

COMESA/ACTESA to Revive Regional Policy on Biotechnology and Biosafety



A Biotechnologist at the lab in Addis Ababa

The COMESA Secretariat will in 2020 support the revitalization of the Regional Policy on Biotechnology and Biosafety under the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA). Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman revealed that the Secretariat will also support ACTESA in having its first meeting for the new board aimed at rebooting the institution.

He was speaking recently in Lusaka when a delegation from the region on Biotechnology and Biosafety led by the Chief Executive Officer at the National Biosafety Authority of Kenya Prof. Dorington Ogoyi paid a courtesy call on him.

“The Secretariat is committed to revive the biotechnology programme and take advantage of the many benefits that come with it,” Dr Haman said to the delegation in his office.

During the discussions, it was agreed that



Dr Dev Haman

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operationalizing the biosafety program will require institutionalizing a Regional Biosafety Risk Assessment mechanism.

This will ensure high-level policy support and commitment from Member States for safe and responsible use of modern biotechnology in agriculture. As an example, several COMESA Member States including Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eswatini have already given approval to start cultivating insect-resistant cotton and maize. Others are conducting field trials and could benefit from data sharing, capacity enhancement and biosafety decisions from lead countries.

COMESA/ACTESA Officer in Charge Dr. John Mukuka said the institution is currently reviving its operations to come up with a revised ACTESA strategic plan covering the period 2020 to 2030. The overall goal of the new plan will be to enhance small-scale farmers access to agricultural input, output and financial markets

COMESA Holds Inaugural Youth Leaders Bootcamp



Participants at the boot camp

Thirty policy makers and youth leaders from ten COMESA countries have participated in a five-day residential boot camp in policy formulation, democratic governance and socio-economic development. The main objective of the boot camp was to increase youth participation and engagement in policy formulation and implementation and also increase experience sharing among youth leaders from the region.

The bootcamp, which is the first of its kind by COMESA was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) while training was facilitated by MS-Training Centre for Development Cooperation (MS-TCDC).

Ethiopian State Minister for Youth Cluster in the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Honourable Hiwot Hailu and the Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA Secretariat Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde officially opened the Boot Camp held in Arusha, Tanzania.

The main focus of the boot camp was on the role of youths in influencing cross-border policy and what kind of change narrative the youth could drive across COMESA in line with regional inter-state cooperation, trade

and commerce facilitation.

During the boot camp held 14 – 18 December 2019, the policy makers and youth leaders interacted, discussed and identified the key problems that limit or undermine the participation of the youth in democratic governance and socio-economic development processes and designed workable solutions.

Delegates from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe also deliberated on the state of the policy environment with regard to equal access to opportunities for youth, policy implementation gaps, capacity gaps and measures to address these concerns.

The residential boot camp is part of the activities being implemented by the Joint COMESA-African Governance Architecture (AGA) project on youth engagement which falls under the Division of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA Secretariat. This initiative is expected to operationalize the COMESA Youth Programme and the AGA-Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) in democratic governance processes. The second boot camp will be held in 2020.

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through improved policy environment, expanded market facilities, services and capacity building.

He stated that the COMESA policy on Biotechnology and Biosafety mainly addresses Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in transit, low-level presence of GMOs, commodities for food, feed and processing and handling emergency food aid with Genetically Modified (GM) content.

“There is need to revive the biotechnology and biosafety harmonization program within COMESA in view of the emerging challenges from recurrent drought in the region and new pests like the Fall Army worm devastating our staple crops,” Dr Mukuka added.

Former COMESA/ACTESA Senior Biotechnology and Biosafety Advisor Dr. Belay Getachew said ACTESA facilitated the development of a common biotechnology and biosafety policy implementation plan commonly referred to as “COMBIP” which was validated in 2015 by the Council of Ministers after nearly 10 years of consultations by Member States.

Members in the delegation that visited Dr Haman included Dr. Charles Mugoya, Chairperson National Biosafety Committee of Uganda, Dr. Margaret Karembu Africa Director of International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA AfriCenter), Dr. Enock Warinda, Deputy Executive Director at the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and Dr. Francis Nang'ayo, Senior Manager and Head of Regulatory Affairs at the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

Others are Dr Lilian Chimphepo focal point for biosafety responsible for coordinating biosafety issues in Malawi, Mr. Mudenda, Regulatory Head for Southern Africa at Syngenta Crop



Central Bank Governors Hold Symposium on the Continental and Tripartite FTA



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (M) with Governors of Central Banks Mr Ahmed Osman

Central Bank Governors, deputies and their representatives from the COMESA region held a one-day symposium in Lusaka on the 'Role of Central Banks in Advancing the Continental and Tripartite Free Trade Area. The gathering agreed that Central Banks have a critical role to play in the full and successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) by ensuring macroeconomic and financial stability hence the need to start engaging on the matter.

Speaking at the Symposium in Lusaka on 13 December 2019, Chairperson of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks Mr Ahmed Osman said it is important to start discussing the Agreements in order to have the right pricing mechanism, efficient trade and appropriate payment channels required for trade exchanges as the region leaps forward with the two free trade arrangements.

He added that formulating and implementing appropriate exchange rate policies to support trading activities will also be important as the Continental and Tripartite Free Trade Area come into force.

"The growing protectionism in advanced countries naturally means we in COMESA and

Africa need to explore the possibility of expanding and enlarging our market beyond individual country borders.... the AfCFTA and TFTA are crucial in this exercise," Mr Osman, who is also the Governor of the Central Bank of Djibouti said.

The bankers noted that the AfCFTA ushered in a new era of deeper collaboration in trade among African countries and it builds on the integration attained by Regional Economic Communities such as COMESA, EAC and SADC.

The governors agreed that lack of trade finance can limit the full trade potential of the AfCFTA and TFTA and therefore discussed selected sub-themes during the symposium. They discussed the 'role of central banks in eradicating obstacles for advancing AfCFTA and TFTA', 'the use of blockchain to increase efficiency in the CFTA' and 'the importance of regional payments systems to increase trade in the CFTA.'

Some of the key obstacles in advancing the AfCFTA and TFTA identified during the symposium include the failure by some Member States to diversify their economies and add value to products, poor road and rail infrastructure which hinders economic growth, limited and inactive cross listings on the stock exchanges, restrictive customs procedures and high fees

making cross border trade expensive and political tension and violence in some Member States.

Other factors are the limited ICT penetration and use in some parts of Africa, shallow financial systems and having multiple and different national currencies with volatile exchange rates almost all of which are non-convertible.

The delegates made several recommendations to improve trade financing, exploring ways of leveraging on blockchain and other new technologies and the need for central banks to support initiatives aimed at interfacing regional payments and settlement systems for increasing trade in the AfCFTA.

Twelve Member States namely Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended the Symposium which was organized by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI).

Once fully implemented, the AfCFTA is expected to cover all 55 African countries with an estimated combined current GDP of US\$2.5 trillion and a population of one billion, 60 percent of whom are below the age of 25 years.

COMESA and Partners Hold Successful Side Events at COP25



COMESA Climate Change Programme Advisor Dr Maclay Kanyangarara at one of the Side Events

COMESA in partnership with the African Union Commission and other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) successfully held side events to push Africa's case at the just ended UN Climate Change Meetings also known as the 25th Conference of Parties (COP) to the Climate Change Convention.

The first meeting to be held was a technical side event to showcase Africa's efforts on Resilience building. The meeting examined ongoing efforts and operational levels at continental and RECs, discussed best practices, challenges and opportunities for synergy and better programming of resilience interventions.

COMESA Climate Change Programme Advisor Dr Maclay Kanyangarara revealed that the side event developed recommendations to strengthen resilience building which includes increasing synergy among different stakeholders at regional level, inclusion of gender at all levels of resilience building, having more effective and sustained engagement with the communities, youths and women and long-term advocacy and policy development among others. This event was attended by more than 150 delegates from across the continent and beyond.

"This meeting was important because we were informed that while the world has recorded an average temperature increase of 1 degree Celsius, Africa as a continent has already experienced a 1.5 degree Celsius temperature increase over the same period, therefore we cannot down play the role of resilience," Dr Kanyangarara added.

COMESA also participated in the Africa Climate Day side event which provides a platform for the continent's decision makers and other stakeholders to engage in a dialogue that informs the region's course of action around climate change. Ministers of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Seychelles, Tunisia and South Africa attended this meeting where they reiterated the need for increased ambition and resource mobilization to transform African Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) into vehicles for development.

They also discussed effective means of implementation including finance, capacity building, technology development and transfer of the Paris Agreement and the implications for Africa as a continent.

The third and final engagement was the side event to take stock of African

Member States NDC implementation and share experiences, best practices, opportunities and associated challenges. This was convened by COMESA and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the NDC Partnership and the East African Community (EAC). It was necessitated by the fact that many African countries are faced with developmental challenges such as limited access to markets, lack of competitiveness, fragile economic development, high poverty levels and limited availability of analytical and technical capacity.

The event allowed African countries to explore further opportunities for implementation and to provoke discussions among experts and stakeholders in development policy and practice on how opportunities in climate change can enhance Africa's transformative economic growth and development agenda.

The 25th Conference of Parties was held in Madrid, Spain from 2 to 13 December 2019 and was attended by nearly 27,000 delegates from around the world. The conference provided the much-anticipated opportunity to finalise the 'Rulebook' of the Paris Agreement which is the operating manual needed when the agreement takes effect in 2020.

It sets the rules for carbon markets and other forms of international cooperation under Article six of the agreement.

However, due to the complex and protracted nature of the discussions, many thematic issues were not finalised and will be further discussed at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland in November next year.

"This was the longest climate talks in history and the result was a weak gesture toward raising climate targets and failure to agree for the second year in a row on rules to govern carbon markets," Dr Kanyangarara pointed out.



Steering Committee lauds 50MAWSP progress



Amb. Kipyego Cheluget

The Steering Committee of the 50 Million African Women Speak Project has given the initiative a stamp of approval for the progress registered so far. This followed the Steering Committee's latest meeting held in Mwanza, United Republic of Tanzania from 5-6 December.

The Committee is comprised of executive staff from the project implementing regional economic communities (RECs), namely; COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS, representatives of the countries chairing these RECs, and heads of regional associations of women in business.

At the two-day meeting, the Steering Committee lauded the project team on the successful launch of the 50 Million African Women Speak platform held on 26 November 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda. It also took stock of the project activities and voiced its satisfaction with the progress registered so far.

Dr. Siga Fatima Jagne, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender and chair of the Steering Committee,

observed that after the 50MAWSP launch, the platform was no longer only the property of RECs, but that of women entrepreneurs on the continent.

She challenged the meeting to provide recommendations for the sustainability of the platform after the project's planned end in 2020.

On his part, the COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, Amb. Kipyego Cheluget thanked the East African Community for hosting the meeting and for the warm hospitality extended to delegations of COMESA and ECOWAS.

Amb. Cheluget expressed his gratitude to the Steering Committee members for their leadership and commitment which had ensured the successful implementation of the project and affirmed that programs like 50 Million African Women Speak will ensure that regional integration is meaningful to ordinary people across the continent.

The 50 Million African Women Speak Project (50MAWSP) is an initiative which is contributing to the economic and social empowerment of women across 38 African countries through the provision of a networking platform to access information on financial and non-financial services.

Funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the project targets 50 Million women in business and is implemented by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community for Western African States (ECOWAS).



Director of Human Resources & Administration Mrs Martha Elimu

COMESA Secretariat Goes on Industrial Break

The COMESA Secretariat will be closed for two weeks from Friday 20 December 2019 to 5th January 2020. Official business will resume on Monday 6th January when most staff members are expected to report back for work. This was announced in a Statement by the Director of Human Resources & Administration Mrs Martha Elimu.

"We are happy to announce on behalf of the Secretary General, that the Secretariat will close on Friday 20th December 2019, which will be the last working day for this year and open on Monday 6th January 2020," read the statement in part.

COMESA Diary			
	Meeting/Activity	Dates	Venue
1.	COMESA Secretariat Closes for Festive Season Break	20 Dec 2019	Lusaka
2.	COMESA Secretariat Opens for New Year	06 Jan 2020	Lusaka