

Free Flow of Traffic Across COMESA, EAC, SADC Expected as Tripartite Ministers Approve New Harmonized Guidelines

“Those mobility restrictions to contain COVID-19 have affected regional trade and transport, and resulted in shortage of goods, and long queues at ports of entry and exit, translating into increased cost of doing business and consumer prices, but this will be a thing of the past,” said the Chairperson



The Tripartite Council of Ministers of three regional economic communities in the eastern and southern Africa have approved new harmonized trade and transport facilitation guidelines.

The Tripartite Guidelines for the Movement of Persons, Goods and Services across the Tripartite Region During COVID-19 Pandemic, consolidates those developed earlier by COMESA, the East African Community and the Southern Africa Development Community into one, which will henceforth be applied across their 28 Member States.

They include: the COMESA-Guidelines for Movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the EAC-Administrative Guidelines to Facilitate Movement of Goods and Services during COVID-19 Pandemic;

and the SADC-Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport Operations across the Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The harmonization of these guidelines was necessitated by the overlapping membership of countries among the three economic blocs and the shared traffic on their transport corridors, which have been negatively impacted by the current COVID-19 response measures.

In a meeting conducted Thursday, July 2020 via teleconference, the Ministers directed the Tripartite Task Force to establish the required institutional arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the Guidelines. Ministers in charge of trade and transport and other government officials attended the meeting.

The Ministers also agreed on the development and integration of electronic surveillance systems to monitor drivers' health and movement of trucks, which will be undertaken by Member/Partner States. They noted that COVID-19 cross-border restrictions have mainly targeted truck drivers leading to their stigmatization. This has not only affected the drivers and local communities, but also negatively impacted the ongoing efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

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COMESA COVID-19 Food Security Response Plan Underway

The COMESA Secretariat has developed a draft COVID-19 Regional Food and Nutrition Security Response Plan to improve agricultural productivity, enhance access to competitive markets and trade in agri-food commodities in the region.

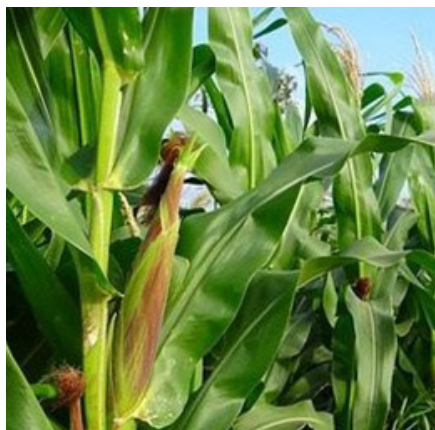
Implementation of the Plan is expected to create synergies and complement existing initiatives targeting specific commodities and value chains that are critical for both regional and national food security and nutrition, and with strong linkage to smallholder agriculture.

Agriculture and environment experts from COMESA countries who attended the 7th Joint Technical Meeting on Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources conducted virtually, Tuesday 28 July 2020 were informed that the draft plan has been shared with their respective governments for further inputs. Once approved by Member States, it will be used to help the region address food security and nutrition needs of the populations that are most vulnerable to the pandemic.

Speaking during the opening of the meeting, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe noted that a number of agricultural projects have been put on hold in the region due to the pandemic and this will negatively affect the sector, hence the need for a strategic response plan for the next five years.

"This Plan will help the region deal with food insecurity worsened by various threats including floods, recurrent droughts, fall army-worm and the worst locust infestation in decades that have destroyed crops and vegetation," Ms Kapwepwe added. She was represented by the Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Dr. Kipyego Cheluget.

According to COMESA agriculture experts, COVID-19 risks escalating further, the current food insecurity arising from the negative impact of the containment measures on the agri-food system. These



include restrictions on movement and availability of labour for farm work, difficulties in moving food from rural to urban areas, limitations to agro-input supplies and availability, closed markets, restrictions on agriculture extension and advisory services and financing agricultural activities due to curtailed banking services.

"This is likely to disrupt further the entire food supply chains from production to processing, packaging, transporting, marketing and consumption resulting in rising staple food prices, food insecurity, loss of livelihoods and incomes and increased need for social safety nets," COMESA's Agriculture Economist, Joel Okwir said during his presentation to the meeting.

Other key support intervention programmes that COMESA Secretariat is implementing include: the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Market Programme (RECAMP), Joint Industrialization Pilot Programme between Zambia and Zimbabwe, Reinforcing Veterinary Governance (VET-GOV) in partnership with AU-IBAR – Funded by EU and AU, the Climate Change Programme, Prioritizing of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Investments for Market Access (P-IMA), the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation plan (COMSHIP), the Biotechnology and Biosafety Programme and the CBC Agro-Industry Seed.

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of the Tripartite Task Force Dr Stergomena Tax, who is the Executive Secretary of SADC.

With the Tripartite guidelines in place, she noted, the smooth flow of traffic for goods and services will ensure economic development of Member and partner States who have been affected by the pandemic and help them build their economies once again.

The Tripartite Council Chairperson who was represented by Assistant Minister for Foreign Trade, Agreements and International Relations of Egypt, Hon. Tarek Shalaby, said the harmonization of guidelines presents an opportunity towards the realization of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) which was signed by the Tripartite Heads of State and Government in June, 2015.

"The attainment of tripartite and continental integration can only be realized with the harmonization of regional initiatives and overcoming the challenges of overlaps and multiple membership of COMESA, EAC and SADC," he said.

Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe and Mr Kenneth Bagamuhunda, the representative of the Secretary General of EAC, Ambassador Liberat Mfumukeko attended the meeting among other delegates.



Zambia Readies to Deal with Structural Vulnerabilities under the COMESA Early Warning System Support



Zambia Government officials at the COMESA workshop in Chisamba, Zambia

COMESA has been hosting national multi-stakeholders' consultative forums to sensitize Member States on its Early Warning (COMWARN) System Vulnerability Assessments (SVAs) to establish response measures that can help in the reduction of such vulnerabilities. So far, four countries including Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya and lately Zambia have been covered.

Last week, 24 July 2020, Permanent Secretaries (PSS) from the Government of Zambia and members of the civil society attended the COMESA SVAs strategy and the Continental Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and provided inputs on the implementation of the programme.

The one day session, was conducted in Chisamba, near Lusaka and was a follow-up on the national multi-stakeholder consultations conducted in September 2018 and May 2019.

Zambia's Minister in the Office of the Vice President Olipah Phiri, who opened the forum, said the government was on course to undergo a voluntarily structural vulnerability assessment in

line with the African Union resolution. To effectively respond to all emergencies, she said, the government has prioritized the establishment of a people-centred early warning system to ensure timely dissemination of information to communities at risk.

"To this end, the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) under the auspices of the World Bank is currently putting up a modern National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) which will act as a command and control centre for handling all emergencies in the country," she said.

Situation Room

She described the training as timely given that Zambia is also preparing for the General Elections in 2021. She revealed that the government will establish a Situation Room soon to act as an early warning system for monitoring all the indicators that may trigger internal conflicts.

The meeting noted that most conflicts are triggered by climate change related factors such as access to water and land due to increase in draughts. For Sub Sahara Africa alone, climate change accounts

for about 30% of internally displaced persons. However politically, socially or economically motivated conflicts also contribute to the internal displacement of people hence the need to have structural vulnerability and resilience assessment and mitigation strategy.

With the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, Member States such as Zambia can utilize an efficient early warning system to track, monitor and prepare adequately for any disaster.

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, urged the PSS to champion the SVA and CSVRA processes at the national level and start the process of taking the process forward by officially writing to the AU.

"COMESA and the AU will work together to mobilize the necessary resources for the CSVRA process and we look forward to Zambia being a leader in the region in volunteering and undergoing the process," she said in a statement presented by Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes, Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget.



Sudan's New Law Allowing Women to Travel with their Children Hailed

by Sudan recognizes women as equal partners in making decisions about their children, and is in line with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

"This is a demonstration of the progress that the country is making to conform to regional and international standards to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and the achievement of gender equality and women empowerment in all spheres," the Director said.

Under Sudan's Muslim Personal Law Act of 1991, only the father could decide if the child could travel abroad, even if he was a former husband to the mother.

The move by the Government of Sudan to allow women to travel outside the country with their children without their father's permission, and for criminalizing female genital mutilation has won accolades from COMESA gender experts.

Director of Gender and Social Affairs Division Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde says the move

Taking Stock of the Implementation of Regional Guidelines, two Months After

There is need for establishment of a public-private border management consultative committee to foster dialogue, collaboration and awareness on new regulatory requirements and response mechanism. This will provide a framework for continued intra-regional trade during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This was part of the recommendations that emerged from virtual a virtual meeting with regional stakeholders from the public and private sectors to discuss the ongoing implementation of the COMESA regional guidelines for movements of essential goods and supplies across the region.

The forum which was hosted by the COMESA Business Council, last week, was convened to take stock of the implementation of the COMESA regional guidelines, two months since they were introduced, in May this year.

Participants noted that whilst the focus has been on essential goods relating to food, beverages and health, there was need to consider all goods as essential to livelihoods and health of regional economies. They urged governments to provide exceptions to facilitate the

movement of other goods/ services of high economic significance not covered under essential goods.

Discussions focused on the varied levels of implementation including bilateral, tripartite and continental approaches and the experience of the private sector in moving their goods across the region. Key challenges discussed were testing requirements and quarantining of truck drivers, relay systems, inadequate information on the Covid-19 response measures, lack of consistency on classification of essential goods, delays and other restrictions

Digital Trade Facilitation

Other recommendations made were to increase private sector investment for industrial development and infrastructure to improve border efficiency through digital trade facilitation (e-trade and e-logistics). They also emphasized the need for governments to increase investment in local manufacturing hubs and production capacities to strengthen alternative sourcing and regional value chains in Africa.

Participants underlined the importance of

maintaining safe trade through application of health and safety measures while balancing trade and trade facilitation and called on COMESA to support SMEs through stimulus packages, access to markets, and among other interventions.

The panelists included Mr. Ian Hirschfeld, Head of Public Policy for Coca-Cola Southern and Eastern, Mrs. Temitope Iluyemi Director Global Government Relations for Africa, Procter & Gamble, Mr. Mike Fitzmaurice Executive Director, Federation of East and Southern African Road Transport Associations (FESARTA) and Mr. William Ojonyo, Board Member and Member of the COVID-19 Taskforce, Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA).

The public sector was represented by Zambia's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr. Mushuma Mulenga and the COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr. Christopher Onyango. CBC Chief Executive Officer Ms. Sandra Uwera moderated the discussion.



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