with the Court and will bring us closer to achieving access to justice for all citizens of the COMESA Region.”

Paul Sachs, CTO and Founder of CaseLines, said:

“We are honoured that the COMESA Court of Justice has chosen CaseLines to transform the trial process across the member states, making life simpler and less costly for lawyers and litigants and enabling judges to properly prepare for cases, whilst facilitating a far more efficient and reliable system.

Mr Sachs added:

“CaseLines offers far greater efficiency and transparency to the process of justice – and an effective and functional legal system is not just good news for those who deal with courts, but for African society and businesses too. CaseLines is a vital tool that helps nations meet the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 16, supporting improvements in the Rule of Law by revolutionising the speed and quality in delivery of justice across Africa.”

CaseLines is already delivering paperless hearings for lawyers and courts around the world, including the UK and the UAE. It provides a secure and easy-to-use cloud-based service to collaboratively produce, present and review high quality professional trial bundles. The platform continues to make the delivery of justice even more efficient, revolutionising the way the justice system operates by bringing it firmly into the digital age.

Regional Strategy for Renewable Energy on the way



The COMESA Regional Association of Energy Regulators of Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) has appointed a Zambian firm to develop a Synthesized Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Strategy for the region.

The short-term consultancy contract is worth \$124,506. It was awarded to the Centre for Energy Environment and Engineering of Zambia (CEEEZ) after further negotiation on the proposed scope of work and work plan. CEEEZ representative Professor Francis Yamba Yamba and Dr Mohamedain Seif Elnasr, the Chief Executive Officer of RAERESA signed on behalf of the respective organisations.

Speaking during the signing ceremony Dr Elnasr observed that the region was in urgent need of developing facilities to provide energy for the development of regional economies. Congratulating the Consultant for meeting all the requirements for the four months project, Dr Elnasr urged him to deliver the task with precision and speed.

“One of the gaps identified in the energy sector is the absence of a synthesized renewable energy and energy efficiency strategy for the ESA-IO region,” Dr Elnasr noted. “Therefore, once developed, the strategy will provide an integrated framework in the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency to support the achievement of the region’s clean energy goals.”

The supply side energy efficiency is another challenge that requires immediate redress. An analysis based on a sample of some countries in the region should form a perspective of what needs to be recommended for improving supply side efficiency in the EA-SA-IO region.

The overall objective of the project is to enhance a sustainable regional energy market in the EA-SA-IO region, which is conducive to investment and promoting sustainable development. The project is relevant for the African Union’s Agenda 2030 and 2063.

Energy experts have observed that most countries in the EA-SA-IO region experience energy challenges, although it is endowed with high potential compared to other sub-Saharan African regions.

The challenges are manifested by: inadequate level and coverage of physical energy infrastructure due to insufficient investment in the energy sector; inefficiency and unreliability of existing energy infrastructure services; increased demand for economic growth and population growth; high cost of operating existing energy infrastructure facilities; energy poverty in terms of lower access rate and reliance on traditional fuels (wood fuels); and low utilization of clean energy option as a result of the absence of a market for energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies and services in the region.



Twelve Member States Benefit from Fiscal Reform Training



Finance officials from 12 COMESA Member States who participated in a training

Finance officials from 12 COMESA Member States recently participated in a training to address the significant gaps and weaknesses in public sector accounting standards and practices.

The training was organized by the International Monetary Fund's Regional Technical Assistance Centers for Southern Africa and for East Africa (AFRITAC South and AFRITAC East) in collaboration with the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI). Its theme was 'Improving Fiscal Reporting in developing countries using International Public-Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS)'.

Several areas of improvement were addressed including the need for more complete coverage of public sector institutions; more comprehensive reporting of assets and liabilities; recognition of a broader range of transactions and other economic flows.

The need for more frequent and timely fiscal reporting was underscored which requires more rigorous approach to fiscal forecasting and risk analysis; and alignment of standards for budgets, statistics and accounts.

The IPSAS provides solutions to these gaps and weaknesses and are designed to facilitate the generation of government financial reports of high quality that are internationally comparable. Countries' experiences presented during the workshop revealed that several COMESA,

AFRITAC South (AFS) and AFRITAC East (AFE) member states have recently chosen to adopt and implement the Cash-basis IPSAS as a stepping stone towards the ultimate adoption of the accrual basis of accounting and financial reporting.

This approach offers several distinct advantages. Among them, providing a base which can be progressively supplemented with accrual disclosure notes. It also creates early awareness of the reporting requirements for consolidating controlled entities. Other AFS countries are already moving towards Accrual-basis IPSAS.

CMI Director Mr. Ibrahim Zeidy noted that the training would significantly contribute to the ongoing fiscal reforms in member countries. He said the reforms are aimed at improving comprehensive reporting of assets and liabilities, producing more frequent and timely fiscal reporting, and for adopting a more rigorous approach to fiscal forecasting and risk analysis among others.

"The joint training will go a long way in ensuring compliance to international standards prior to implementing full accrual accounting, hastening reforms in public sector accounting practices and standards, identifying challenges related to implementation of IPSAS, providing solutions to address the challenges, which are based on best practices; and for Sharing Knowledge, peer

to peer exchange of ideas, experiences and for networking," Mr. Zeidy said.

Participants were drawn from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Rwanda, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

COMESA MEDIA AWARDS – 2019 Submission Period Extended

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has extended the submission period for the 2019 COMESA Media Awards entries by one month, from 31 January 2019 to 28 February 2019. The extension will afford more time to journalist to prepare their entries.

The award scheme is conducted every year to recognize and reward journalists who have contributed to regional integration by publishing and producing broadcast stories on the subject. Its objective is to promote reporting of COMESA regional integration programmes hence raising public awareness, understanding, participation and ownership.

Relevant topics for entry include: development projects involving more than one COMESA Member State or a national project which has a regional dimension. Such projects cover trade, infrastructure (energy, transport, ICT), investments, gender etc.