

## National Launches for 50 Million African Women Speak Project put on Hold

*Plans to Spring Back After COVID-19 on Course*



L-R: Zambia's Gender Minister, Hon. Elizabeth Phiri, First Lady, Mrs. Esther Lungu and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe at the 50MAWSP National Launch in Zambia

Following the successful development and global launch of the 50 Million African Women Speak Platform (50MAWSP) in November 2019, everything was looking up for this first-of its-kind intervention to empower women in the COMESA region and the wider African continent. National launches were supposed to follow. Statewide marketing campaigns had been mooted. National Content Developers, responsible for collating the platform content were on the ground. Then Coronavirus (COVID-19) happened, but these have been put on hold, for now.

The first case of COVID-19 in the region was reported in February. This was followed by full or partial shutdowns of COMESA Member States; restrictions on travel imposed by COMESA Secretariat and most Member States; banning of public gatherings and restrictions to the conduct of work activities which are deemed to be non-essential.

One of the major activities planned for the 50MAWSP in 2020 had been the national launches in the first half of the year (from February to June 2020) and the marketing, publicity and enrolment of users to the platform. By the time the COVID-19 took root in Africa, only one national launch (for Zambia in February 2020) had been conducted. Fourteen other national launches had been planned. In March launches were scheduled in Zimbabwe and Seychelles, while Ethiopia, Eritrea and Eswatini were planned for April and the rest of the countries in May and June.

The three-year project is funded by the African Development Bank, and jointly implemented by COMESA, East African Community and the Economic Community for Western African States in 36 countries. Its objective is to empower women entrepreneurs by providing a digital platform that enables access to financial and non-

financial information needed to develop or grow businesses.

The national launches are a critical entry point for the 50MAWSP platform into the consciousness of key stakeholders, including government/ public entities, private sector, media, civil society and women's associations, among others. They are expected to offer the first grand avenue to sell the platform, engage potential partners and open opportunities for practical illustrations of the usefulness of the platform through user trainings. They will also serve as the launchpads for dedicated platform marketing activities, which would be conducted through workshops, traditional media and digital media.

Restriction on the movement of people also means that Consultants who were recruited as National Content Developers (NCDs) are, for the time being, unable generate content for the platform. Similarly, offline sensitization activities have been put on hold, including workshops with women entrepreneurs in DR Congo and Tunisia and planned engagements with women in Zambia and Sudan.

While the online platform promotion remains an option, this has not been fully utilized as the focus of the target audiences, at the moment is on messages relating to COVID-19. The numbers of users accessing the platform has recorded drops of between 6% and 30% from the second week of March when Member States began preventive measures. It can be inferred from these statistics that the onset of COVID-19 in Africa lowered the consumption of content on platforms such as 50MAWSP as many sought information on COVID-19 instead. This is however not a unique case.

The project has responded appropriately to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of ways. These include continuing with those aspects of national launch plans which do not require physical meetings such as drafting of launch programmes, guest lists and speeches. Country Teams are also encouraged to conduct virtual planning meetings where possible to validate content and/or discuss national launch plans. Focus has also shifted to social media tools to disseminate 50MAWSP messages during the period of lockdown and commencement of skills transfer exercises by NCDs to ministry staff to enhance the capacity of the latter to sustain the platform after the consultants' contracts expire.

With the response measures outlined above, project activities have continued albeit it at a much slower pace. It is envisaged that a return to normalcy post-COVID-19 will be fairly seamless

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as a lot of the groundwork for key activities, particularly national launches, will have been undertaken already.

Furthermore, a full-scale marketing/promotion campaign to be undertaken by specialized media firms post-COVID-19 is expected to position the platform as the go-to resource for women in business to relaunch their entrepreneurial activities.

## Virtual Meeting of the Bureau Addresses Current Concerns



File Photo/ Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Ministers Hon. Lantoso Rakotomalala (L) chairing the Council of Ministers Meeting in November 2019 flanked by Zambia's Minister of National Development Hon. Emmanuel Chiteme

The 32nd Meeting of the COMESA Council of Bureau of Ministers took place on 15 April 2020. The virtual meeting was chaired by the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Handcraft of Madagascar Madame Lantoso Rakotomalala Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Ministers.

Key issues on the agenda included the COMESA's response to the COVID - 19 pandemic, preparation for the 2020 COMESA Summit, status of Member States contributions, update on the acquisition of new COMESA Headquarters, and human resource matters for Secretariat staff.

In attendance were the H.E. Mr. Tarek Chalabi, Assistant Minister of Trade and Industry of Egypt and Vice Chairperson and State Minister of Trade and Industry of Ethiopia H.E. Ambassador Mesganu Arga Moach, the Rapporteur of the Bureau.

Addressing the bureau, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe recognized the tremendous challenges that Member States are facing and their efforts to preserve life and public health whilst mitigating adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and businesses.

"The Secretariat is working on measures to support your efforts in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on our Member States economies. Such measures include developing guidelines that will ensure that intra-COMESA trade continues without impediments especially in terms of essential goods such as food, fuel, medicines and medical equipment," the SG informed the Bureau.

The proposed policy interventions, she said, are aimed at supporting Member States manage the pandemic so as to reduce its adverse impact and its aftermath. Key interventions identified include support to Member States in carrying out cross border trade and facilitating trade along key transport corridors as an essential component of building countries' resilience towards containing COVID-19 and impacts on livelihoods.

In addition, the speedy implementation of the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area has been identified as critical in ensuring that trade especially for essential supplies continues through online and digital transactions given the physical restrictions that are currently in place.

Further, COMESA is working with the African Union and other Regional Economic Communities in coming up with harmonized efforts to address the challenges of the pandemic.

The Chairperson noted that as COMESA re-focuses its activities at this time, it should take into account the need to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Member States.

"Within the framework of preserving public health, essential goods such as medicine, food, fuel and other similar items should still be able to reach areas which require them," Hon Rakotomalala said.

On the COMESA Summit, the Bureau asked the Secretariat and the Government of Egypt to continue engaging on the matter given the prevailing circumstances. Egypt is host of the 2020 Summit, which was expected to take place in the second half of the year.

The report of the Bureau will be presented before the Council of Ministers meeting which is now under preparation





# Malawi Products set to Access Wider Market

***As Project to Enhance Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary Standards is Launched***

Malawi is set to benefit from the enhanced market access for its products through a new COMESA led programme known as the Prioritizing Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary Investments for Market Access (P-IMA).

The programme is funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) of the World Trade Organization and also receives financial support from the European Union Trade Facilitation Programme. Under this initiative, evidence-based approach is applied to help inform decisions on where to invest in Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary (SPS) capacity building.

Malawi's primary focus under P-IMA is to boost agriculture exports and its trade capacity in its targeted value chains involving honey, horticulture, livestock and oils seeds/legumes. To prepare the country to benefit from this project, COMESA Secretariat is working with the Malawi Ministries responsible for trade and agriculture. Last month, the inaugural meeting of the stakeholders was conducted in Lilongwe, which was also used to launch the initiative.

COMESA's Director for Industry and Agriculture, Mrs. Providence Mavumbi said the project will help Malawi to improve its exports to the region and beyond. For the past 10 years, Malawi's top agricultural export destinations have been Belgium, South Africa, Tanzania, Germany, Egypt, China, UK, U.S and Zimbabwe.

"Further, P-IMA helps to link investments in SPS capacity building to expected impacts on trade,



*Stakeholders at the P-IMA Launch in Malawi, March 2020*

as well as other national policy objectives, such as agricultural productivity, poverty reduction or gender impacts," the Director said. "It helps to make the business case for SPS investments, inform project development and supports fund-raising and resource mobilization for increased market access."

"P-IMA offers a transparent and participatory process to prioritize several different SPS investment options, based on the engagement of relevant stakeholders including government agencies, private sector stakeholders, academia, policy/research institutes and the use of the best available data and information," Mrs Mavumbi said

In 2014, when the development of the P-IMA framework was being done, Malawi used

the framework to mobilize resources for the development and implementation of the Malawi Programme for Aflatoxin Control (MAPAC).

The COMESA P-IMA was launched in December 2018, in Kampala, Uganda and so far, the process has been successfully rolled out in four out of the five COMESA countries under P-IMA namely; Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Malawi and Ethiopia.

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**Malawi's primary focus under P-IMA is to boost agriculture exports and its trade capacity in its targeted value chains involving honey.**

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## The COMESA Diary

**23-24**  
April 2020

7th Meeting of the Technical Working Group of the RCTG Carnet

**Organised by:** Yellow Card/ RCTG

**29-30**  
April 2020

5th Meeting of the IT Committee on the Digital Yellow Card

**Organised by:** Yellow Card/ RCTG

*NB: The meetings will be virtual*

# Regional Peace and Prosperity Index Set to Drop

**As Number of COVID-19 Cases Rise**



*File Photo/ Multi-stakeholders consultation meeting on the CPPI held in Zimbabwe*

The continuous spread of the Coronavirus in the region is expected to negatively affect the rating of Member States on the COMESA Peace and Prosperity Index (CPPI), experts at the COMESA Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) Unit have revealed.

Indications are that the current spread of the COVID-19 in the region is happening in an environment where countries are already overburdened by huge challenges that is set to disrupt the CPPI ratings.

Some of the challenges cited in the GPS report include climate change effects, terrorism, locust invasions in East Africa, which is threatening food security and effects of natural disasters like cyclone Idai and Kenneth in 2019 that killed and displaced many families. This is coupled with overburdened health systems - Malaria, Cancer, HIV and AIDS, Cholera, Ebola and other communicable diseases.

The resultant effects are that COMESA Member States are going to concentrate

resources in the health sector to contain the spread of the COVID 19," the Report says.

"Other areas of societal development are likely to suffer due to limited resources. This will leave some countries in the region more vulnerable to internal and external shocks that may pose a threat to national and regional peace and security," the Report says.

The analysis provided by GPS further notes

**Local gangs and negative forces such as rebel and terrorist groups may take advantage of this situation to enhance their territorial control.**

that the situation is likely to worsen for countries that have been projected for low levels on the CPPI as compared to those projected for high CPPI for 2020-2021.

"What this means is that countries that have built their resilience overtime, will likely come out of the pandemic stronger as

compared to those that remain structurally vulnerable. In addition, the situation could worsen for countries that have emerged from long periods of conflict."

Local gangs and negative forces such as rebel and terrorist groups may take advantage of this situation to enhance their territorial control. With four terrorist groups and approximately 25 rebel groups being active in the region, the security situation may worsen with the spread of the virus, the experts added.

Some of the negative effects are economic hardship associated with the impact of the virus is likely to lead to the emergence of criminal gangs specially in urban and rural areas with limited government presence. The gangs, if not controlled will be a source of insecurity, the Report says.

According to the COMESA Early Warning Structural Vulnerability Assessment Framework (COMWARN SVA) projection for 2020 -2021 released in November 2019, the region was projected for medium level CPPI.

This is largely going to be driven by continued investment in infrastructure, investment in human resources through investment in both secondary and tertiary education and value addition in agriculture. These sectors are likely to be impacted by the spread of COVID-19 due to limited resources allocated to these sectors. This, in the long run will derail the regional CPPI, concludes the Report.