

# COMESA NEWS

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## COMESA Offers 18 Scholarships to Students Undertaking Master's Degree in Regional Integration

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# Editorial

## The Successful Rollout of the COMESA Virtual Degree Programme is Timely



Finally, the COMESA Masters Degree in Regional Integration is off the ground. By the end of March this year, two universities, out of the 22 that are participating in the programme, had admitted their first cohort of students. These are Kenyatta University of Kenya and the University of Mauritius. The virtual programme represents the first steps towards a future, full-fledged entity complete in brick and mortar. Seven universities have signed MoUs with

COMESA on the implementation of the programme. Besides, COMESA Secretariat and partners have secured funds to offer scholarship to eligible applicants. It has taken tenacity of the lead team at the Secretariat and the lead institution; Kenyatta University to get here. The conceptualization of the university was motivated by the need to strengthen COMESA and Member States' ability to implement the numerous protocols, decisions and Acts by strengthening the institutional and human capital and related support mechanisms. While Member States have been amenable to decisions that their ministers and leaders make from time to time, to a great extent, the domestication of the same has remained a challenge. Within the region, a small number of institutions of higher learning provide appropriate, flexible and affordable range of regional integration programmes. This partially, explains why the rate of progress of regional integration in the COMESA region, and indeed in the rest of the continent has been slow. Therefore, the commencement of this programme is opportune given that Member States will constantly be engaged in multiple trade negotiations and agreements, all of which require high technical skills and evidence-based analysis.

*Mwangi Gakunga*

## COMESA INSTITUTIONS

COMESA Clearing House  
COMESA Monetary Institute  
Trade and Development Bank  
African Trade Insurance Agency  
COMESA Competition Commission  
PTA Reinsurance Company  
COMESA Regional Investment Agency  
Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute  
COMESA Federation of Women in Business

### Specialized Agencies

Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa  
COMESA Business Council  
Regional Association of Energy Regulators in Eastern and Southern Africa  
East African Power Pool

### Judicial Arm

COMESA Court of Justice

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**“Some NTBs have remained unresolved for periods ranging from one year to more than a decade,” Dr Christopher Onyango**

## New Regional Forum Established to Deal with Escalation of NTBs

Small Scale traders crossing the Uganda/DRC border

COMESA has established the Non-Tariff Barriers Regional Forum comprising of National Monitoring Committees and NTBs Focal Points. This new structure is aimed at further strengthening the Trade and Customs Committee and Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee as part of the institutional structures for the elimination of NTBs at the regional level.

The first meeting of the Forum took place on March 16, 2021, attended by over 60 NTB National Monitoring Committees and NTB focal points from the COMESA Member States. The objective was to learn about the provisions of the Revised COMESA NTB's Regulations and Working Procedures focusing on the institutional arrangements and provisions for identification and elimination of NTB's.

The establishment of the Forum follows the decision of the 41st Council of Ministers, meeting in November last year, which adopted the Revised COMESA Regulations on the Elimination of NTBs and Working Procedures.

Addressing the delegates, COMESA Director of Trade, Dr Christopher Onyango attributed the prevalence of reported and unreported Non-Tariff Barriers to the constrained intra-regional trade noting that the Member States

have justified most of these as measures necessary to regulate trade.

“To date, intra-COMESA NTBs constitute 21.9% of total NTBs reported in the Tripartite online reporting, monitoring and eliminating mechanism, out of which 82% emanate from operational issues while the remaining 18% are policies/measures that have resulted in NTBs,” the Director said.

He expressed concern that although all Member States have appointed effective NTBs Focal Points, only five had formalized and notified the composition of their National Monitoring Committees (NMCs) to the Secretariat. A well functioning NMC is critical to the implementation of the Regulations and elimination of NTBs.

Noting that the use of NTBs has escalated following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Director observed that worldwide, they have become the major trade policy tool to protect domestic economies, accounting for on average 55% of the implemented protectionist interventions.

“Some NTBs have remained unresolved for periods ranging from one year to more than a decade. In contrast, since

2009, only 20% of all implemented protectionist interventions could be attributed to an increase in tariffs.

“This explains why the Secretariat, has continued to foster engagement with Member States to address the shortcomings that had stalled implementation of the NTB Regulations and prepared working procedures/modalities to facilitate their effective implementation,” he added.

The three days meeting was a critical step towards ensuring Member States do not fall back to uncoordinated restrictive trade policies whenever there is a crisis. For such strategies do not only fuel help anti-trade free trade rhetoric but result in an even stronger slow-down in the economic growth of our economies.

The meeting marked the beginning of a process where the elimination of NTB's will now be controlled through strict adherence to the provisions of the COMESA NTB's Regulations. It is expected that effective implementation of a rules-based approach to addressing NTB's will result in a considerable increase in intra-COMESA trade.



File: Cargo truck under the RCTG Carnet preparing to leave the port of Mombasa, Kenya

## COMESA, AFREXIMBANK Sign Deal to Implement US\$1billion Continental Transit Scheme

COMESA and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) have signed an agreement to implement the COMESA Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme, commonly known as RCTG-CARNET.

This marks the beginning of the implementation of the Bank's US\$1billion AfCFTA Adjustment Facility. This will support countries from significant tariff revenue losses as a result of the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement, of which about US\$200 million is earmarked for the COMESA region.

President and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Afreximbank, Prof. Benedict Oramah and the Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG Carnet) Dr Elirehema Doriye signed the agreement in a virtual ceremony on Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

The Agreement set the stage for the implementation of the Continental Transit Guarantee Scheme using the COMESA RCTG under which the Afreximbank will be the regional and continent-wide guarantor. It will provide transit bonds covering the full range of borders that goods are required to cross. This will be done in collaboration with the African Union, COMESA and other

Regional Economic Communities. Through the scheme, Afreximbank will ensure that, when goods do not complete their transit, sums are paid in line with the duties and taxes that would have been required, thereby enhancing tax collection for African nations. Besides, the transit guarantees provided by the Bank will enable businesses to release working capital otherwise tied up as collateral against transit bonds, while also accelerating the movement of goods across borders. By speeding up transit times and reducing costs, the scheme will provide a boost to African manufacturers, ensuring they can easily access the inputs they need for their business and enabling them to pass savings to consumers.

Currently, African States require businesses transiting goods through their countries to secure transit bonds, which protect against the risk of transit goods being disposed-off in the transit countries. However, the limited implementation of regional transit guarantee schemes means that traders are required to obtain national bonds for each border they cross. As a result, transit costs in African countries are 63% higher compared to the average in developed countries and 135% higher than in Europe.

Prof. Oramah described the launch of the

COMESA-AFREXIMBANK Collaboration on RCTG Carnet as a milestone in Africa's journey towards deepening regional integration and a key tool for delivering on the vision of the African Continental Free Trade Area. It will accelerate trade, reduce the cost of trading, release capital for businesses investment, improve the bankability of intra-African trade, and in the end, reduce prices for consumers.

"With this COMESA RCTG scheme, the Cape to Cairo road project will become a financially viable cross-continental trade route," Prof. Oramah stated.

Studies show that the average costs of freight as a percentage of the total value of imports is 11.4% compared to 6.8% in developed nations. Transit costs in the region are estimated at around US\$450 per truck per day. By implementing an effective transit guarantee scheme the continent will save more than US\$300 million per year.

Dr Doriye, in his remarks, said by joining the continental scheme, the implementation of the COMESA RCTG will be accelerated beyond COMESA and promote the implementation of the AfCFTA amongst its members.

"Reaching an Agreement might not be that easy implementing the Agreement is equally challenging and, in this regard, I would like to assure you that COMESA Council of RCTG will provide the necessary support to ensure the successful implementation of the Agreement," he said.

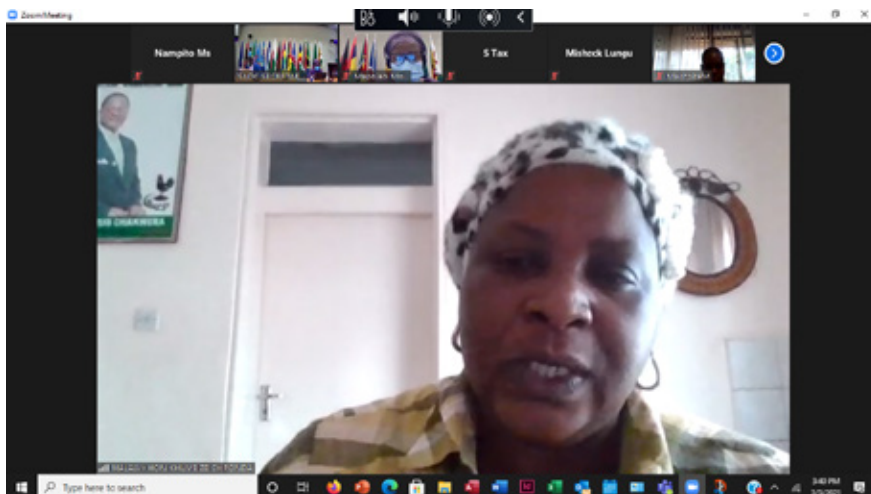
Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe noted that the reduction or elimination of tariffs would greatly reduce the transaction costs across the continent

"It is however imperative that the tariff reduction should be complimented with trade facilitation instruments, such as, the RCTG Carnet -to reduce the high transit and transport costs and boost productivity," she said in a statement delivered by Assistant Secretary General Administration & Finance Dr Dev Haman.



# Ease of Cross Border Movement of Persons Expected

## as Tripartite Ministers Approve Facilitation Guidelines



Hon. Khumbize Chiponda addressing the Meeting

The Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee for Trade, Customs, Finance, Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs in March approved guidelines to facilitate the safe mass movement of persons and personal goods across the region while mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

The guidelines will subsequently be tabled before the next meeting of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Council of Ministers, planned to take place by June this year, for final approval and adoption.

In their 1st Extra-ordinary Tripartite Sectoral Meeting with Ministers responsible for health on March 4, 2021, the Committee reviewed the draft guidelines which are built upon the principles adopted in July 2020 by the Council on cross-border movement of goods and services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tripartite guidelines will be harmonized with the national guidelines for smooth re-opening of air, land and sea borders for the mass movement of persons and personal goods while preventing the spread of COVID-19 across borders within the three regional

blocs.

Based on health analysis and epidemiological situation of respective Member/ Partner States and countries across the globe, the Ministers agreed to ease and remove the current suspension and restrictions on the cross border (inter-State) movement.

They further agreed thus: "The movement of people should resume through a process whereby Member/ Partner States mutually negotiate agreements between/among themselves based on inter-alia similar COVID-19 epidemiological situation."

Speaking during the official opening, Chairperson of the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee, Hon. Khumbize Chiponda, who is also the Malawi Minister of Health urged the Member/ Partner States to ensure that they domesticate the tripartite guidelines and align them to the national guidelines to achieve the desired objectives.

"This is the only way that the region shall realize the benefits that shall come with the development of the COVID guidelines as this will result in normalization

of economic activities amidst the pandemic," Minister Chiponda said.

Chairperson of the Tripartite Taskforce, Dr Stergomena Tax, who is the Executive Secretary of SADC, called for the speedy harmonization of policies that have been formulated during the COVID era to create an enabling environment for economic development.

"May I appeal that we focus on a bigger picture, to reach consensus on pending issues, and in doing so facilitate a safe environment for economic activities and trade, and as such, tripartite integration which is very critical to the creation of jobs and wealth, and the enhancement of standards of living of our citizens," Dr Tax said.

Some of the areas, she said require uniformity includes the type of tests and protocols to be used for drivers and crews. These need to consider efficiency and turnaround time for results and the mutual recognition of test results and validity period, to contain the spread of COVID-19, and to avoid repeated testing as much as possible.

The Ministers' meeting was preceded by that of the tripartite senior officials for trade customs, finance, economic matters and home/internal affairs.

“.....  
**The movement of people should resume through a process whereby Member/ Partner States mutually negotiate agreements between/among themselves based on inter-alia similar COVID-19 epidemiological situation.”**



## COMESA Offers 18 Scholarships to Students Undertaking Master's Degree in Regional Integration

COMESA Secretariat has awarded 18 scholarships worth USD 50,100 to students admitted to a master's degree programme in Regional Integration at Kenyatta University of Kenya and the University of Mauritius. The sponsorship was facilitated through support from the European Union and the Organization of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the TradeCom II Capacity Building programme.

In 2010, the 28th COMESA Council of Ministers meeting decided to establish a professional or graduate school on regional integration to foster cooperation in research and development in the COMESA region in line with Articles 127 and 128 of the Treaty. Subsequently, COMESA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with participating universities to offer training and undertake conventional research as tools for analyzing impacts and supporting innovations to address development challenges in the region.

The two-year Masters of Regional Integration programme is a unique multi-disciplinary professional course designed

to build the capacity of public sector officials working on trade, economic integration and international cooperation issues. In addition, the programme is relevant to private sector stakeholders, including private firms/organizations, media practitioners, chambers of commerce, manufacturer and consumer associations.

The programme is hosted by Kenyatta University (Kenya) and is offered in collaboration with 21 other universities in COMESA Member States. So far, COMESA has signed a memorandum of understanding with six universities, including Kenyatta University, University of Mauritius, Open University of Mauritius, ISGE of Burundi, University of Zambia and University of Zimbabwe.

The programme offers tailor-made courses best suited for sound conceptual, policy and practical training to foster all areas of integration in COMESA, including economic, social and political integration. By expanding the pool of experts, the programme is expected to address capacity constraints and strengthen implementation of

various commitments, including legal, economic, social and political areas in Member States.

Commencement of this programme comes at a time when Member States are engaged in multiple negotiations e.g. the Tripartite Free Trade Area, the African Continental Free Trade Area, Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and other bilateral agreements, all of which require high technical skills and evidence-based analysis.

Based on the Scholarship Award Criteria, Kenyatta University received 13 scholarships in these inaugural scholarships, whereas the University of Mauritius received five out of a total of 30 students who have commenced learning. The students undertaking the virtual studies in the two universities hail from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, as well as Ghana and South Africa.



Indeni Refinery plant in Zambia

## Zambia, Zimbabwe to Implement Joint Industrialization Strategy

Zambia and Zimbabwe signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 18th March 2021 to implement a joint industrialization project spearheaded by COMESA Secretariat. The Joint Industrialization Project (JIP) will promote self-sustained, balanced and inclusive economic growth between the two countries. It will provide opportunities for the private sector to benefit from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) through enhanced competitiveness.

Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry of Zambia, Hon. Christopher Yaluma and his Zimbabwe Counterpart Dr. Sekai Nzenza signed the MoU virtually with COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe witnessing.

Ms Kapwepwe said the success of the project would enable the two Member States to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic transformation through industrialization.

"Once successful, the pilot project will be upscaled to other Member States in the region," she said.

According to the 2020 World Bank estimates, the average manufacturing value added as a percentage of GDP for the COMESA region stood at 10% while that of South East Asia was at 18%. This indicates that the COMESA region and the African continent at large needs structural economic transformation through industrialization.

Minister Yaluma said the project came at the right time as it fully supports the Zambian industrialization and job creation agenda for the country. He said it will enable the two countries to share ideas and resources for industrial development and further strengthen the working relationship between Zambia and Zimbabwe in the field of industrialization.

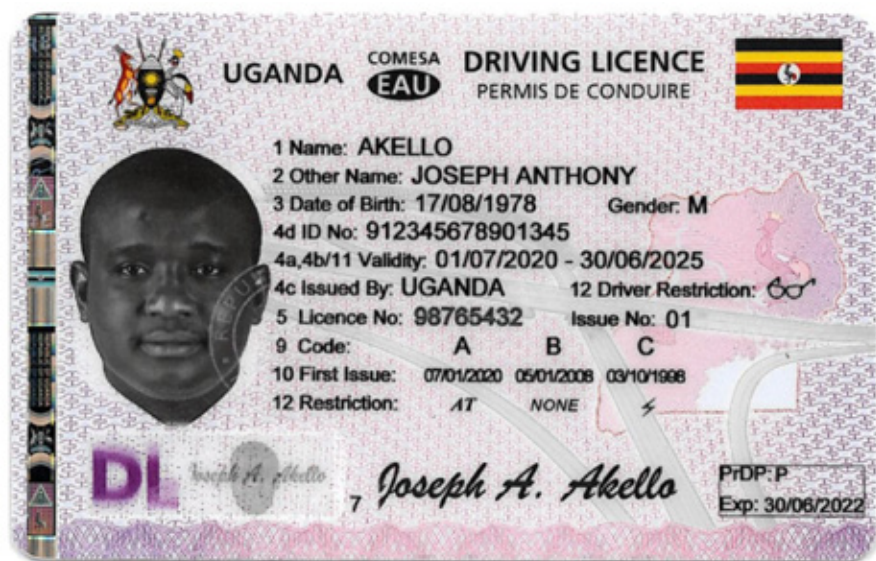
He thanked the COMESA Secretariat for facilitating the milestones so far achieved towards the implementation of the Project. These include drafting the Roadmap and an indicative action plan, formulating the MoU by the joint technical working group of the two member states and submitting the documents to respective Permanent Secretaries of the two Ministries which adopted them.

Hon Nzenza said that the project will result in increased private sector participation, effective utilization of the Public Private Partnership framework, effective coordination, enhanced investment in science, technology and innovation including the availability of both human and financial resources necessary for its implementation.

She further stated that the project will harness the competitive advantage of the two countries resulting in improved product development for export into and out of the region thereby creating wealth for the citizens and the countries at large.

"Our two countries will ensure that the implementation of the project shall be done according to the project implementation plan through value chains from both countries so that no losses are made due to the long process of implementation," said Hon Nzenza.





Sample of the harmonized driver's license

## Uganda Takes Lead in Adopting Tripartite Standards on Drivers' Licensing

Uganda became the first country in the eastern and southern African region to convert its driver's licensing categories to conform to the regionally harmonized Tripartite Transit and Transport Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) standards. The country was expected to commence issuing of the new licenses from the 1st of March 2021, according to Mr. Winstone Katushabe, Commissioner Transport Regulation and Safety in Uganda.

The TTTFP drivers' license categories and driving license card, are based on the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the United Nations road traffic regulations. Uganda amended its Traffic and Road Safety Act of 1998 in May 2020.

"This has enabled the harmonization through adoption of the ISO Driver License Categories, Driving License Card Format and Professional Driving Permit (PrDP). Uganda has also redesigned the Driver License Card in accordance with the TTTFP standard specification," Mr Katushabe stated.

Further, Uganda had obtained a single Issuer Identification Number (IIN) from the American Bankers Association, for licensing drivers. This was granted on 5 January 2021.

The TTTFP is an undertaking of the three Regional Economic Communities namely COMESA, East Africa Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). It is a flagship programme under the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF 11).

The programme addresses cross border transport and trade challenges. These include high transport costs and delays through the implementation of harmonised road transport policies, laws, regulations, systems and standards that affect drivers, loads, vehicles and road infrastructure in the countries of the Eastern Africa and Southern Africa (EAS) region.

The official further confirmed that Uganda was pursuing other measures towards the implementation of TTTFP Vehicle Load Management Agreement (VLMA) and the Multilateral Cross-Border Road Transport Agreement (MCBRTA). Towards this end, Uganda begun the process of updating regulations to operationalize the amended Traffic and Road Safety Act, based on the VLMA/ MCBRTA Model Laws and Regulations/ Principles.

In addition, Uganda outsourced the motor vehicle inspection function, by contracting an international inspection agency SGS to ensure compliance with standards, on behalf of the government. SGS constructed several vehicle inspection stations on major routes radiating from Kampala, the capital city under a public-private-partnership being promoted by the TTTFP.

According to Mr Katushabe, the standards applied for the inspections were to a great extent aligned to the TTTFP standards. Furthermore, Uganda would initiate implementation of a framework for an Automated Driver Testing System during this year.

Once this is in place, it is anticipated that driving schools would upgrade their systems to ensure that trainees obtained the required competencies and skills to pass the driver's test. Automated licensing system for passenger service vehicles (PSVs) are in existence and regulations developed for the implementation of a similar system for licensing goods vehicles. This includes Dangerous Goods Vehicles Regulations, which are largely adapted from the TTTFP instruments.

Among institutional reforms done was the designation of the department responsible for transport regulation and safety in the Ministry of Works and Transport (MOWT) as the competent authority for registration of motor vehicles.

MOWT's motor vehicle registration and licensing system will form the backbone for the proposed National Transport Information System (NTIS), whose development process will begin in the 2021/2022 fiscal year. Hitherto, motor vehicle registration in the country was undertaken by the Uganda Revenue Authority.

In the short term, Uganda will seek to re-validate all motor vehicle records including issuance of new number plates in accordance with the Tripartite Road Transport Legal Instruments.



# Gender Experts Meet to Review Programmes' Implementation



Image/File: 12th COMESA Meeting of the technical committee on Gender and Social Affairs

COMESA Gender and Women's Affairs experts held their 13th Meeting on 22 March 2021 to discuss progress on the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women through implementation of policy and legal frameworks, ministerial council decisions, programmes and projects.

The objective of the three-day virtual meeting was to consider the progress made by both the Secretariat and Member States on the implementation of the decisions of the 10th meeting of the COMESA ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs held last year.

As a way of ensuring progress towards attaining national, regional, and continental goals on gender and women empowerment, Member States and the Secretariat are obliged to provide updates on the implementation of the council decisions.

The agenda of the meeting included the report on the 50 Million African Women Speak Project- an initiative which fits well in the current times where digital platforms hold the answer to access to information, services, and market opportunities for women in business. They also received an update on the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative and the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project both of which have a strong focus on the creation of a conducive operating environment for small scale

cross border traders -majority of whom are women.

The meeting also received and discussed a report on the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) initiative, which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of Small, and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) including women and youth in selected value chains and access to markets.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Permanent Secretary in Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr Mushuma Mulenga appreciated the meeting coming shortly after the international Women's' Day when governments, private sector, community groups, professional associations, women's networks, celebrate women around the world, and their achievements in social, economic, cultural, and political spheres.

"It is the period when we celebrate, raise awareness about women's equality, calling for gender parity, economic empowerment of women, and elimination of violence against women and girls," he said.

Assistant Secretary General for Programmes in COMESA, Dr. Kipyego Cheluget said despite the progress recorded so far in the advancement of women, current data shows that majority of them globally work in the informal

sector, and experience gender-based violence more than men.

"The issue of diseases like HIV is still high among females than males, illiteracy rates are higher among females than males, more women than men have limited access to information and business opportunities, fewer women than men are in decision making positions, and COVID-19 has negatively affected women more than men among many other issues," he noted.

Within this broad spectrum of issues that affect women and men, the COMESA Secretariat has been involved in redressing the legal and policy gaps including programme implementation disparities that contravene the rights of women, men, girls, and boys in the cultural, social, political, and economic spheres.

To promote gender equality, Dr Cheluget said the Secretariat is pushing for the availability of statistics to support gender responsive planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for mainstream programs in COMESA.

To this end, the Secretariat is working towards generating gender disaggregated data to strengthen availability of regional gender statistics in different sectors including small scale cross border trade.



## Region Needs to Focus more on Border Facilitation and less on Controls

There is a need to shift approaches in border management in the region to focus more on facilitation as opposed to control, to facilitate the free movement of persons. This will boost regional trade and lead to higher levels of integration and economic development.

This was expressed at the 11th meeting of the COMESA Chiefs of Immigration held virtually on March 2, 2021. At the meeting, it was observed that free movement of COMESA citizens to the other Member States has been constrained for years despite the adoption of the Protocol on the Gradual Relation of Visa Requirements and implementation of the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, the Right of Establishment and Residence. The Protocol was adopted in 2001 but is yet to be in force.

Speaking during the meeting Dr Kipyego Cheluget, Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes in COMESA, said the Member States have so far agreed on several programmes which will eventually lead to the implementation of the above protocols. However, this will be achieved much faster if countries focused less on border controls towards border facilitation without compromising on State security.

The meeting was convened to consider the progress report of the small-scale

cross border trade initiative and a report on the migration component of COMESA Trade Facilitation Project all funded under the 11th European Development Fund Programme.

Dr Cheluget pointed out that trade and migration were drivers of development and therefore accurate data was required, which unfortunately lacks in the level of disaggregation for evidence-based policymaking.

“It is abundantly clear at regional and national levels that there are significant variations in data availability that leads to compilation challenges,” he said.

To address this, COMESA is implementing the Southern African Migration Project under the auspices of the United Nations agencies including the International Labour Organization, the International Organization on Migration, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UNHCR.

COMESA is also working with Sweden to implement a project known as Developing Capacity in Migration Statistics, which will help increase national capacity in migration data collection for the effective management of migration. This will enhance the availability, quality and comparability of data, which are key in effective migration management.

Migration has been referenced under the Sustainable Development Goals target 10.7 which calls upon States to make efforts towards the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. Such facilitation can only be done through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. Besides, the COMESA Treaty provides for the creation of a fully integrated, internationally competitive regional community within which goods, services, capital and labour are free to move across borders.

The informal cross-border trade in the COMESA region has been identified as a vibrant micro-entrepreneurial sector with significant potential to help alleviate poverty, contribute to food security and serve as an empowerment tool for women and the youth if managed efficiently.

The following papers were also discussed during the meeting: Implementation of Developing Capacity in Migration Statistics project in COMESA, the Southern Africa Migration Management (SAMM) Project with a focus on COMESA Components, and the COMESA-MIEUX+ International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD/EU) Migration Project in addressing Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic.



# The 50 Million African Women Speak Platform Rolled-out in 13 States



Ethiopian President, Her Excellency Sahle-Worke Zewde

The launch of the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform continued apace with four countries conducting the events in the first quarter of this year. Mauritius was the first off the blocks with the unveiling of the project on 11 February 2021 in Port Louis.

With the launch, Mauritius became the tenth COMESA Member State to launch the platform which aims at facilitating a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs. The platform provides in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market.

Mauritius launch was presided over by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare Dr. Rooba Moorghen, who represented the Minister Hon. Kalpana Koonjoo-Shah.

Malawi followed closely thereafter on 18 March 2021 with the national launch presided by Malawi's Minister of Trade Hon. Sosten Gwengwe. He pledged his government's commitment to support the initiative saying:

"The platform would help women to develop market intelligence skills and build networks with fellow businesswomen in Malawi and beyond." He challenged the local implementation team to find a way to reach out to women who cannot access the digital platform so that they too can benefit.

Malawi's Minister for Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare Dr Patricia Kaliati, who attended the event virtually, described the initiative as "an opportunity to uplift Malawian women" and urged the various stakeholders to play their roles in ensuring its success.

Next was Sudan on March 4, 2021 with the Undersecretary in the Ministry of Social Development, Mr Mohamed Elshabik presiding. He expressed the country's commitment to harness technological capabilities to motivate women who are economically active, to join the platform by introducing them to it, increasing training opportunities, building capacity and providing finance for them.

"The launch of the 50 Million African Women Speak Platform in Sudan is happening at a crucial time in the country's history, at a time when they

are witnessing radical transformations in the march of women in Sudan after the victorious December revolution," Mr Elshabik said.

Ethiopian wrapped up the launches to become the 13th State to unveil the platform during a high-level event presided by the President Her Excellency Sahle-Worke Zewde in Addis Ababa on 18 March 2021.

"The platform will contribute to uplift women economically," President Zewde said. She urged the implementing institution in Ethiopia; Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, as well as other stakeholders to "work hard to take the platform to the intended beneficiaries".

The 50MAWS platform is jointly implemented by COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Funded by AfDB, it enables women in 38 countries in the three regional blocs to find information on how to run businesses, where to access financial services, how to create business opportunities online and where to access training resources, among others.



Effects of Climate Change. Credit: (Scott/Adobe Stock)

## COMESA Develops Climate Change Strategy

COMESA has developed a Climate Change Strategy as part of its efforts to ensure that cross-sectoral climate change issues are integrated into all its programmes. The Strategy will enable the organisation to operate as a green institution and provide guidance to the Secretariat, its organs, agencies and the Member States on ways of integrating climate change initiatives in their national priorities.

Member States are expected to gradually align their strategies to the COMESA Regional Climate Change Strategy, which was endorsed in November 2020 by the Council of Ministers. At the same meeting, the COMESA Regional Resilience Framework was also endorsed to guide the Member States on the key resilience areas of focus at the regional level. The framework is expected to

be operationalized and rolled out for implementation by the Member States this year.

According to a report prepared by the COMESA Climate Change Unit, two institutions of higher learning namely the University of Seychelles and the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) will provide climate-related capacity building in the region. COMESA has also applied for accreditation to the Global Climate Fund (GCF) and is awaiting a response.

Besides, a study on carbon neutrality was undertaken in 2020 and a report produced which guides the key proposed areas where COMESA can reduce and or offset its carbon print.

## 50m Women Platform ...

The events were conducted through a hybrid arrangement with a limited number of local participants gathering physically and the other guests joining virtually. High level representatives from the government, the African Development Bank and COMESA.

Chief Gender Officer at the African Development Bank (AfDB) Ms. Linet Miriti-Otieno who participated in some of the launches said 50MAWSP should become “the ‘Facebook’ of women entrepreneurs in Africa” noting that it possesses the potential to spur engagements that can lead to women’s economic transformation.

“We know that this project is not a magical bullet that will transform women’s entrepreneurship overnight. However, on the 50 million women platform, there can be 50 million ideas and solutions that will lead us to the future we want for African women entrepreneurs.”

While participating at the Ethiopian launch, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe remarked:

“This platform comes at a time when the need for businesses to transition from their traditional physical spaces into a new normal, where they operate online is not an option anymore; it is an imperative.”

Among those that participated in the separate events were Hon. Filsan Abdulahi, Ethiopian Minister for Women, Children and Youth, AfDB representatives for Malawi and Ethiopia Ms Eyerusalem Fasika and Dr Abdul Kamara. Others were the Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes in COMESA Dr Kipyego Cheluget, Director of Gender and Social Affairs, COMESA, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde and Chief Executive Officer of COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) Ms. Ruth Negash.

Other countries that launched the platform earlier are Zambia, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Eswatini, DR Congo, Egypt, Djibouti, and Tunisia.





Women package avocado for export in a warehouse in Kigali.

## Rwanda Prioritizes Horticulture, Livestock and Cereals for Investment in Health Standards

Rwanda has prioritized three value chains namely horticulture, livestock and livestock products covering dairy and honey and cereals under the Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary (SPS) Investments for Market Access (P-IMA) project.

This was revealed during the meeting to validate Rwanda's outcome report on P-IMA. The meeting held on 18 March 2021 also discussed the mainstreaming of SPS priorities into national policy and investment frameworks to enhance trade capacity for the country.

At the workshop, Rwanda Country Report was reviewed. The report was compiled after a series of sensitization, capacity building and continuous improvement sessions held in the country since September 2019 when the P-IMA Project was launched.

The report identified 14 SPS capacity building investment options out of an initially proposed 18 that were subjected to the P-IMA priority-setting framework.

According to the findings, about US\$ 9 million is required to implement all the 14 capacity building options that could potentially generate about \$255 million

worth of exports annually. However, since resources are limited, priorities were set based on a structured process of identifying SPS capacity building options that were relevant for market access, prior to agreed objectives and weights assigned to the decision criteria.

Speaking during the opening ceremony of the virtual meeting, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) Mr Jean Claude Musabyimana said Rwanda has had very limited export rejections by the United States and European Union on SPS issues. Even so, most agri-food exports from the country are susceptible to SPS compliance requirements.

Since 2012, the PS noted, there have been observable efforts including sector-specific strategies and interventions in addressing SPS challenges. Both Rwanda's Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (2018-2024) and the National Agricultural Policy (2018) recognizes the need to address SPS issues to access high-end consumer markets.

In effect, one of the strategic orientation of the plan is a focus on upgrading the

provision of SPS/quality standards for the horticulture, vegetable, poultry, pork and fisheries sectors.

"The plan intends to focus on two broad value chains namely animal resources and horticulture and therefore attention must be paid to SPS issues related to these value chains to facilitate agri-food trade particularly to high-end markets," Mr Musabyimana said in a speech read by Dr Charles Murekezi, Director General in charge of Agriculture Development in the MINAGRI.

In terms of regional trade, the recent WTO Trade Policy Review (2019) indicated that Rwanda's intra-Africa trade has expanded drastically from 35.2% in 2011 to 49.7% in 2017 with the main markets in Africa comprising of D R Congo, Kenya and Uganda.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe commended Rwanda for the commitment to address SPS issues and championing the P-IMA which will lead to increased trade capacity for the country.

"COMESA views the P-IMA framework as a unique planning and sector-wide engagement and resource mobilization tool," she said. "We encourage our Member States to use P-IMA to take stock of SPS capacity building needs, prioritize and cost investment options with the best returns and integrate them into national agriculture sector investment plans,"

Her speech was presented by the Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget.

The P-IMA project is funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and the Enhanced Integrated Facility (EIF). The Rwanda programme also benefited from support from the EU Trade Facilitation Programme.

COMESA rolled out the regional P-IMA Project through a high-level inception meeting conducted in 2019 in Rwanda.

# 12

## Zambia Receives Fuel Meters Calibration Equipment Worth \$155,000



Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget (2nd right) handing over the mobile prover to PS Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mushuma Mulenga

COMESA has handed over to the Zambian government a mobile Prover worth USD155,000 to be used by the national metrology agency. Mobile Prover is used in the calibration of bulk meters in the fuel sector to increase accuracy in the standards used thus enhancing confidence in the quantity purchased or sold. These in turn facilitate fair local and international trade practices.

COMESA Assistant Secretary-General in charge of programmes, Amb. Dr Kipyego Cheluget handed over the equipment to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry, Mr Mushuma Mulenga, Tuesday, March 16, 2021, at the Zambia Government Complex.

The provision of the equipment is part of a comprehensive COMESA Regional Integration Support Programme (RISM) extended to Zambia under the COMESA Adjustment Facility. The programme is funded by the European Union.

The total support granted to Zambia

amounts to 5.8 million EURO's and has included support to the adoption and implementation of harmonised standards and metrology requirements to strengthen regional and international fair-trading practices.

It also includes the procurement of the Central Processing Centre (CPC) Equipment which has connected Zambia Metrology Agency (ZMA) to the Zambia Electronic Single Window (ZESW). This system rides on the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) Customs System the ASYCUDA World and enables the agency to monitor products and instruments of metrology interest as they are imported into the country through all 28 Zambia's automated entry points.

In a statement presented by Dr Cheluget, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe noted that owing to the opening of a wider regional market of 1.3 billion people under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), there is great importance in investing in quality infrastructure that ensures the

integrity of exports and quality control.

"For the region to fully achieve its potential, the facilitation of a conducive environment for the growth and development of the private sector is key," she noted. "This is why the Central Processing Centre is so important as it will help in the surveillance of imported pre-packaged products ensuring that the minimum metrology requirements are met."

In his remarks, Mr Mulenga said that the Zambia Metrology Agency will be able to monitor, regulate and assure compliance of imported goods, without unnecessary disruption.

"The accuracy of bulk flow meters is very critical in ensuring fuel security for the country as they inform the decision-making process in fuel supply management for our nation," he said. "With the acquired equipment, monitoring will be undertaken in real-time, thereby enabling the ZMA to carry out its regulatory functions effectively."





## €3.2 million Euros National Sanitary and Phytosanitary System for Comoros

In collaboration with the European Union, COMESA supported the development of an efficient national Sanitary and Phytosanitary System (SPS) in Comoros.

The support was provided to the National Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment (INRAPE), through the COMESA Adjustment Fund (CAF) under the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) programme. Activities under this initiative included facilitating consultations to improve the local SPS regulations and the introduction of new legal texts in the sector in alignment with international protocols.

The regulations were developed through ministerial and presidential decrees and subsequently, parliamentary approval. They were expected to improve the sanitary control of plants or plant products, imports and exports and guarantee the control of the processing, packaging, storage or distribution of animal products going to the local market. These are expected to constitute the main references in agri-food and plant protection in the Comoros.

According to the project's progress report, the application of the laws will require the organization and coordination of national institutions responsible for certification besides official controls which will protect the Comoros national market.

Over 35 phytosanitary inspectors were trained in the islands of Anjouan and Moheli in anticipation of the application of the proposed legislation on foodstuffs

### CMI is Helping Member States to Allay Financial Shocks

To safeguard the financial systems in the region against the build-up of systemic risk, the COMESA Monetary Institute, mounted a virtual training from 8 – 12 March 2021 to enhance Member States' understanding and mitigation measures.

Participants were drawn from 12 Central Banks of COMESA Member States namely: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Libya, Malawi, Madagascar, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Anchored under the theme: **Transmission Mechanism of Macro Prudential Shocks to the Financial System**, the forum sought to enhance the capacity of analyzing the most important features of transmission channels of the risks - also referred to as macro prudential shocks - on the financial system, especially during periods of extreme widespread financial distress.

Mr Ibrahim Zeidy, Director of the Institute observed that successful implementation of macro prudential regulations requires an accurate assessment of how fast they propagate to other parts of the financial system

and the timing and the size of these effects.

"It is important for the sector players to be well versed in application of Vector Auto Regressions (VAR), Structural VAR (SVAR) and Vector Error Correction Models (VECM) as they discharge their duties," he said.

The training was motivated by the fact that macro prudential shocks have potential to disrupt the normal credit intermediation channel and may result in a widespread curtailment of credit to bank dependent borrowers, thereby disrupting the entire financial system. Hence it was intended to uncover the process (call it the transmission mechanism) through which macro prudential policy impacts the financial system.

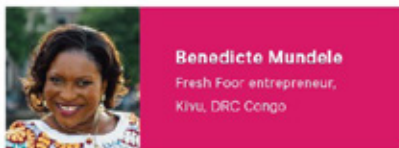
The training was based on the 2021 Work plan for CMI, and was approved by the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks. It was meant to deepen understanding of the interdependencies among key financial and macroeconomic variables and the feedback effects thereof, share experiences and create networks.

50MAWSP | Celebrating African Women in business

## "IF I COULD MEET BENEDICTE MUNDELE, WHAT WOULD I TELL HER?"

Visit [www.womenconnect.org](http://www.womenconnect.org)

and nominate women entrepreneurs you admire and they could be featured on the 50MAWSP website.



## COMESA Launches 30 Days of Women in Business Campaign to Celebrate Women Entrepreneurs

COMESA launched a regional campaign in March to popularise the 50 Million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP). The platform is an information and networking hub for women which provides a one-stop-shop for them to start, grow and scale up their businesses. The platform also provides women access to financial and non-financial services.

The distinctive campaign named '30 days of women in business' ran on radio and social media channels for one month. It aimed to promote the platform in Comoros, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. These are the Member States where COMESA is implementing the 50 Million African Women-Speak Project.

The campaign invited women in the region to log onto the platform at [www.womenconnect.org](http://www.womenconnect.org) or to download the 50MAWSP app from the Google or Apple

stores. To participate, women were required to register on the platform and to then submit short stories about their most admired businesswomen giving the reasons why, and what they would tell them if they had a chance to meet them in person. The most compelling of these submissions would be published on the platform and those who submitted them may have an opportunity to meet their role models.

The 50MAWS platform is jointly implemented by COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It is funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and enables women in 38 countries in the three regional blocs to find information on how to run businesses, where to access financial services, how to create business opportunities online and where to access training resources, among others.

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe

Mpundu Kapwepwe saw the campaign as a great step in driving awareness about the platform which allows African women to engage in peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and knowledge sharing.

"I view this campaign as a catalyst in creating the much-needed push to bring more of our women to connect, network and ultimately benefit from this platform. The campaign's appeal for women to identify and celebrate their most admired women entrepreneurs speaks to a key facet of the 50 Million African Women Speak initiative, which is facilitating support and mentorship by women for women," Ms Kapwepwe said.

She added, "The coincidence of the launch of this campaign with the upcoming celebration of the International Women's Day on 8 March provides a special way for women to celebrate their social, economic, cultural and political achievements in our region."





## COMESA Online Trade Platform Soon to Go Live

Eighteen out of the 21 COMESA Member States had by early March this year nominated focal point persons to be responsible for the management of the COMESA Online Trade Portal and coordinate with national stakeholders. Their role would also be to compile information needed to update the live platform at the national level.

The platform was approved by the Council of Ministers in May 2020, but activation delayed owing to the slow pace of nomination of the Member States' focal points. Once it is fully operational, it is expected to serve as a business facilitation solution for the region during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the platform, Member States will be able to share information on the availability of products and their potential to produce and supply all different types of goods. This is especially the case for essential products and food supplies. Besides, it will connect buyers to suppliers of goods thereby promoting and fostering regional intra-COMESA trade.

The platform will also be ideal for small-scale cross-border traders and SMEs to have access to market information and linking producers, sellers and buyers.

Speaking at the opening of a webinar on the platform for the COMESA/Member States on 4th March 2021, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget urged the remaining countries to complete the nomination process.

"We are concerned about the slow pace of implementation of this activity despite its potential to restore businesses and create the much-needed jobs in our region," Dr Cheluget said. "Further delays only amount to increasing the devastating effects of the pandemic." He added that the Member States need to take ownership of the platform, as it has great potential to support increased intra-regional trade during and post Covid-19 period.

In the previous four months, the Secretariat had trained all the nominated focal points to ensure they were well equipped to manage and coordinate the implementation of the platform at the national level. This would ensure that multiple stakeholders, including private sector players at the national level, can use the platform.

According to Dr Cheluget, the successful implementation of the online platform was an important step towards the

realization of COMESA Digital Free Trade Area initiatives. He called on the business community to take advantage of the platform to showcase their products to the wider region using digital trade solutions.

Participants were taken through the functionalities of the platform, roles and responsibilities of Member States/Stakeholders including the businesspeople.

### €3.2 million Euros SPS for Comoros..

*From page 13*

and other priority texts related to phytosanitary law.

The support was provided to address the regulatory deficit within the national sanitary and phytosanitary system and included the rehabilitation and equipping of the premises of INRAPE and the SPS Information Exchange with IT equipment. COMESAs' support was expected to contribute to a strengthened SPS system that is effective in ensuring food safety and quality control within the region.



*Nakonde border post between Zambia and Tanzania*

## 6.8m Euros Border Post Upgrading Project Kicks Off

Activities towards the implementation of a €6.8 million project are underway to upgrade the priority cross-border infrastructure and equipment at selected border points between Zambia on one hand and Malawi, Zimbabwe and Tanzania on the other. The borders are Mwami, Chirundu and Nakonde respectively.

One of the first activities was the project implementation workshop conducted in Zambia on March 21, 2021, organized by the Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry (MCTI) in collaboration with the COMESA Secretariat and other line Ministries. The other activities would be carried out under the Zambia Border Posts Upgrading Project for two years from the signing of the sub-delegation agreement which was done in November 2020.

Apart from upgrading infrastructure, the project will assist the country to effectively implement coordinated border management principles at the border posts, build capacity on modern border operations for stakeholders and implement a border information awareness campaign. The project will support customs cooperation, implementation of the e-Certificate of

Origin and Single Window System and reduce the asymmetry in knowledge on Rules of Origin.

According to Mr Mushuma Mulenga, Permanent Secretary in the MCTI, the European Union-funded project will also support capacity building for stakeholders on modern border operations and the implementation of an information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments among other deliverables.

By the end of the implementation period, it is expected that clearance time and costs for passengers and goods processed through the border posts will be reduced. Likewise, the number of reported non-tariff barriers and cases of corruption and harassment if any, are expected to go down.

"All this effort is expected to contribute to increased collection of revenue through increased trade flows," Mr. Mushuma Mulenga said in a statement presented by the Director of Foreign Trade Mrs Bessie Chelemu.

Among other issues discussed were the implementation structures and

communication channels, review of the project plan and the operational implementation modalities including priorities for year 1 and year 2. A procurement plan for the project and a performance monitoring framework was agreed upon.

EDF Programme Coordinator at COMESA Secretariat Ms Mshuka Kamwela encouraged the Zambian team to focus on implementing the project within the agreed timeframe. She reiterated COMESA's resolve to provide the necessary support to ensure effective implementation of the EU sub-delegated activities.

The PS thanked COMESA Secretariat and the European Union for the technical and financial support the country continues to receive.

**"All this effort is expected to contribute to increased collection of revenue through increased trade flows,"**  
**Mr. Mushuma Mulenga**





## COMESA Sub-delegates Upgrading of Chirundu Border Post to Zimbabwe Worth €4.1million

COMESA and Zimbabwe early this year signed an agreement that sub-delegated the implementation of coordinated border management activities, trade and transport facilitation programme at the Chirundu border post. The sub-delegated activities are worth 4.1 million Euros.

The funds will be used to support the upgrading of priority cross-border infrastructure and equipment at the Chirundu border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. This is part of the 48 million Euros Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP), financed under the 11th European Development Fund (11 EDF) from the European Union (EU) to COMESA.

The TFP has five key result areas, among them deepening regional integration, improving inclusive regional economic growth and enhancing the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, and the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Zimbabwe, Ambassador James Manzou, separately signed the sub-delegation agreement in mid-February 2021 in Lusaka and Harare respectively.

Ambassador Manzou stated that the signing followed an assessment of the existing challenges, conducted at the targeted border post, in early 2020. He thanked the EU for the support rendered under the programme through the

COMESA Secretariat to improve the facilitation of trade at the Chirundu border post.

“He added: “The support is a testimony of the continued and strengthened collaboration between Zimbabwe and the European Union.”

Ambassador Manzou explained that the modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities envisage the beneficiary Member State, taking ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities, in line with the EDF procurement procedures.

“The benefits for sub-delegation are that the Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and beneficiary border agencies in Zimbabwe will improve their systems. It is also an opportunity to upgrade the border infrastructures on the basis that the Ministry is best placed to understand the challenges and provide the best decisions of mitigating these challenges,” the COMESA Secretary General said.

She added that COMESA will facilitate financial, logistical and administrative processes. The funds will also support capacity building for stakeholders on innovative and state of the art border operations. Besides, Zimbabwe will implement an awareness campaign on border information targeting customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments.

“The Zimbabwean Government desires to build on current trade facilitation efforts through programmes, such as the COMESA EDF 11 Trade Facilitation Project,” the Permanent Secretary said. “The interventions at the border post are expected to enhance efficiency and ultimately reduce the cost of doing business. The support is, therefore, timely as Zimbabwe grapples with the negative effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA affirmed thus: “The European Union applauds the signing of the agreement between Zambia and Zimbabwe as it showcases a regional partnership which will strengthen trade facilitation in the region.”

He added: “The EU and its Member States are keen to share their experiences from our common market integration to steadily improve connectivity and regional integration in Africa.”

Timo Olkkonen, the Ambassador of the European Union to Zimbabwe observed that:

“All countries in the region have a lot to benefit from deepened regional integration and increased trade. Economies of scale matter. Zimbabwe will benefit directly from trade facilitation and easier access across borders”, he noted.



Moyale, the Kenya - Ethiopia border point

## COMESA, Ethiopia Signs 5.6m Euros Sub-delegation Agreement to Upgrade Border Posts

COMESA and Ethiopia signed a 5.6 million Euro sub-delegation agreement to improve coordinated border management, trade and transport facilitation at the Moyale and Galafi border posts. Moyale and Galafi borders link Ethiopia on one hand to Kenya and Djibouti on the other, respectively.

The project will assist Ethiopia to upgrade the single window service system, increasing inter-agency connectivity and improving the connectivity of the two customs systems. The project is funded by the European Union under the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.

The State Minister of Trade and Industry of Ethiopia, H.E. Ambassador Mesganu Arga, and COMESA Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe separately signed the sub-delegation agreement. The EU will also finance the construction of the main building of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) at the Ethiopian Galafi border post. Other components of the project include capacity building, training of the agencies' staff present at the borders and holding of sensitization workshops.

Appreciating the European Union for the support rendered, the State Minister

said:

"The support is timely as the Ethiopian government desires to build on the current trade facilitation effort that will enhance the efficiency and ultimately reduce the cost of doing business as Ethiopia grapples with the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic".

The State Minister also thanked COMESA for the technical support rendered during the development of Ethiopia's project.

Explaining the modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities, the Secretary General said it is envisaged the Ethiopian government will take ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities.

"We foresee increased collection of revenue through increased trade flows" the SG projected.

She added that COMESA is committed to ensuring that all borders are assisted to become more efficient and operate smoothly to deepen regional trade, which will lead to enhanced regional integration.

The Ethiopian government will proceed with the implementation of the sub-

delegation agreement, which includes managing contracts, supplies and services, while COMESA will provide technical guidance. This is to ensure that implementation takes place in line with European Union procurement procedures, stipulated under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

The funds will also support capacity building for stakeholders on improved border operations and the implementation of a border information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments.

The measures will lead to less bureaucracy, as traders will only have to submit their documentation once, and shorter clearance times will reduce the overall cost and time of transport. Likewise, non-tariff barriers, corruption and harassment along the two-border post are expected to reduce, with notable an increase in revenue collection through enhanced trade flows.

H.E. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, acknowledged the development as a critical step towards seamless trade along corridors and at the Moyale and Galafi border posts.

"The sub-delegation agreement is timely to boost trade flows within the Horn of Africa" he noted.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Ethiopia, Mr. Johan Borgstam added: "Ethiopia, as a landlocked country, understands like no other, the importance of regional integration and trade. In line with Ethiopia's homegrown economic reform agenda, the EU, therefore, supports Ethiopia and its neighbouring countries in strengthening coordinated border management, to enhance import and export efficiency and reduce costs to improve competitiveness."



# Digital Finance has Thrived in COMESA Region During COVID-19 Pandemic



The growth of digital finance in the COMESA region has deepened the financial inclusion of millions of people, households and firms thus cushioning them against the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report prepared by Senior Economist at the COMESA Monetary Institute, Dr Lucas Njoroge, digital finance has proved to be critical during the pandemic in reaching the poor in different social-economic conditions driven by mobile money and agent banking.

“These have reached millions of previously unbanked individuals, households and small and medium scale enterprises, offering affordable, instant, reliable services on payments, savings, credit, and insurance services, among other services,” he noted.

In his paper titled ‘Financial Inclusion and COVID-19 in the COMESA Region,’ Dr Njoroge noted that individuals and firms have been empowered to maximize their potential by increasing access to adequate financial services, thereby allowing them to make optimal decisions to enhance lives and livelihoods amid disruption.

According to the World Bank, financial inclusion is the access to and use of formal financial services and an important factor for economic development since it enhances equitable access to finance and consequently

**“Financial inclusion is the access to and use of formal financial services and an important factor for economic development since it enhances equitable access to finance and consequently economic opportunities,” The World Bank**

economic opportunities.

Based on the most recent data from the World Bank (2018), the COMESA region has experienced a faster pace of financial inclusion, surpassing the Sub-Saharan Africa average. The number of financially included in COMESA has more than doubled in the last decade, increasing from 23% in 2011 to 32% in 2014 and further to 48% in 2017.

Some of the measures that have enhanced financial inclusion during the pandemic in the region includes the introduction of cash transfers to the poor through mobile money cash transfers, encouraging cashless payment and scrapping transaction fees between banks and Telcos for values of less than or equal to 10 dollars.

Dr Njoroge noted that these measures have ensured the survival of the affected financial inclusion stakeholders.

“The use of online banking, prepaid cards and mobile wallets have offered benefits of convenience, speed, security and affordable pricing that did not exist with traditional banking....at the same time

allowing social distancing which is very important for containing the spread of COVID-19,” Dr Njoroge noted.

On the flip side, he noted there was still much to be done on deepening financial inclusion. Among these are traditions and the low levels of financial literacy that exist in most COMESA countries.

“There is also a huge challenge to convince customers to change from their traditional ways of accessing and using financial services,” Dr Njoroge said. “Perceptions of risk, lack of consumer protection or technology failure have tended to reinforce mistrust which can only be addressed through financial education and awareness.”

Among policy recommendations made in the paper to encourage digital financial services is to demystify adopting digital financial technology through public awareness and financial literacy among end-users. This is in addition to reducing tariffs on digital services to increase the number of users and addressing concerns of trust, regulation, financial capabilities, compliance and interoperability.



File:/ TIDOs training at COMESA Secretariat

## Capacity Building Programme for Border Trade Officials Underway

A training programme to build the capacity of trade information desk officers stationed at selected border posts was conducted in February this year, to integrate them into border operations. The aim was to enhance their working relationship with state agencies manning border posts.

The training was part of the implementation of a €15 Million European Union-funded programme known as the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI) in selected borders. The SSCBTI aims to increase formal small-scale cross border trade flows in the COMESA/Tripartite region leading to higher revenue collection by governments at the borders as well as increased security and higher incomes for small scale cross border traders.

COMESA, together with the International Organisation for Migration and the International Trade Centre is implementing the Cross-Border Trade Initiative.

Trade Information Desk Officers (TIDOs) from the following border posts attended the training; Chirundu (Zambia/Zimbabwe), Kasumbalesa (DR Congo/Zambia, Mwami/Mchinji (Malawi/Zambia) and Nakonde (Zambia/Tanzania).

The main subject of the virtual training was the provisions and implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR). The STR provides for small-

scale traders to qualify for duty-free entry for certain goods and for a more simple and reduced set of documentary requirements to cross the border.

The TIDOs were taken through trade procedures for clearing goods under the STR threshold and the Regulations on the Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Small-Scale Cross Border Traders. This is expected to help them in executing their mandate of providing trade facilitation services and smooth implementation of small-scale cross border trade. The training also provided insights on cross-border data collection activities.

Addressing the TIDOs during the opening of the training, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said COMESA would ensure that the officers are equipped with skills to interact better with border officials, cross border trade associations and coordinating ministries' staff.

"TIDOs are the face of the programme at the borders and it is essential that they display good demeanour, integrity and courtesy in their interaction with both traders and border officials as well as the researchers that frequent the borders gathering primary data," she said. "It is also important for the TIDOs to keep abreast with policy and administrative changes that affect them to provide value-added information."

The training was conducted by customs and immigration officers.

## Regional Seed Trade in Staple Food set to Improve

*As procedure manual and checklist for maize trade are developed*

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) working with COMESA's specialised Seed Agency ACTESA, have developed Regional Seed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to improve regional seed trade in staple food crops. This is in addition to an audit checklist mechanism for maize trade. These are provided under the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP).

The initiative is part of the implementation of the AGRA-COMESA cooperation framework titled "Improved Regional Seed Trade in COMESA region".

It is aimed at improving regional seed trade in maize, rice, soybeans and rice as a way of catalysing and sustaining an inclusive agricultural transformation.

Emerge Centre for Innovation-Africa (ECI-Africa) developed the draft COMSHIP maize SOPs and audit checklist mechanism through funding from AGRA. According to the COMESA/ACTESA Seed Development Expert Dr John Mukuka, consultations were conducted with national seed authorities and seed companies who are now ready to market their seed on the COMESA Harmonised Seed Trading Platform.

"With the SOPs in place, assessment of the implementation of the harmonized regulation framework will be achieved by independently and regularly auditing





## AfCFTA will Stimulate Intra-COMESA Trade

The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area whose trading commenced on 1st January 2021 is expected to provide the missing ingredient to intra-COMESA trade, according to a research expert at the COMESA Secretariat.

In a paper published in February this year titled: AfCTA - A Stimulant to Intra COMESA Trade," Senior Research Fellow, Mr Benedict Musengele highlighted the benefits that the regional bloc stands to reap from the continental platform. Among them is the elimination and resolution of some of the challenges associated with multiple and overlapping memberships in COMESA. This will be achieved through the harmonization of integration policies for the existing regional economic communities (RECs) Free Trade Areas (FTAs).

A total of 36 African countries had so far ratified the AfCTA agreement and deposited their instruments of ratification, 12 of which are COMESA Member States namely: Kenya, Rwanda, Djibouti, Eswatini, Uganda, Egypt, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Mauritius, Malawi, and Zambia. COMESA non-FTA Member States, Eswatini and Ethiopia had ratified the agreement and were extending preferential tariff treatment to other State parties including the Member States.

"This implies a wider and larger market for the COMESA Member States," Mr Musengele stated.

The report noted that AfCFTA will progressively eliminate tariffs on intra-African trade, making it easier for African businesses to trade within the continent and benefit from the growing African market. This will make it more affordable for informal traders to operate through formal channels, which offer more protection.

This can be further enhanced by introducing a Continental Simplified Trade Regime (CSTR) since cross-border traders operating under such a regime would no longer be trading informally.

"The COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) could be used as a model for establishing the continental STR. The STR is currently operational only in COMESA and EAC," the report stated.

The AfCFTA through duty-free access to the huge market will also encourage manufacturers and service providers to increase production to serve the enlarged market. Given that most of the trade in Africa takes place among neighbouring countries, this will lead to enhanced production and trade among the neighbouring COMESA Member States".

According to the report, the AfCFTA will

stimulate the formation of regional value chains to ease production and supply to the enlarged market. COMESA Member States producers will therefore easily join the regional value chains such as the leather and leather products, textile, wood and paper, agro-foods, sugar, beverages, vegetables, fruit, nuts and rice. This will enhance their production efficiencies, increase their profit margins and consequently integrate into the global value chains.

The report noted that AfCFTA has the potential to reduce external imports from external sources and increase intra-REC and African trade by opening more regional markets through improved infrastructure connectivity, and a larger market which will enhance competitiveness, increase value addition and productivity.

"This combined with enhanced trade promotion and market information sharing will increase intra-COMESA and African trade," the report stated. "The leading imports from EU such as food and live animals are readily available in COMESA and the region has huge potential to produce manufactured goods and pharmaceuticals."

The AfCFTA brings together 55 AU Member States with a total population of about 1.3 Billion and a combined GDP of about US\$ 3.4 Trillion.

## Regional Seed Trade in Staple Food set to Improve ....



*continued from page 20*

country systems and processes, which underpin quality seed production and certification including border controls,” Dr Mukuka said.

This is in line with the COMSHIP which aims at enhancing seed production, reliability and seed trade including increasing the competitiveness of the seed industry in the Southern and Eastern African (ESA) region.

Dr Mukuka said the seed system audit mechanism was not intended to be a policing tool as it would focus on identifying gaps and corrective actions towards achievement and consistent application of regionally agreed (at a minimum) standard.

He added: “The audit mechanism shall be mutually recognized, technically competent and independent in its operations. Through the new mechanism, reports shall be prepared (e.g. country-

level dashboard) which will be shared in regional seed forum to form the basis of evidence-based deliberations and decisions.”

He noted that such experience-sharing in a forum format and collaborative spirit, will engender positive challenge and inspire action rather than defensiveness and lead to changes without compromising trust.

The draft SOPs formed the basis for developing the COMSHIP regional audit checklist covered the following: the conduct of distinctness; uniformity and stability (DUS) tests; the conduct of variety maintenance/ check plot observations; variety release and catalogue and authorization of private seed inspectors and entities (licensing and registration of seed inspectors; samplers and analysts).

Others covered are requirements and process of seed crop field inspection,

seed crop intake verification, inspection and sampling, pest control testing of seed lots, handling quarantine pests, moisture determination and germination analysis.

Both the draft SOPs and audit checklist were developed based on provisions of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations aligned with the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants Test Guidelines, International Seed Testing Association (ISTA), and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Field Seed Schemes for Maize.

The provision of adequate information and higher levels of transparency to all seed stakeholders is critical in ensuring that the time and cost of trade is reduced and thus, increasing efficiency in cross border regional movement of seed.



# New Deadline set for Ratification of Tripartite Free Trade Area



Ministers from the tripartite group of regional economic communities in eastern and southern Africa set June 2021 as the deadline to achieve the threshold of 14 ratifications required for the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) agreement to enter into force. This was during the 2nd Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers that took place virtually on 15 February this year. The new deadline coincides with the sixth anniversary of the launch of the TFTA Agreement on 10 June 2015 in Egypt.

The tripartite group brings together Member/Partner States of COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

In their discussions, the Ministers noted that the commencement of the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) this year, has provided the necessary impetus to countries that have not ratified the TFTA to do so.

"The countries that ratified the agreement earlier have not realized the benefits they had expected as they have been held back by those that haven't," the Ministers said, noting that some Member/Partner States had ratified the AfCFTA but not the

TFTA.

The Agreement establishing the AfCFTA was signed in March 2018, (three years after the TFTA) and entered into force on 30 May 2019 after attaining the threshold ratification of 24 countries. The work already done under the tripartite framework contributed significantly to the speedy implementation of the continental trade regime.

So far, 10 Member/Partner States had by end of March this year, ratified the TFTA with four more needed to attain the ratification threshold. The 10 were Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and Zambia.

The Ministers advised countries to delink ratification with the negotiations on tariffs that were still ongoing. Moreover, the team of experts conducting the negotiations confirmed that negotiations would be concluded before June this year.

The COMESA, EAC and SADC Member and Partner States represent 53 per cent of the African Union membership, constituting over US\$1.4 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is roughly 60 per cent of African continental GDP and a combined estimated population

of 800 million. This makes the TFTA an important building block for the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Besides the TFTA ratification, the Ministers adopted the guidelines for management and monitoring of safe cross border movement of persons and personal goods while mitigating the spread of the Coronavirus.

Speaking as she chaired the meeting, Hon. Soraya Hakuziyaremye, Minister of Trade and Industry, Rwanda, urged countries to implement the guidelines.

"These guidelines will serve as a basis for all tripartite Member /Partner States to draft their national rules to facilitate the movement of people and goods across all countries," she said.

They will facilitate the harmonization of national guidelines for the re-opening of all modes of transport including air, land and sea borders for the mass movement of persons and personal goods in line with national laws and regulations.

The meeting was also attended by the Chief Executives of the COMESA-EAC-SADC, H.E. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, H.E. Ambassador Liberat Mfumukeko and H.E Dr Stergomena Tax and Senior Officials.



## COMESA is Resetting Relationship with its Institutions



*Retreat for COMESA institutions and the Secretariat in Lusaka, 2019*

Specialized institutions established under the COMESA Treaty are among the best rated in the African continent with some attracting membership beyond the regional bloc. The Secretariat and the institutions are now developing a cooperation agreement to guide their relationship to not only keep pace with the changing dynamics but ensure the interest of other stakeholders are safeguarded.

The envisaged agreement is in line with the COMESA Treaty which provides that, 'each institution of the Common Market shall, in the implementation of the provisions of its Charter take into account the objectives, policies, programmes and activities of the Common Market.'

Over 10 institutions have been established since the creation of the regional bloc, firstly as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa, the precursor to COMESA. They specialize in different aspects of regional integration including finance, insurance, industry, investment, competition policy, women affairs, energy among others.

In coming up with a cooperation

framework, the Secretariat and the institutions seek to create a nexus that balances the institutions' responsibilities to COMESA and the interests of the other external stakeholders.

"As institutions grow, linkages may loosen," the Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Kapwepwe observed during the first meeting with the new Chief Executive Officer of the African Trade Insurance Agency (ATI) Mr Manuel Moses.

ATI is one of the institutions that have excelled and attracted membership beyond COMESA region together with the Trade and Development Bank (TDB), the PTA Reinsurance Company (ZEP-RE) and the COMESA Bureaux of the Yellow Card. For the last ten consecutive years, the ATI has been assigned 'A' rating by Standard & Poor for both its Counterparty and Insurer Financial Strength Ratings.

Underlining the critical role of the ATI in building investor confidence in the region, the Secretary General said:

"Our Member States have big infrastructure deficits which are great

opportunities for investors, but the investors are wary of the risks involved. This is where the ATI comes in to ensure such risks are mitigated and investor confidence is restored."

She added that even though the ATI has attracted countries and institutional shareholders outside the regional bloc, many COMESA countries were still not Members of the agency. Going forward, she said COMESA Secretariat will be inviting the ATI and the other institutions in meetings and missions to the Members States, to give them platforms to raise awareness about their services and products and thereby drive membership.

Mr Moses said ATI has great potential in enabling the Member States to attract grant funding from international lenders through the provision of political risk cover to companies, investors, and lenders interested in doing business in Africa. He said ATI's financial instruments, insurance products and services, are making a difference in assisting African countries to build new infrastructure and facilitate investments.



*Mr Charles Kwenin*

## COMESA, IOM Revises MoU to Incorporate AfCFTA, COVID-19 Emerging Issues

The International Organization for Migration and COMESA will review their current memorandum of understanding (MoU) to incorporate emerging issues on movement of people particularly in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority issues to be addressed are those relating to the free movement of people under the AfCFTA framework now that majority of the African Union member states have endorsed the free movement of goods and services. Notable during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been an upsurge of non-tariff barriers affecting free movement of people, goods and services as countries strive to contain the spread of the pandemic. "Given the changing dynamics and human mobility issues not just from the Corona pandemic but others – it's time to revisit our MoU signed in 2003 to include these emerging issues", Mr Charles Kwenin, the IOM Regional Director for Southern Africa Region said.

He was speaking during a virtual meeting with COMESA Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget, on February 10, 2021. They agreed that technical teams from the two organization begin reviewing the current MoU with a view of finalizing it within a short time frame. Further inputs to the new MoU would also come from the meeting of Chiefs of Immigration from COMESA Member States scheduled in March this year.

Noting that trade and migration are entwined, Dr Cheluget observed that the movement of goods and services cannot be realized in isolation of free movement of businesspeople across the region and the continent.

"Some of our Member States, especially in the eastern Africa sub-region, have made good progress in the implementation of the COMESA protocol on the free movement of people and the right of establishment," Dr Cheluget observed. "However, there have been setbacks where countries make one step forward, one step backward."

They noted that IOM and COMESA shared common interest in their quest to facilitate movement of people by addressing impediments to regional trade. Currently, the two organizations are collaborating in implementing a European Union funded small cross border trade programme under a co-delegation framework. Under this framework, COMESA co-delegated implementation of the component relating to movement of small-scale traders in selected regional borders.

This has led to a successful launch of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System at Mchinji border between Malawi and Zambia. This has enabled Member States to collect, process, store and analyse information for the purpose of identification of travelers, data collection and analysis. The system supports the evaluation of cross-border traffic, helps determine the optimum deployment of human resources at border posts and supports a better understanding of human mobility flows.

# Burundian Products set to Access Wider Regional Markets

COMESA RISM Programme equips Burundi labs



File photo/ COMESA team visiting the BBN in Burundi, March 2019

Burundi export products are set to access the larger regional market following improvement of their quality standards. This has been made possible through the provision of laboratory equipment to the agency responsible for standardization and quality control (BBN) in Burundi.

The equipment, provided under the COMESA Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM), include a UV spectrophotometer, a flame photometer, a pH meter, a fiber analyzer, a distillation unit for protein analysis, a sugar analyzer, an alcohol analyzer, an oxygen and carbon dioxide analyzer.

The equipment has enabled the institution to carry out analysis of over 20 additional parameters which were previously done out of the country. This will raise the standards of Burundian goods and eventually lead to the certification of more export commodities. In addition, they have provided additional confidence to local consumers on the safety of the local products.

The report indicated that the equipment has positively impacted on product certification and cut down on costs and the certification process as the laboratory

does not need to subcontract part of its analysis as was the case before. All the testing parameters are now done in-house.

As a result, many local milk producers are now able to take their products for certification earmarked for export while previously only small quantities of the products were exported. This was due to high certification costs occasioned by the need to analyze antibiotic residues such as tetracycline, chloramphenicol in milk, and aflatoxins in other milk products outside the country.

"Now the whole process is done at BBN's labs as they respond to the export requirements of products at EAC and COMESA level," the report read in part.

Under the RISM programme, whose funds originate from the European Union (EU) through the COMESA Adjustment Fund (CAF), Burundi has received close to 16 million Euros over the 2010-2020 period. The funds have helped the country to address challenges that inhibited its deeper integration into the regional economy thus enabling it to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by such wider markets that COMESA and the East African

Community present.

Regional statistics indicate that trade flows between Burundi and members of these regional blocs are among the lowest in the region.

In supporting the country, COMESA has leveraged on the Strategic Framework for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction developed by Burundi authorities which emphasizes consumer protection as an important aspect of trade promotion. The strategy also stresses the need for permanent monitoring of the quality of marketed products and conformity to international standards which would allow Burundi to reach the quality of goods required to export to its neighbouring countries.

The report also identified the challenges faced by local stakeholders such as the need for a National Quality Plan as well as better training on equipment and standards to improve the quality of goods and facilitate export to regional and international markets.

Through the support from RISM, the National Quality Policy was developed last year and is currently awaiting adoption by the Burundi Council of Ministers. Trainings were also provided to eight BBN technical staff of the physics-chemical analysis laboratory. They covered operation, elementary maintenance, and sample preparation and analysis of the equipment delivered by COMESA to the chemistry laboratory.

The report added: "The training has helped the staff make proper use of the equipment to conduct chemical analysis on goods being assessed for their quality. It is to be noted that with the use of the latest procured lab kits, additional parameters can be added with additional testing parameters planned on local goods."



## Zimbabwe Leather and Textile Clusters Shake-off COVID 19 Effects to Register Impressive Growth



Members of the Bulawayo Leather Cluster display Shoe shoes earmarked for export to Namibia

The COVID-19 pandemic is the worst thing that has happened to many small-scale enterprises across the globe, but the Zimbabwe leather and textile sector has defied the odds. Two clusters, one dealing with leather and the other in textiles have recorded remarkable profits on goods produced during the COVID 19 era.

The textile cluster is in Chitungwiza south of the capital, Harare while the leather cluster is in Bulawayo. The clusters managed to withstand the pandemic effects to make over USD 36,600 in profits partly by changing tack and producing essential products needed to mitigate the pandemic such as face masks. This was in addition to their customary school uniforms and sportswear.

The textile cluster was supported by the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF), Regional Integration Support

Mechanism (RISM) which is funded by the European Union. In the first phase of the funds' disbursement, Zimbabwe got €4.2 million through a Grant Agreement signed in September 2014 between the government and COMESA

At the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the textile cluster switched to manufacturing products which required readily available raw materials and personal protective products. In majority of cases, the customers would provide the materials with the clusters doing the manufacturing.

The total value of textile produced during the period is estimated at USD 16,600. The Cluster also managed to train eight people in tailoring (5 female and 3 male).

Despite the various challenges, the pandemic has created a unique demand for local textile products.

The cluster is therefore expecting an increase in its business orders from schools across the country.

The leather cluster has also continued to thrive, producing an array of products ranging from formal shoes, school shoes, sandals and leather belts. Within the pandemic period, the cluster has produced goods worth USD 20,000 with Namibia being one of the export destinations for school shoes.

During the first two phases of the lockdown, which were stricter, the government of Zimbabwe supported the clusters with documentation which designated them as essential services. This enabled them to open and operate while adhering to the required health protocols.

## COMESA Secretariat Signs Sub-Delegation Agreement with Malawi to upgrade Mchinji Border Post

COMESA Secretariat and the government of Malawi signed a 3.54 million Euros agreement in January that sub-delegated to Malawi, the implementation of coordinated border management activities under the broader Trade Facilitation Programme at Mchinji border post. Mchinji lies between the Malawian side with Zambia.

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Ms. Christina Zakeyo, and Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, separately signed the sub-delegation agreement in Lilongwe and Lusaka in the last week of January this year. The project will support the implementation of key pillars of One Stop Border Post (OSBP) operations.

Some of the major activities to be implemented include upgrading the customs e-management system and bandwidth, improving inter-agency connectivity, implementation of the Trade and Transport Corridor Management System, capacity building, training and sensitization of National Trade Facilitation Committee and border agencies among others. The signing of the sub-delegation agreement comes a month after a similar agreement was signed with the Zambian government to upgrade its side of the border post at Mwami.

This new development is part of the 48 million Euros Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) with COMESA financed under the 11th European Development Fund (11 EDF) whose objective is to deepen regional integration, improve inclusive regional economic growth and



*File photo: Libyan delegate during the 20th COMESA Summit, in Lusaka, Zambia, July 2018*

## Libya Reboots Economic Engagement with COMESA

Libya renewed its commitment to COMESA in January and resolved to actively participate in the implementation of regional integration programmes. To kickstart this process, COMESA Secretariat hosted a two-day virtual sensitization workshop on 25-26 January 2021 which was attended by stakeholders from diverse public and private sectors in Libya.

Libya's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Taher Hamouda Siala addressed the workshop. He said his government's resolve was to engage more in the activities and programmes of COMESA for the benefit of the country and the region for more meaningful impact.

"Libya has long believed in the ideologies of COMESA and it was the right time to re-focus and prioritise regional integration in order to transform the economy of the country," Minister Siala said "This marks a new phase for Libya's participation in COMESA programmes and activities."

During the workshop, the Secretariat made presentations on the current regional integration programmes covering trade, infrastructure, industry, agriculture, and gender among others.

Participants were also taken through programmes implemented by specialized institutions of COMESA.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said Libya has always shown determination to fully benefit from regional integration programmes having joined the COMESA Free Trade Area in 2006 just after becoming a member of the organization. Libya joined COMESA in 2005.

Participants acknowledged how COVID-19 had placed additional strain on Member States' economies, which is likely to put a risk on the socio-economic gains recorded so far.

Among the COMESA institutions that participated in the workshop were Trade and Development Bank, Zep-Re Reinsurance Company, Africa Trade Insurance Agency, COMESA Competition Commission, COMESA Monetary Institute, Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute, COMESA Business Council, COMESA Clearing House, Regional Investment Agency, COMESA Court of Justice, and COMESA Federation of Women in Business.





Participants to the Leadership and Business Management Training in Malawi

## Malawi Women in Business Benefit from COMFWB, GIZ Training

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) in partnership with GIZ-MEIRA early this year organized a 10-day training in leadership and business management for the Women in Business in Malawi. The training attracted small scale entrepreneurs from two cooperatives in Malawi: the Luso Lawo Cooperative with 12 members and Chiwila Cooperative with 15 members. It was conducted in Nkhata.

The objective of the training was to ensure that micro and small-scale enterprises build their businesses and relationships to add value to their products. This would enhance their access to improved services and productive resources, as well as engage in structured markets to increase their income. It helped to improve understanding of how each group functions for sustainability and growth and provided a foundation for enhancing their entrepreneurship skills to develop their own personal businesses.

Speaking during the opening session, COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ruth Negash said that her organization was responding to the identified need to connect businesswomen and SMES to other players in the various sectors by

developing their business management skills.

"Although the Northern region has a great tradition of making Nsima (African Pulp) from cassava and dried cassava leaves, they do not produce value added products for the local markets," Negash said. "Hence the training will equip women entrepreneurs with skills thus enabling them produce value added cassava products for export to other countries in the COMESA region and beyond."

Participants appreciated COMFWB and GIZ for organizing the training saying it will go a long way in helping the women to reap the benefits of being members of the cooperatives.

"Business management is key to ensuring sustainability of the cooperative. This is my first training on leadership and business management," said Kaluso Nyimba a participant.

The capacity development offered by COMFWB and GIZ-MEIRA has enabled the two cooperatives to have a coherent shared vision and mission, develop short term plans and action plan.

## COMESA Secretariat Signs Agreement with Malawi ...

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enhance the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

Principal Secretary Zakeyo stated that the signing of the sub-delegation agreement came after an assessment of existing challenges conducted at Mchinji border post in early 2020. She thanked the European Union for the support rendered under the programme through COMESA Secretariat to improve the facilitation of trade at Mchinji/Mwami border post. She said that the support is a testimony of the continued and strengthened collaboration between Malawi and the European Union.

"The interventions at Mchinji border post are expected to enhance efficiency and ultimately reduce the cost of doing business and the support is, therefore, timely as Malawi grapples with the negative effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Ms Zakeyo added.

In her remarks, Secretary General Kapwepwe explained that the modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities provide an opportunity for Malawi to take ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities. The COMESA Secretariat will provide technical guidance.

Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and COMESA stated "We welcome the signing of the agreement as a major step towards reduction in hindrances to trade at the border and that will lead to increased seamless flow of goods between Zambia and Malawi."

By the end of the implementation period of the project, it is expected that clearance times and costs for goods processed through the border posts will be reduced.





## A Shot in the Arm for the Madagascar Leather Industry

The COMESA Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM), with support from the Africa Leather and Leather Product Institute (ALLPI), brought together various players in the leather sector in Madagascar to form a leather cluster known as GasySkin. Besides, over 30 people including artisans in regional systems for the improved traceability of skins, the application of standards for value chains in leather, and the certification of leather products that are environmentally friendly have been trained.

Through this support the cluster has acquired leather tannery equipment for sewing, leather skiving, strip cutting, hydraulics plane cutting press machines, among others, valued at more than 100,000 Euros. This has raised awareness amongst leatherworkers, salespeople and tanners, leading to national cohesion among players in the leather value chain. It has also triggered rising demands, the most significant being an order from India for 2,000

pieces each of 17 different leather items. The production of leather items is now projected to grow tenfold.

The RISM programme received funds from the European Union (EU) through the COMESA Adjustment Fund (CAF), and has provided financial support to Madagascar of more than 1.8 million Euros over the 2016-2020 period. An additional 500,000 Euros is expected in 2021. Disbursement of the funds followed Madagascar's government identification of the local leather sector as a cluster with great potential for producing quality goods at international and regional level and for creating much-needed employment opportunities.

One of the main challenges identified by local stakeholders was the need for a national leather value chain strategy and better equipment and training on quality and standards that would facilitate exports to regional and international markets.

The ALLPI, a specialized institution of COMESA provided technical expertise to develop the leather value chain strategy for the country. The strategy will help to ensure that artisans meet market requirements, in terms of quality and standards.

As a logical continuation of the strategy, Madagascar's Directorate General of Handicrafts (DGA) has included in its priority activities the standardization of the leather sector. This has been done by upgrading to COMESA and international standards, and by making sure such standards adapt the specifications of Madagascar.

Under the latest support, it is programmed that in 2021, additional leather processing equipment worth 150,000 Euros will be procured. This equipment will enable production of more diverse items, better designs, and more precise cutting of the raw leather.



## CBC Partners with the Trade and Development Bank for the Digital Financial Inclusion Programme

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) in partnership with the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) convened a high level Public-Private Dialogue, under the theme, "Towards the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy for Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) on 20th January 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda.

The public-private dialogue brought together nine pilot-study countries, Central Banks' governors, ministers of finance, ICT regulators, manufacturers, mobile network operators, commercial banks and MSMEs to consider and validate the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment (DFIP) Policy and Framework for SMEs. The ensuing deliberations attached great importance to partnerships, regulatory dialogue and consumer protection as key success factors for the digital financial inclusion of SMEs.

Speaking during the official opening, Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Dr. Kipyego Cheluget said the formulation of the policy on Digital

Integrated Common Payment will be the foundation of an infrastructure that supports African SMEs to grow into prosperous businesses over the coming years.

"We've seen a willingness from competitive forces in the industry to prepare a strong pathway that will facilitate digital payments across markets," said Dr Cheluget.

CBC Board Chairperson Mr. Marday Venkatasamy said that the gains from the digital payment system for COMESA and Africa at large, will be in the growth of regional trade (sourcing and supply) which is currently below 20%.

"Turning this vast potential into reality will require the collective efforts of our governments, the private sector, and development partners," he added.

CBC has been implementing the Digital Financial Inclusion Program to support the design, development and deployment of an integrated digital financial services infrastructure that is low-cost and fraud

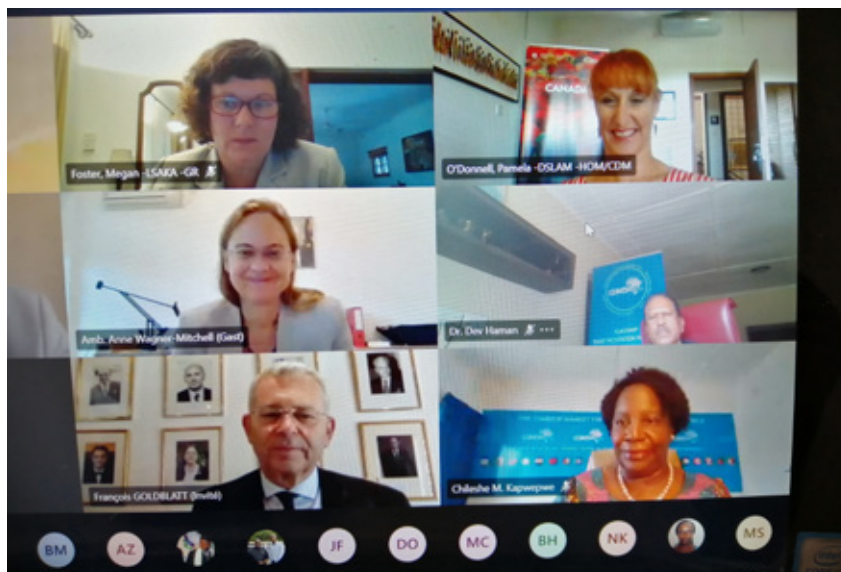
resistant, that serves micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly women and youth, who are at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

At the same event, the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) President, Admassu Tadesse, pointed out that financial inclusion involves multiple stakeholders, from policymakers and regulators to private industry, including employers, educational systems, communities and individuals.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Rwanda Mr. Michel Sebera and the Chairman of the Rwanda Private Sector Federation, Mr. Robert Bafakulera, attended the dialogue.

The Draft Model Policy Regulation Guidelines/Rulebook for a digital integrated regional common payments scheme for SMEs was presented and validated during the public-private dialogue. National committee meetings will precede a second validation meeting of the edited report of the common policy framework.

## Deeper Economic Ties Envisaged, as COMESA Accredits top EU and Canadian Diplomats



The virtual presentation of diplomatic credentials

New Heads of Diplomatic Missions of Canada, Germany and France were accredited as Special Representatives to COMESA in February 2021. Ambassadors Pamela O'Donnell of Canada, Dr. Anne Wager-Mitchell of Germany and François Goldblatt of France presented their Letters of Credence to Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe in a ceremony held virtually.

The Canadian Ambassador expressed her country's interest to work with COMESA to advance shared values and increase opportunities for international trade. Specifically, Amb. O'Donnell identified gender and trade as a priority area which her country is keen to collaborate with COMESA.

"I cannot speak today without focusing for a moment on our goal of empowering women and girls to become equal participants in an inclusive, prosperous and safe society which is at the heart of Canada's priorities in Africa," she said.

She stressed the need to create the conditions for women, and for the small- and medium-sized businesses they own and run, to compete and succeed in order to achieve development goals in the region.

She added: "Public officials and business

leaders must work together to advance policies and concrete actions to further women's participation and recognize the crucial role that women play in business expansion."

Amb. O'Donnell who is also the High Commissioner of Canada to Tanzania and Zambia emphasized the importance of engagement opportunities with key stakeholders, such as COMESA, in order to advance the ideals of inclusiveness and gender equality.

She said COMESA and Canada can share best practices, connect entrepreneurs and ideas, and see the mutual benefits of increased economic integration.

On her part, the German Ambassador, Dr Wager-Mitchell who is also the German Ambassador to Zambia said: "We are ready to support regional integration and to share our own experience to regional organizations around the globe – either bilaterally or through the EU."

Germany and France are members of the European Union, which is the biggest development partner of the regional bloc especially on the implementation of the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.

This programme aims at harmonizing trade procedures within the COMESA

region through, amongst others, identification and resolution of non-tariff barriers, supporting the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, and improving the implementation of harmonized, science-based sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and technical standards.

"We highly value COMESA's Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative, which is also financially supported by the EU," she said. "One of the border-posts the initiative focuses on is the Kasumbalesa border post between Zambia and DR Congo."

Amb. Goldblatt who is also the French Ambassador to Zambia noted that 10 member States of COMESA are officially French speaking.

"This offers my country a natural bridge allowing my headquarters to come forward with unique tools and expertise, particularly adapted to the needs of almost half the members of your organization, especially in the field of language training," he said.

Secretary General Kapwepwe appreciated the partnership with the EU and Canada, which she said was guided by shared values and common interests.



# COMFWB Participates in the 1st Annual Africa Gender Equality Conference



1st Annual Africa Gender Equality Conference

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) was one of the institution that participated in the 1st Annual Africa Gender Equality Conference (#AGEC2021) High-Level Round Table Discussions during the International Women's Day under the theme: "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world".

This first-ever such conference took place in Lilongwe, Malawi from the 8th to 10th March 2021 and was broadcasted to the African continent virtually. Over 3,000 delegates from government, civil society, academia, gender equality advocates and activists participated.

The conference provided a platform for celebrating progress made towards attaining gender parity, 26 years post-Beijing, championing gender equality, crowd-sourcing the development of home-grown solutions to address existing inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the high-level events, sponsored by COMFWB and the UN Spotlight Initiative, was Round-table discussions for policymakers, society influencers and development partners on approaches to collectively create a world free of violence for women and girls.

In the discussions, COMFWB CEO Ms Ruth Negash stated: "It is critical to creating in all countries a gender-inclusive, conducive business environment fostering policy consistency to tackle violence against women and girls at the workplace."

She noted that long-lasting behavioural change to eliminate violence against women and girls (VaWG) can be expedited if the young generation learns through the school curriculum and the society is exposed to the message through a continuous media campaign denouncing VaWG.

Malawian Minister of Gender, Community

Development and Social Welfare, Hon. Patricia Kaliati said the government is working with UN Spotlight Initiative and other development partners in building capacity in the society to sensitize and put sustainable systems and programs to eliminate violence against women and girls.

COMFWB acts as an intermediary between government/ development partners and women MSMEs in 21 countries to deliver services using national Chapters.

*"It is critical to creating in all countries a gender-inclusive, conducive business environment fostering policy consistency to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls at the workplace."*

## Bidding Farewell to Departing Senior Staff



Mr Brian Chigawa



Mr. George Lipimile



Mr Innocent Makwiramiti

Three COMESA senior staff left the organization earlier this year after serving their contracts /attaining the mandatory retirement age of 60 years. They were Mr George Lipimile, the Director and Chief Executive Officer of the COMESA Competition Commission, Mr Brian Chigawa, Director of Legal and Institutional Affairs, and Mr Innocent Makwiramiti, Senior Private Sector Development Officer.

Mr Lipimile (Zambia) and Mr Makwiramiti

(Zimbabwe) retired, while Mr Chigawa (Malawi) left after serving his full 12-year term as Director as provided for in the staff rules and regulations. The COMESA Secretariat bid farewell to the three at a virtual send-off ceremony on 18 February 2021. The former staff were commended for their exemplary contribution to the COMESA regional integration agenda.

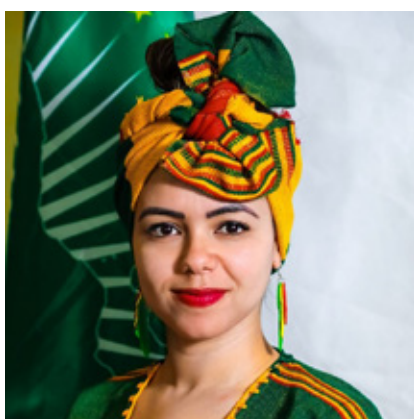
The ceremony was attended by a cross-section of staff and the two Assistant Secretaries General (ASG) for

Programmes, and Administration and Finance Amb. Dr Kipyego Cheluget and Dr Dev Haman Respectively. The two ASGs commended the three staff for their consistent drive to ensure that COMESA programmes were implemented and the region made a mark on the continent. They urged them to continue being ambassadors of COMESA in their next phase of life. Former colleagues in attendance wished them well in their future endeavours.

## COMESA Hails Outgoing African Union Youth Envoy

Outgoing African Union Youth Envoy Ms Aya Chebbi (inset) received accolades for working with COMESA to advance the voices and participation of the youth in development programmes at both regional and continental level. In a message from the COMESA Secretariat, Ms. Chebbi was hailed for ensuring the Office of Youth Envoy (OYE) worked diligently to reshape youth participation in leadership and inspired millions of young women and men on the continent.

"The OYE broke barriers and proved that youth have the energy, the brains, they are innovative, they can be trusted, they are dedicated and committed to actively participate in the development of their communities and the region," said the Secretary General Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe.



OYE worked closely with the Joint COMESA-AU/African Governance Architecture (AGA) Project on Youth Engagement in democratic governance and socio-economic development.

At continental level, Ms Chebbi involved COMESA in several activities including

a series of virtual consultations on COVID-19 featuring high-level speakers from Africa and beyond. The meetings enabled high-level officials to share knowledge, strategies and initiatives on youth engagement from different perspectives.

During her two-year tenure, the OYE pooled leaders and youth on an intergenerational approach to promote African and Global Solidarity for youth empowerment, engagement, employment and sharing of experiences and knowledge, showcasing youth innovations and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

Ms Chebbi from Tunisia served as African Youth Envoy 2018-2020.



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