

African Women Business Platform Launched



Young women at the launch of the 50MAWSP

An online business networking platform aimed at connecting 50 million women entrepreneurs across Africa has been launched. The 50 Million African Women Speak Platform (50MAWSP) is an initiative of three regional economic communities supported by the African Development Bank.

The inaugural national launch was conducted in Zambia, Friday, 28 February 2020. It will be rolled out in 38 countries that are members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The Platform was developed to empower women in Africa to enable them access real-time information on financial and non-financial

services mainly through mobile phones and other communication devices. It is custom-built and dedicated to serving the information needs of women by providing an avenue through which to improve their ability to network, share knowledge and do business with each other.

Zambia's First Lady, Mrs. Esther Lungu launched the Platform in Zambia.

"With this platform you have your own space as an entrepreneur to post your merchandise and advertise it free of charge..."

-Mrs. Esther Lungu

COMESA is leading the national launches in 15 countries, with Zambia being the first off the blocks. Other national launches are lined up in Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Eritrea, Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, Malawi, Madagascar, Comoros, DR Congo, Tunisia, and Mauritius.

The development of the platform was conceived in 2016 and a Memorandum of Understanding signed between COMESA, the EAC and ECOWAS to jointly implement the project. This followed a study conducted by the AfDB that found that about 70% of women in Africa are financially excluded.

"To give you just one more grim static; women alone, who contribute the larger percentage of Africa's population and form the majority of those engaged in key sectors such as agriculture and trade, face a financing gap of close to US\$16

billion,” COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe told guests at the launch.

She added that even where financing is provided it is not always accessed owing to lack of information about the available financial products such as affordable credit, business training, and mentorship, among others.

In COMESA Member States, the Platform will ride on the trade facilitation tools that have already been developed and removal of restrictions to trade across borders, such as the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime. Being a tech-driven platform, the women can begin to transact or share information with millions of people in the 38 countries where the platform is present, within seconds of signing up.

The platform is accessed on: www.womenconnect.org

Urging the women in Zambia to sign up on the Platform the First Lady said:

“With this platform you have your own space as an entrepreneur to post your merchandise and advertise it free of charge. Alternatively, it could be the place where you connect with suppliers, or

even business mentors. All these features, ladies are available to you at absolutely no cost.” Mrs. Lungu urged Governments, policy makers, trade and business support institutions and women business leaders to support rural women and the youth to participate in the Platform so that they are not left behind.

“Let us roll and reach out to this untapped potential by providing them with internet training and skills for them to participate,” she said. “Other

stakeholders and partners can go a mile further and facilitate the acquisition of the internet tools, the smart phones.”

Zambia Minister of Gender Hon Elizabeth Phiri said that a an initial team of 50 has been trained to support women enlist in the platform.

The next national launch will be conducted in Zimbabwe later this month.



Zambia First lady Mrs. Esther Lungu (middle) launches the 50MAWSP flanked by COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe (R) and Zambia Minister of Gender Ms. Elizabeth Phiri.

Zimbabwe Leather Sector Looking Up

Bulawayo Leather Cluster set to supply over 20,000 pairs of shoes to Namibia



The leather sector in Zimbabwe is set for better times if what is happening at the Bulawayo Leather Cluster is anything to go by. The cluster has a standing order to supply shoes worth USD 25,000 for schools in Namibia and this is expected to rise to USD 540,000 by end of this year.

Cluster Secretary Mr. Fugai Zvinoramba told a COMESA Secretariat team that visited their factory last week, that the initial contract with Namibia is to supply 1,000 pairs and steadily increase to 20,000. The revitalization of the cluster was supported by COMESA under the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM).

Until the year 2000, Zimbabwe produced 17 million pairs of leather shoes annually and had a vibrant leather industry comprised of highly skilled Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including



“For any product to succeed it has to be responsive to the demands of the youths as a single largest consumers in today’s world,”

-Ms Situmbeko stated.

livestock farmers, hides collectors, tanners and manufacturers. Given the high potential that the leather sector has, the government is now keen to recapitalize the leather and footwear sub-sector so as to increase industrial capacity utilization and boost exports.

“We are now happy to see that we are able to work together as a leather cluster of Bulawayo because of the support that you have provided to us which has enabled us to penetrate the Namibian market,” Mr Zvinoramba said. “As a cluster we also plan to expand supply of our products within the COMESA Member States and other countries beyond the region.”

COMESA Aid for Trade Coordinator, Hope Situmbeko, emphasized the need for the full application of harmonized leather product standards across the region to ensure that compliance and quality assurance is attained by the players in the sector.

“Consumer demand is based on high quality production of goods that compete favourably in the open market. This applies to local, regional and international markets and therefore the cluster should aspire for the highest standards of leather products,” Ms Situmbeko said.

Speaking during a Standards Training Workshop for members of the Bulawayo Leather Cluster prior to the factory visit, Ms Situmbeko said compliance to common standards would benefit the industry in achieving sufficient supply capacities through collaboration amongst national



and regional leather clusters. She added that such collaboration would allow for full employment of national facilities like the leather design studios which have production capacities of over 500 shoes per day.”

She called for increased participation of women and youth to bring in higher innovation in the design and production as well as skills transfer from the experienced designers and producers.

“For any product to succeed it has to be responsive to the demands of the youths as a single largest consumers in today’s world,” Ms Situmbeko stated.

The workshop was conducted by the Standards Association of Zimbabwe.

Tripartite Rollout, now Within Sight

Eight countries ratify the TFTA, six short of threshold



Namibian High Commissioner to Zambia Mr. Siyave Haindongo (L) presents the Tripartite Ratification Instrument to the Chair of the Tripartite Task Force Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe

The implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement is now in sight following a surge in the number of countries ratifying and set to ratify the Agreement. Eight countries have so far ratified the agreement with six remaining to attain the required threshold of 14 for the Agreement to enter into force.

Namibia is the latest to ratify the TFTA agreement, and on 20th February 2020, the country's High Commissioner to Zambia Mr. Siyave Haindongo deposited the Instrument of Ratification to the Chair of the Tripartite Task Force, Chileshe Kapwepwe, who is the Secretary of COMESA.

"Namibia now joins Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Burundi and Botswana in the roll of honour of countries that have ratified the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement," the SG said.

Seven countries are in advanced stages of the ratification process: these are Comoros, Eswatini, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They are expected to complete the ratification process before the end of this year paving the way for its implementation.

"With the impending ratification by the seven countries, it is my firm belief, that the threshold of 14 ratifications for the TFTA Agreement to enter into force, is now clearly in sight," Ms Kapwepwe said.

Several rounds of negotiations spanning five years have been taking place with the Tripartite Council of Ministers having earlier set April 2019 as the deadline for Member/Partners States to ratify Agreement.

The tripartite FTA brings together 28 countries that are members of COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

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Launched in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt, in June 2015, the TFTA champions integration that is grounded on the developmental approach to regional integration, based on the three pillars: market integration, industrial development and infrastructure development.

This approach is borne out of the realization of the complementarity existing between trade

liberalization, competitive industrial production and infrastructure development.

"As Africa moves to consolidate gains to intra-continental trade and make itself competitive, of great significance for our region, is the long-standing commitment of our Heads of State and Government to advance regional integration as an overriding vision for generating increased trade volumes in the Tripartite Region," COMESA SG said.

Ambassador Haindongo said Namibia was now ready to implement the Tripartite FTA having completed the required processes.

Implementation of the TFTA is critical in addressing key constraints to trade in the region, namely; the structure of production and the composition of exports in the Member/Partner States.

For example, many Member/Partner States in the TFTA have narrow production bases, exporting only a few primary commodities. The Tripartite Model is intended to ensure that the right commodities are produced and competitively availed to the market. In addition, a significant proportion of the States have economies that are resource based with primary commodities accounting for between 40% - 90% of their total exports.

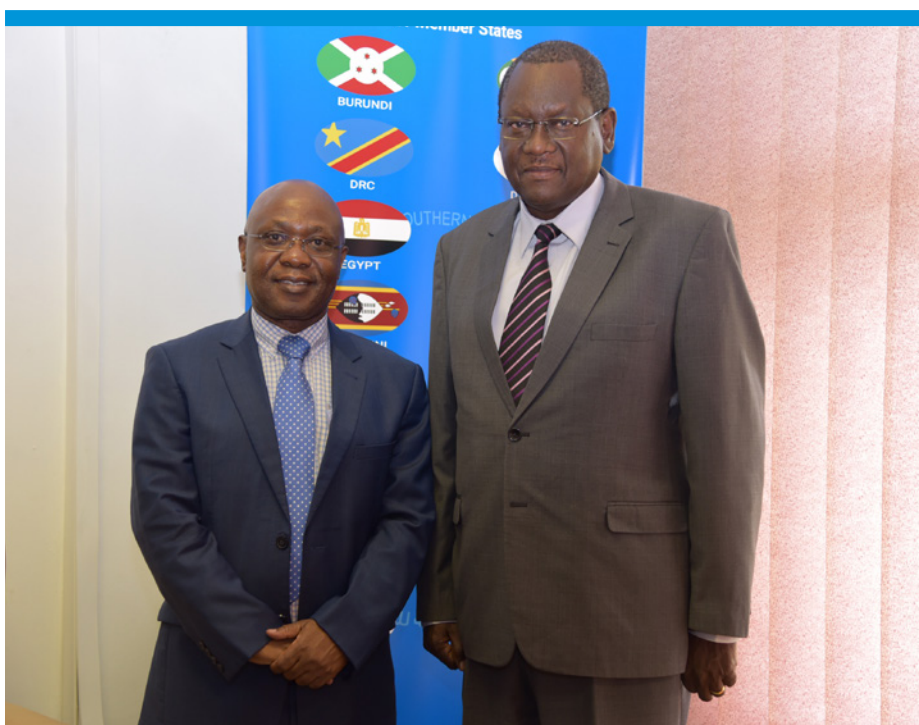
According to the COMESA SG, this has resulted into an expansive extractive sector in the region, with limited linkages to other sectors of the economies. This scenario has rendered many of the Member/Partner States vulnerable to external shocks.

The Tripartite model espouses a value chain approach to exploitation and processing of commodities within the region to address this constraint. It addresses not only the types of goods to be produced in the region, but also the technological content of those goods.

Ms. Kapwepwe called upon the rest of the Tripartite Member/Partner States, to demonstrate commitment by ratifying the Agreement, to consolidate and enjoy the gains that the TFTA has to offer.



New Partnership to Drive Agriculture Transformation



Dr Simon Mwale (L) and Dr Kipyego Cheluget

The Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) is seeking collaboration with COMESA to drive agricultural transformation in the COMESA/SADC regions. The need for collaboration is informed by the dual membership of countries to COMESA and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), convergence of common interests and the need to rationalize resources and create synergies.

CCARDESA is a SADC agency responsible for implementing matters related to agricultural research and development and is currently placing emphasis on agriculture transformation and industrialisation.

Last week, the Acting Executive Director Dr Simon Mwale paid a courtesy call on the Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, Dr

Kipyego Cheluget at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka for talks on collaboration.

The two agreed that the envisaged collaboration in projects and programmes should attract funding in priority areas that can drive agricultural transformation in the region.

Dr Cheluget observed that in the next steps, there will be need to develop a concrete way of working together, by starting with a few initiatives that can be scaled up.

"We need to develop a strategy that will help in strengthening the priority areas of collaboration and enhance trade within the region," Dr Cheluget said.

He cited climate change as an important factor particularly, for the island Member States which are more vulnerable to the effects of climate variability and related risks.

The coming together of CCARDESA and COMESA is timely as the latter pushes its Member States to ratify the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA). The TFTA will bring together all the countries within COMESA, EAC and SADC to leverage their resources and drive regional agricultural and industrial development.

The COMESA Diary

3 - 6 Mar 2020	Peer Review and the 9th Annual General Meeting of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa -RAERESA Organised by: RAERESA Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
16 - 17 Mar 2020	48th Meeting of the Management Committee of the Yellow Card Scheme Organised by: Yellow Card/ RCTG Venue: To be confirmed
19 Mar 2020	Technical Working Group Meeting for the EDF Trade Facilitation Programme Organised by: European Development Fund (EDF Programme) Venue: COMESA Secretariat, Lusaka
23 - 24 Mar 2020	7th Meeting of the Technical Working Group of the Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG Carnet) Organised by: Yellow Card/ RCTG Venue: Lusaka, Zambia
30-31 Mar 2020	Meeting of Project Implementation Units, Ministries and Communication experts to harmonize programme for 2020 Organised by: Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project -GLTFP Venue: Chisamba, Zambia