

COMESA Launches Mobile App to Facilitate Operations of the Regional Customs Transit Scheme



File Photo/ Crews prepare a transit goods truck operating under RCTG, to depart to Uganda from the Port of Mombasa, Kenya

The COMESA Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme (RCTG-Carnet) has launched a Mobile Application to provide access to real-time information to clearing and forwarding agents in the region. The Application is accessible on Google Play Store and Apple Store and provides a one-stop shop for the agents in member countries to view current bond balance and active Carnets, get notifications on Carnet acquittals and expiry of RCTG Bonds.

The scheme popularly known as the RCTG CARNET is a guarantee used for goods in transit as an undertaking to comply with Customs obligations within each transit country. Its objective is to ensure that governments of transit countries can recover duties and taxes from the guarantors should the goods be illegally be disposed-off in the local market. The CARNET offers Customs Administrations a secure regional system of control replacing the nationally executed practices and procedures.

COMESA Member States introduced the Scheme in 2012 to address difficulties experienced by transport operators, freight forwarders and clearing agents. These included high cost of Bond / Guarantee and collaterals charged by Sureties and Agents, delays at border points and revenue leakage.

At the launch of the Mobile Application on Friday, 11th September 2020, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe remarked:

“The creation of this Mobile Application is a very practical way of enabling Clearing and Forwarding Agents to access real-time information on their RCTG bonds from wherever they are without going through Customs Authority offices.”

The COMESA RCTG Carnet is the second of its kind in the world after the European Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR)

Carnet and the only one in the region and the African continent. It is recognized by the World Customs Organization (WCO).

The RCTG Scheme has 13 members namely Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Currently, the Scheme is operational in five countries; namely: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The RCTG Carnet is fully digitalized and integrated with the National Customs IT Systems.

During the year 2018, nearly \$2billion COMESA RCTG Carnets for customs duty and taxes for goods in transit in the Northern and Central Corridor countries were issued.

Find the App on google and apple store on:-

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.comesa.rctgmobile> <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/id1530035067?platform=iphone>



Zambian SMEs Receive Capacity Building Support from COMESA Business Council



File photo/ Small scale Zambian entrepreneurs visiting Rosebloom agro-industry in Zambia. The study tour was organized by CBC under the Local Sourcing for Partnership programme.

Over 50 Small and Medium size Enterprises (SMEs) drawn from various sectors across Zambia participated in a two-day virtual training on capacity building organized by the COMESA Business Council (CBC). Participants were drawn from horticulture sector, meat, dairy and other agro-food industries. The objective was to enable the SMEs to meet the demands of the current urban African consumers and improve the current low rates of local sourcing and consumption of home-grown products.

The initiative is part of the CBC's Local Sourcing for Partnerships Project which has been under implementation since 2016 focusing on promoting inclusiveness of SMEs within firm and sectoral level value chains in Africa. The project is intended to increase local sourcing from small growth enterprises by large companies in the COMESA region to create jobs and economic development. Over the past four years, similar trainings on quality and food safety standards, have been conducted benefitting more than 700 agro-food suppliers in 11 COMESA countries.

Zambia's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr Mushuma Mulenga commended the CBC for working with his Ministry to organize the

online training. He said this will help build the technical capacity of SMEs to implement compliant food safety systems and to feed into the supply chains of the hospitality industry, retail and manufacturing sectors in Zambia and the COMESA region.

He announced that the Ministry had reached an advanced stage in revising and updating the National SME Development Policy and is scheduled to be completed for implementation in 2021.

"Once completed, the revised SME Development Policy will be alive to the current challenges and more importantly, opportunities that the sector can capitalise on to enhance a thriving private sector," Mr Mulenga added during his opening remarks.

“With Africa speaking of deepening integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area, such opportunities can be lost if the participation of SMEs is not addressed,” Ms Uwera added.

CBC Chief Executive Officer Ms Sandra Uwera said the training was not simply an exercise in 'show and tell' but that key principles of successful value chain development and regional integration demand the integration of SMEs into regional supply chains.

"With Africa speaking of deepening integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area, such opportunities can be lost if the participation of SMEs is not addressed," Ms Uwera added.

Representatives from the Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ZACCI) and the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS) acknowledged that it was time for SMEs to realise their full potential and create local sourcing linkages between the sectors. They noted this has the potential to foster a more competitive and dynamic agro - industry sector that can promote local economic development. This will be achieved through providing support to the local producers through supporting the local producers in the agriculture sector by cementing business linkages and establishing sustainable supplier-buyer relationships.

Eswatini has Developed Trade Facilitation Instruments for **Small Scale Border Traders**



Small scale Eswatini farmer displays her agricultural products

The government of Eswatini has developed a national Roadmap for the implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) as well as the Trade and Transportation Facilitation instruments for the Small-Scale Cross Border Traders (SSCBT). The Roadmap is under consideration by senior management in respective ministries and institutions in the country.

The Roadmap and related Instruments were developed during a sensitization workshop on implementation of the Tools under the COMESA EDF11-Cross Border Trade Initiative (CBTI) conducted virtually on 1-2 September. It was intended to create awareness amongst Eswatini stakeholders on the need to formally adopt the STR and other COMESA trade facilitation instruments to facilitate SSCBT flows between at selected borders.

Director of Micro- Small and Medium

Scale Enterprises (MSME) in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade of Eswatini, Mr. Mluleki Sakile Dlamini opened the meeting and emphasized the importance of small-scale cross border trade. He outlined the challenges that SSCBTs face in conducting their businesses noting that the MSME sector contributed to incomes and livelihoods.

"I am hopeful that this workshop will help develop instruments that will ease the way small scale cross border traders do business. Our country will support all these activities that COMESA is implementing locally," Mr Dlamini stated.

Team Leader/Cross Border Trade Expert at the COMESA Secretariat, Tasara Muzorori, stressed the importance of the STR in facilitating trade by SSCBTs.

Mr Muzorori called on stakeholders in Eswatini to embrace and implement

the STR with some of the COMESA Member States to enhance the trading environment for the SSCBTs. He outlined the rationale for the STR and its advantages to both the traders and governments as well as in formalizing informal trade. He thanked the European Union for providing funding for the Cross-Border Trade Initiative which had made it possible for the workshop to be conducted. Mr Muzorori was accompanied by Coordinated Border Management Expert, TFP at the Secretariat Mr. Ahmed Y. Salih.

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The instruments to be developed will ease the way small scale cross border traders do business



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR65jN47tO4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0i1IINEu8pkAYYLnb2Y6WjC-Yvb6_gdlmXgMFs2jstU6cUdQbzc8FZ1xE

Africa Tonight with COMESA SG Kapwepwe

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe has been named among 100 Most Influential African Women on the continent for the year 2020.


The Award given by Avance Media, a leading African Public Relations and Rating Firm is a recognition for women who are leading various initiatives across the continent and seeks to present them as role models for the younger generation. ZNBC TV's Africa Tonight programme took some to interact with the Secretary General on this achievement.




<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98J4tS3cjVk>

The Future of Intra-Regional Trade Amid COVID-19

Director of Trade and Customs Dr Christopher Onyango appeared on Spring TV in Lusaka and discussed the future of intra-regional trade amid COVID-19 and how the pandemic has affected implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

 COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051

 +260 211 229 725

 www.comesa.int

 info@comesa.int

 facebook.com/COMESA/

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