

COMESA is Resetting Relationship with its Institutions



File Photo/ COMESA Secretariat and institutions retreat, November 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 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 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 ATI Mr. Manuel Moses two weeks ago.

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's 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 Members States, to give them platforms to sensitize them about their services and products and thereby drive membership.

Mr Moses said ATI has great potential in enabling Member States attract grant funding from international lenders through 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 in the continent.

Mauritius Launches 50 Million African Women Speak Platform

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform was unveiled Thursday 11 February 2021 in Port Louis, as Mauritius became the tenth COMESA Member State to launch the digital networking initiative.

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

Chief Guest Dr. Rooba Moorghen thanked the African Development Bank (AfDB) for spearheading the initiative, which she noted would complement the efforts of the Mauritian government, and paid tribute to COMESA for its partnership.

The Permanent Secretary described the timing of the launch as perfect.

"Today's event is happening at an opportune time as we move towards accelerating our drive towards the Sustainable Development Goals," Dr. Moorghen said.

"We are duty-bound to find solutions to ensure that women become part of the transformation in the COMESA region," she added, noting that the wealth of information on the platform will enable users in Mauritius to expand supply chains.

The event was conducted through a hybrid arrangement with a limited number of local participants gathered physically and the other guests joining virtually, with COMESA's high-profile participation led by Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Assistant Secretaries General Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget (Programmes) and Dr. Dev Haman (Admin & Finance). Also in attendance were Ms. Linet Miriti-Otieno, Chief Gender Officer at the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Ms. Ruth Negash, Chief executive Officer of COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB).

COMESA SG Kapwepwe said she hoped the platform would be a springboard for Mauritian women entrepreneurs coming off a difficult 2020.



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe speaking to delegates attending the launch of the 50 Million Africa Women Speak Platform in Mauritius

"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," Ms Kapwepwe stated.

Speaking on behalf of the AfDB, which provided funding for the platform, Ms. Linet Miriti-Otieno 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."

The launch event also featured a panel where panelists comprehensively discussed the

approaches for supporting women to utilize digital tools, as well as a detailed exposition of the opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the COMESA region which was presented by Ms. Providence Mavubi, Director for Industry & Agriculture at the COMESA Secretariat.

The 50 Million African Women Speak platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using 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 opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries. The next launch is scheduled for 18 February 2021 in Malawi.



Left Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare and Chief Guest Dr. Rooba Moorghen who represented the Minister of Gender with Ms Bali, Head Gender Unit, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare



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 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.

Also 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, Wednesday 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 will also come from the meeting of Chiefs of Immigration from COMESA Member States scheduled next month.

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 business people 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 on implementation 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, which allows the Member State 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.



File Photo/ Mr Charles Kwenin

The two organizations are also jointly organizing the annual COMESA Migration Dialogue (MIDCOM) which is a consultative forum for planning programmes. The dialogue is scheduled for early March this year.

COVID-19 Vaccinations Roll Out Slowly in the COMESA Region

Three COMESA Countries Egypt, Mauritius and Seychelles have rolled out the COVID-19 vaccinations. According to the COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) report, countries in the COMESA region have however, been slow to roll out COVID-19 vaccination. The slow rollout in Africa generally has been attributed to the costs of procurement, availability and safety concerns. Most developed countries that had earlier procured COVID-19 vaccines from the bigger pharmaceuticals started vaccinating their citizens earlier in the year.

Data compiled by COMWARN indicates that Seychelles has so far vaccinated 37,589 people. Since the onset of the pandemic in the region in February 2020, the region has recorded a total of 1,047,018 COVID-19 cases.

While the numbers of cases have been increasing, the region has also recorded a high number of recoveries. Currently, the cumulative number of COVID-19 deaths in the region stands at 30,248. The countries that have so far recorded the highest numbers of cases include Tunisia (217,753), Egypt (170,207), Ethiopia (142,994), Libya (124,882) and Kenya (101,944).



The high numbers in some of these countries is partly attributed to high rates of testing and non-adherence to COVID-19 measures. The number of recoveries in these countries is also commendable with Kenya at 88.61%, Egypt at 87.94%, Ethiopia (84.42%), Libya (82.86% and Tunisia at 77.96%.

On the other hand, Djibouti (with 5,950 cases), Somalia (4,862), Comoros (3,088), Eritrea (2,326), Burundi (1,728), Seychelles (1,575) and Mauritius (593) have recorded relatively low cases. The populations in the majority of these countries are relatively low making it easier for the governments to implement strict measures. In this category, Djibouti and Somalia had recorded high numbers of daily rates in the initial stages.



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