

COMESA Countries Set for Elections in 2022



Four COMESA countries namely Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Libya are preparing to hold presidential and general elections this year. These elections are expected to usher in new political dispensations.

The first of these is Somalia which will hold presidential elections before 25th February 2022 using a relatively complex indirect system. The presidential election will be conducted after the completion of the legislative election where clan elders will elect 275 members of parliament who will constitute the lower house. These legislators will in turn pick the president.

The next is the Libyan presidential election, which has been scheduled for June 2022. According to the High National Electoral Commission (HNEC), 2.8 million voters have registered to participate in the election. Holding the presidential election is part of the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement that will move the country from the transition phase and pave way for long-term political stability.

The Kenya General elections are scheduled for 9th August 2022 which will include

elections for the President and Members of Parliament as well as Senators, Governors and Women Representatives for the 47 Counties and Members of County Assemblies. The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has already published the calendar of activities in preparation for the elections. Presidential and legislative elections for Sudan are expected to be held in December 2022.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the four major elections are expected to be held normally with the full observance of the health guidelines such as encouraging vaccinations, sanitizing, wearing of masks and social distancing. It is expected that Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) will be put in place to guide the elections amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) experts at COMESA Secretariat, it is important for COMESA countries to continuously hold elections in line with the existing legal and policy frameworks. This, in the long term, will strengthen democratic culture at both national and regional levels. Regular democratic elections contribute to the consolidation of democracy and enhance good governance.

COMESA is pleased to note that since the third wave of multiparty politics in the 1990s, most countries in COMESA have organized and held regular elections. "Certainly, periodic elections in the region have given impetus to democratic governance and the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region," GPS Head of Unit Ms Elizabeth Mutunga added.

COMESA has been supporting Member States in the electoral process and has so far observed 30 elections. Through the COMESA Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) Forum, COMESA has provided training to EMBs. The EMB forum was established as a platform for Member States to share experiences and benefit from peer support from each other. Through elections observation missions, COMESA provides practical recommendations that have, in the long term, informed key reforms in Member States and improved the quality of elections.

"Certainly, periodic elections in the region have given impetus to democratic governance and the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region," Ms Elizabeth Mutunga added

RAERESA Gets US\$1.5m for Harmonisation of Electricity Regulations and Improving Cross Border Power Trade



File: Electricity Power lines

The Board of the African Development Bank (AfDB) has approved a grant of US\$1.5m to advance intra-regional harmonization of electricity regulations and drive cross-border power trading in the COMESA region. This will be implemented through COMESA's energy regulatory arm -the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA).

The two-year project seeks to provide tools for harmonizing regulatory frameworks to facilitate the smooth and timely completion, utilization and operation of regional energy infrastructure-a move that is expected to further enhance regional electricity trade, which is critical to COMESA noted RAERESA Chief Executive Officer Dr Mohamedain El-Seif. He added that the grants will fund technical assistance to promote the development and adoption of regional electricity regulatory principles, enhance capacity to monitor utility performance across the region, conduct a cross-border analysis of electricity tariffs, and

develop a centralized database management system in both blocs.

The project comprises four components which include Elaboration and Adoption of Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) and Key Performance Indicators for COMESA. It will involve technical assistance to COMESA for the adoption of regulatory performance indicators from the Bank's flagship Electricity Regulatory Index for Africa (ERI), contextualization and adoption of same and application of the adopted indicators for monitoring uniform regulatory performance in the region by RAERESA.

Component two will involve technical assistance to COMESA for the adoption and application of uniform Key Performance Indicators for monitoring utility performance across the region and support the collection and reporting on these indicators.

The project will also assist the region to have

a harmonized comparison of electricity tariffs and develop a Cost Reflectivity Assessment Framework Tool (CRAFT). This component will involve technical assistance to COMESA to undertake a comparative analysis of electricity tariffs and drivers of tariffs across the electricity value chain in the region and developing a cost reflectivity assessment tool to track progress made by countries in migrating their tariffs towards cost reflectivity levels.

The fourth component is the Development of Information and Database Management System (IDBMS). This will involve technical assistance to RAERESA to develop a centralized database management system that will provide a platform for collecting data from member countries, store and disseminate regulatory and other relevant energy information.



Simplified Trade Regime Threshold Reviewed



Small Scale Cross border traders

COMESA Secretariat has conducted a study to review the suitability of the current Simplified Trade Regime (STR) threshold which stands at US\$2,000 per consignment, per crossing. Specifically, the study was commissioned to review the current STR threshold value with a view to establishing a suitable level that is capable of effectively facilitating intra-regional trade in Member States already implementing the STR and those that will implement it in future.

Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA Secretariat Dr Christopher Onyango stated that the review will also benefit countries that are not yet participating in the STR but intend to do so. This is part of COMESA's strategies to boost cross-border trade.

He added that apart from enabling small scale cross border traders to benefit from the tariff preferences available under regional integration the STR has the ingredients to stimulate domestic production and cross-border trade.

"I commend Member States who have already initiated bilateral discussions aimed at strengthening the STR regime, including the threshold, reviewing common lists of products and applicable customs documentations, all this is meant to deepen intra-COMESA trade," Dr

Onyango stated.

He was speaking during the meeting to validate the study conducted by a consultant. The one-day virtual meeting was attended by senior government officials from targeted Member States, border agency officials, representatives from the private sector and small-scale trading communities.

The study involved desk research and stakeholder consultations focusing on the products being traded at the borders, the average value of consignments declared by small scale cross border traders, assessing the suitability of the current STR threshold in facilitating regional trade and integration.

COMESA Secretariat together with Member States have been implementing the STR since 2010. Funded under the 11th European Development Fund (11th EDF), the overall objective of the project is to increase formal small-scale trade flows in the COMESA and tripartite (EAC-COMESA-SADC) regions leading to higher government revenue collection at the targeted borders and increased security and incomes for small scale cross border traders.

Specifically, this project is expected to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade flows between

targeted countries through effective policy and governance reforms, institutional capacity building and improve border infrastructure and lastly strengthen data collection and monitoring. Over the years, implementation of the STR has not been without challenges which range from the value of the threshold which was initially at US\$500 worth of value of goods and being progressively raised to the current level of USD2000, and discussions on the common lists of products traded across neighbouring countries.

Therefore, the validation meeting of the study which was held virtually on 19 January 2022, enabled the delegates to deliberate and validate the results of the study with a view of improving implementation of the STR which is an important trade policy tool. Based on the views from the stakeholders, the study recommended that the STR threshold be maintained at the current level of USD2000 which was adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2014.

"With recent revelations that there is potential to increase COMESA's intra export of goods alone by over USD\$100 billion, it is not therefore in doubt that an improved and effective STR regime will significantly contribute and bolster exports and intra-regional trade altogether," Dr Onyango said.



COMESA Mourns Bank of Uganda Governor

COMESA is mourning the passing on of Bank of Uganda Governor Prof. Emmanuel Tumusiime-Mutebile, who died on 23 January 2022. Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said Prof Tumusiime-Mutebile would be remembered for the rich legacy of championing monetary cooperation and his contribution in the regional integration agenda of COMESA.

In her message of condolences sent to the Central Bank in Kampala, SG Kapwepwe stated that during his tenure of office, Prof. Mutebile served the region and his country with distinction in the banking sector. He provided unique leadership in the monetary

sector in Uganda and the region through the COMESA Committee of the Central Bank Governors.

"On behalf of the COMESA Secretariat and its institutions, I would like to extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved family, staff of the Central Bank, the people and Government of Uganda," the message read in part.

She has prayed to the Almighty God to give the bereaved family strength and courage to surmount this most difficult and trying moment.



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