

## Launch of the 50m Women Speak Digital Platform Draws Near, Training for users in COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS begins



*Joint team from COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS attending training on 50million WomenSpeak Digital platform*

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWS) digital platform moved closer to becoming a reality after the kickoff of a two-week training workshop in Lusaka, Zambia Monday, 25th March 2019. The training will equip users with the required skills to manage the platform setting the stage for its official launch later this year.

The 25th March to 5th April 2019 workshop is hosted by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). It brought together 22 participants from the host regional body as well as the collaborating Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the 50 Million African Women Speak Project (50MASWP), namely; the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS).

Opening the workshop, the COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Finance and Administration, Dr. Dev Haman described the platform as a “game changer” in the drive to economically empower women entrepreneurs across the African continent. The training, he noted, was an important step in the journey to operationalising the platform.

“This project is a game changer. You will agree with me that we are already experiencing the profound change and efficiency that modern technologies bring to the way we live, work, interact, and do business. Thus, the need to pull in one direction and share knowledge amongst ourselves cannot be overemphasized,” Dr. Haman said.

Through this first-of-a-kind platform, the Assistant Secretary General pointed

out the 50MAWS Project has the potential to transform the role of women entrepreneurs in Africa, and noted that its success will immensely contribute towards the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women as outlined in the gender policies and frameworks of the respective RECs.

“I have no doubt that all the three RECs will be able to use the platform to serve the women in our respective regions and Africa, and collectively achieve the intended goals of the project,” he added.

With the platform design and development in its final stage, the main objective of the workshop is to conduct a hands-on training of the project implementing units, users and IT experts on the platform’s features and

# Need for Coordination of RECs- AU Activities in Regional Integration Programmes



(Right) Assistant Secretary General, Dr Kipyego Cheluget speaking during the Conference in Morocco.

Assistant Secretary General, Dr Kipyego Cheluget led a COMESA delegation to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that took place in Marrakech, Morocco last weekend.

The team participated in the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RCM-Africa) meeting, which derives its mandate from UN resolution 32/197, which directed Regional Communities (ReCs) to take leadership and responsibility for enhancing cooperation and coordination of UN activities at the regional level.

The Mechanism and its four Sub-regional Coordination Mechanisms (SRCMs) covering the five sub-regions of Africa, have become the frameworks for the UN family to work together in supporting the priorities of the African Union (AU) and its organs, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other regional and sub-regional organizations. In his address to the meeting Dr Cheluget observed:

“Taking into account the new developments both at the UN and AU Reforms, this calls for a rethink of the RCM-Africa, aim at aligning the coordination and leadership roles to

the ongoing reforms, the four sub-regional mechanisms need to focus on the regional economic communities where the regional mechanism focuses on support to the AUC.”

He said there was need to strengthen the UN system-wide policy coherence, coordination and cooperation at the regional level to ‘deliver as one’ in response to identified regional priorities and initiatives of the AU, and at the REC level.

“The aim is to reduce fragmentation in their operations and increasing coherence, coordination and cooperation in their support of their programmes and priorities to the member states,” he noted adding that the current practice lacks in efficient coordination of all stakeholders.

Addressing delegates in a side event assessing the status of regional integration in Africa, Dr Cheluget said COMESA is guided by its Treaty that binds the member states to integrate practically.

He gave examples of successful COMESA trade facilitation instruments such as the Yellow Card that is now digitalized and travelers from as far afield as Europe showing

interest in it.

“COMESA has robust specialized institutions many of which have expanded continentally such as the Trade and Development Bank, ZEP-RE Reinsurance Company, African Trade Insurance Agency, COMESA Competition Commission among others,” Dr Cheluget said. “COMESA takes the role of women in regional integration very seriously as evidenced by its setting up of FEMCOM, the 50 Million Women Speak Project and we are proud to have our first woman SG.”

He informed the meeting that COMESA was one of the initiators and champions of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), building on the success of its own Free Trade Area (FTA) and the Tripartite FTA.

He said: “The ACFTA, can learn from and benefit from COMESA’s tried and tested instruments such as the Rules of Origin, digital FTA among others.”

He called for rationalization of the multiplicity of efforts and organizations dealing with the free trade issues for better coherence and synergy.



# Launch of the 50m Women Speak Digital ...

continued from page 1

realize structural transformation. The strategy provides for market integration, infrastructure development, industrialization, science, technology and innovation pillars.

Secretary General Kapwepwe commended the Kingdom of Eswatini for consistently participating in regional integration frameworks as a way of enhancing its trade performance in the COMESA region.

"This project preserves the Kingdom's unique culture by pulling on the knowledge of the gatekeepers of Eswatini traditions while applying modern technologies and designs that are attractive to an international market," Ms Kapwepwe added.

EU Head of Cooperation Ms Ariane Labat assured his organization's commitment to continue supporting regional integration programmes and commended the Government of Eswatini for its decision to establish modern infrastructure for small-scale traders.

"The Trade Hub is a significant Project for Eswatini. It will improve the environment for MSME production and trade capacities for creation of jobs and growth,"

COMESA has provided Eswatini with over three million Euros from 2013 – 2018 under the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF) and with support of the EU through the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM).

Programmes supported under RISM include the free trade area, the customs union, resolution of non-tariff barriers, harmonization of standards, trade in services, investment, competition policies transport and trade facilitation policies.



Egyptian business delegation visiting COMESA. Also in the picture is Dr Francis Mangeni (COMESA) Egyptian ambassador to Zambia (7th from left) and Zambian Ambassador to Egypt (5th from right)

## Egyptian Business people explore investment opportunities in COMESA

An Egyptian business delegation was in COMESA on March 20, 2019 to meet and discuss trade and investments opportunities in the region. The 35-member team was led by the president of the African Cooperation Committee of the Federation of Egyptian Industries Mr. Sherif Al Gabaly and Egyptian Ambassador to Zambia and COMESA Amb. Ahmed Mostafa.

This is the first time such a delegation has been to COMESA and the region. Egypt takes the lion's share of the COMESA market at 22%. Globally, Egypt's total exports to COMESA is at 8% and imports at 1% thus presenting huge potential to increase trade with COMESA member States.

Mr Gabaly said the Federation of Egyptian Industries has 19 chambers specialized in different sectors of the industries and is also a member of the COMESA Business Council (CBC). The delegation had representation from sectors such as food processing, packaging, engineering, chemical industries, pharmaceuticals among others.

Ambassador Mustafa said the business delegation was in Zambia to seek economic cooperation with their fellow businessmen

and women in the Zambia in particular and the COMESA region at large.

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe received the delegation and appreciated the country for ratifying both the Tripartite and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

The Secretary General indicated that the COMESA region is open for investment from stakeholders within the African continent and beyond especially that the region has put in place mechanisms and policies that are conducive for investments.

"COMESA is ready to accommodate investments from anyone willing to invest in any sector, as the region has abundant land resources and plenty of water to enable investment," Ms Kapwepwe said.

Director of Trade Dr Francis Mangeni took the delegation through the potential trade opportunities in the region and responded to their inquiries.

# Kenyan Exporters equipped for US Exports

There is potential loss of US markets, if COMESA exporters do not upgrade processing facilities to meet US food safety regulations that came into force October 2017. To this effect COMESA is therefore keen to support both the both public and private sectors in achieving compliance with US Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) rules.

The aim of the training was to strengthen the capacity of Kenya producers and exporters in their efforts to respond to the NEW US food safety regulations. The training will be rolled out to six additional Member States to ensure COMESA exports do not lose their competitive advantage in US markets.

During a food safety training workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, on 11th March 2019, the Director of Agriculture and industry, Mr. Thierry Kalonji (in picture) informed the participants that COMESA is developing a harmonized food safety regulatory environment and infrastructure to enhance the quality and competitiveness of goods produced in COMESA.

"As you all know, agriculture is key to Kenya's economic development as evidenced by its 26% direct contribution to the GDP and its 65% contribution to total national exports," the Director said.

COMESA has spearheaded similar initiatives in the Tripartite Free Trade Area framework that brings together the EAC-COMESA-SADC, which in turn provides lessons to inform and support the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The Director noted that compliance with FSMA was a challenge to governments and the food safety regulatory authorities



already faced with resource constraints. He stressed that, this was also an opportunity to leverage public/private resources for enhanced food safety compliance and increased consumer confidence in locally produced products.

Further, he said building local capacity on FSMA and providing a pool of human

resources in Africa that industry can draw on, is an important contribution, for which he thanked the US Government for the support.

The FSMA was signed into law in January 2011 and came into effect October 2017. The Act is implemented by two regulations with new requirements for food processors; the regulation on preventive controls for human food and the regulation on produce safety.

An important requirement under the regulations is that food safety management in the food processing facility should be performed by a Preventive Controls Qualified Individual (PCQI) who has successfully completed training under a standardized curriculum recognized by the FDA.

The second most important requirement for exporters of food products into US is the FSMA Rule on Foreign Supplier Verification Program (FSVP) which requires US importers to verify that their foreign suppliers are producing food according to the US food safety regulations.

This implies that at the request of a US importer, the exporter's food processing facility will be subjected to periodic food safety audits to verify compliance with US regulations.

## Upcoming Events

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3

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5

**Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Min...**  
Fri 2 PM · 14 guests

Common Market for Easter...  
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## Insurance Experts discuss Digital Yellow Card Implementation

Lusaka, Thursday 28 March, 2019: The third Meeting of the IT Committee of the Digital Yellow Card Scheme are meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, from 28th to 29th March 2019. The meeting is focusing on progress regarding the status of implementation of the Digital Yellow Card; the consolidation and enhancement of the Digital system and implementation of the second phase which deals with mobile applications.

This meeting follows the October 2018 Council of Bureaux meeting held in Livingstone, Zambia which made a number of decisions to fully roll-out and consolidate the operations of the Digital Yellow Card.

The COMESA Digital yellow Card Scheme is in line with one of COMESA's Strategic objectives which is to strengthen Market integration, through the seamless flow of goods, services, capital, people and the right to establish and reside within the COMESA region.

This ensures trade facilitation through simplification and harmonization of documents thereby lowering the cost of cross border trade through removal of trade barriers.

Speaking during the official opening of the meeting, Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Administration and Finance, Dr. Dev Haman, indicated that Market integration is a practical way of addressing the small size of the markets of individual countries.

Based on this premise, he said, "COMESA is working to establish a COMESA Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA) for the 21 COMESA Member States. The DFTA has three thrusts, namely: E-Trade, E-Logistics and E-Legislation."

"What you will be doing in the next two days therefore is critically important to your stakeholders and important for Market integration under the COMESA Digital Free trade Area." Dr Haman added.

The Digital Yellow Card is so far being accessed by 166 insurance companies, over 566 branches and an average of 2,500 users daily in the region.

IT Directors and Experts of the National Bureaux of the Yellow Card scheme of Member States attended the meeting



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe(middle) with a team from the African Union (AU) comprising representatives of the programme management team of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and a European Union (EU) consultant.

## APSA Team pay courtesy call to COMESA SG

A team from the African Union (AU) comprising representatives of the programme management team of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and a European Union (EU) consultant paid a courtesy call on the Secretary General.

The team is at COMESA Secretariat to discuss the implementation of the APSA programme and set priorities for its next phase, which is expected to run from 2020 – 2023.

In her welcome remarks, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said that COMESA remains appreciative of the EU for the support given in Peace and Security, which is a key activity of the organization.

During the meeting, the Secretary General signed an addendum to the APSA grant agreement.

Under APSA, COMESA has been able to produce key results that support its overall integration agenda and some of these include the establishment of a robust theory informed data-driven early warning system that focuses on identifying key structural vulnerabilities of Member States and providing recommendations. It is expected that this will ultimately lead to strengthening the resilience of Member States especially

if the partnership with the AU CEWs is maintained.

The second key result area is to build mediation capacity of COMESA through the COMESA Committee of Elders which was established by the COMESA Authority in 2017.

"This has enabled the Elders to support the consolidation of democracy through pre-elections assessments as well as supported the mitigation of conflicts and crisis through fact-finding missions and preventive diplomacy mission," the Secretary General added.

Another key result area supports cross border cooperation that has led to relations at the borders between DRC and its eastern neighbours by using trade as a mechanism for peace and security.

Ms Kapwepwe further said, "...the high level of cooperation has resulted in greater coherence of programme as each REC clearly understands the areas of comparative advantage and the joint programming and implementation has assisted in exploiting the synergies. We now mostly have greater coherence in Programming and better value to our Member States."

## COMESA Observes Comoros Elections

Comoros, March 25, 2019: COMESA was among 150 accredited international and

local observers that observed the 2019 Presidential and Gubernatorial elections in the Island of Comoros. COMESA Committee of Elders member Ms Hope Kivengere was the Mission Leader. During the deployment,

the COMESA delegation held meetings with various stakeholders including Government representatives, Members of the opposition, civil society and the media. The team managed to observe 56 out of the 731 polling stations in the Union of the Comoros.



Inking the finger as proof of voting



Voter name verification



Voters waiting to vote



A voter been guided on the ballot box (Presidential or Governor)



Votes counting at the polling station



COMESA Mission Leader taking down the names of party agents at a polling station



Pregnant lady been helped on voting procedure



An elderly lady been helped to go and cast her vote