

Regional Optical Fibre Regulatory Policy and Framework Validated



Permanent Secretary, Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, Uganda, Dr. Aminah Zawedde at the EGEE-ICT workshop.

Close to 50 experts in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector from Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean region have validated the draft Policy and Regulatory frameworks for fibre infrastructures. These frameworks will help enhance digital development in the region.

During a validation workshop held in Kampala, Uganda from 25th to 27th March 2024, officials acknowledged existing gaps in missing links which result in inefficiency and non-cost-effective utilization of installed capacity in the 29 Member States of the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean region (EA-SA-IO).

To promote efficient and cost-effective deployments and use of optical fibre cable infrastructure and services, the European Union funded Programme on Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT), supported several activities of this cause.

The first activity was a study on optical fibre cable infrastructure, which identified missing links, capital and operational costs associated with fibre networks, and recommended appropriate policy and regulatory interventions to enable efficient and cost-effective utilization and deployment of fibre networks.

The policy and regulatory frameworks will guide the development of national frameworks at a regional and national level and support an enabling environment to accelerate the rollout of fibre-based broadband networks and penetration and use of fibre-based broadband services through effective infrastructure sharing in the EA-SA-IO region.

Additionally, a strategic framework of cooperation was developed to foster regional cooperation for the advancement of cross-border backbone fibre networks in Africa. This was necessitated by the need to improve policies, infrastructure connectivity, and access to ICT and to help the region develop policies and regulatory frameworks for open access and infrastructure sharing.

In this regard, two draft documents were developed to stimulate investments into regional communications infrastructure and improve access to ICT services in the five regional economic communities covered by the EGEE-ICT programme. They are COMESA, East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

Speaking at the workshop's opening on Monday, 25th March, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry

of ICT and National Guidance, Uganda, Dr. Aminah Zawedde noted that only 37% of Africans were using the Internet. She emphasized the need to improve ICT infrastructure coverage and target the underserved and unserved communities. To bridge the gap, digital infrastructure investments will require 250,000 new 4G base stations and at least 250,000 kilometers of fiber in Africa.

Senior Telecommunications Officer in COMESA, Mr. Leonard Chitundu, stated that the two documents will facilitate the sharing of optical fibre cable infrastructure among operators, leading to a reduction in the macroeconomic cost of fibre deployments, enhanced competition and access, and ultimately, improved affordability of fibre services.

One of the recommendations in the Draft Policy and Strategic Framework is to ensure that infrastructure deployment is encouraged locally and that dominance in national markets is not leveraged detrimentally into cross-border services.

Other partners in the meeting included the East African Communications Organisation (EACO) and the Southern Africa Telecommunication Association (SATA).



D R Congo Minister, Hon. Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi (3rd left) and his team, meets Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (3rd right) at the COMESA HQs in Lusaka, Zambia. On the right are Assistant Secretaries General Dr Mohamed Kadah (extreme right) and Dr Dev Haman.

DRC Minister visits COMESA: affirms commitment to regional integration

The Minister of Regional Integration in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Hon. Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi visited the COMESA Headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia on Friday 22 March 2024 and held discussions with the Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

The discussions focused on key developments in the implementation of regional integration programmes that relates to the DR Congo, including an update on the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) which the country is poised to fully enlist.

Currently, the FTA has sixteen participating Member States while the DRC is in the process of tariff reduction that will pave way for its full participation once it is completed.

Hon. Nyamwisi affirmed the DRC government's commitment to the ideals of COMESA regional integration agenda and pledged to continue doing more to advance this agenda in deepening trade within the regional bloc.

"We will continue doing our best to advance regional integration," said Minister Nyamwisi. "The DRC believes that as Africa and the COMESA region, we should avoid remaining isolated. We need each other by pooling our resources for the betterment of all people." The SG urged the DRC to complete the process

of tariff reduction so that it can fully participate in the FTA.

Further, she commended the government for preparing phase 1 of the Great Grand Inga hydropower project with support from the African Development Bank and the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD. This project, she noted, will have a significant positive impact on the energy security in the region which has been facing a deficit of power.

Also discussed was the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Project targeted in the eastern borderlands of the DRC and Burundi. This is a USD 245 Million six year project funded by the World Bank aimed at supporting peace and stability in the region through programs to improve livelihoods in the border areas, promoting cross-border trade and strengthening economic relationships.

Through the visiting Minister, the SG congratulated President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo on his recent re-election, and to the government and people of DRC for upholding this important democratic process.

COMESA Member Central Banks' Staff Trained in Econometric Modeling of Climate Change's Influence on Monetary Policy

Central bank staff from 13 COMESA Member States recently underwent training in econometric modeling to understand the impact of climate change on monetary policy. Organized by the COMESA Monetary Institute from March 18 to 22, 2024, the training focused on integrating climate change effects into econometric models of monetary policy transmission, particularly relevant to COMESA member central banks.

Forty-two participants from Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe attended the virtual training, a significant milestone in enhancing the resilience and adaptability of COMESA member central banks to address the challenges of a rapidly changing climate.

During the training, participants learned how to compile and measure key indicators of climate change risks, transition to green economies, and assess how climate change risks and policies interact with countries' macroeconomic frameworks. They also gained insights into modeling aspects to incorporate climate change risks and mitigation indicators into monetary policy frameworks.

Dr. Lucas Njoroge, CMI Director, highlighted the consensus among policymakers and scholars on the major implications of climate change on monetary policy. He emphasized that measures like carbon pricing against physical and transition risks can directly impact inflation dynamics and output, potentially impairing the transmission of central banks' monetary policy through changes in banks' balance sheets and credit flow to the real economy.

Overall, the training provided a valuable platform for participants to share knowledge and exchange experiences regarding the evolving country dynamics stemming from climate change.



Advancing Coordinated Border Management: Strategies for Efficiency and Competitiveness

Borders serve as crucial points where various agencies act as gatekeepers to territorial boundaries, with Customs authorities and other border management agencies playing essential roles in community protection. These roles include tax collection, preventing international terrorism, and safeguarding public health and cultural heritage.

However, there is a notable shift towards facilitation and competitiveness through the implementation of Coordinated Border Management (CBM) programs. CBM aims to enhance efficiency and competitiveness by facilitating legitimate trade and travel while ensuring predictable and streamlined clearance procedures.

In the COMESA region, CBM is being implemented under the Trade Facilitation Project, funded by the European Union under the EDF 11 program. Previous efforts to facilitate trade within COMESA have not yielded significant results, as intra-COMESA trade flows remain low at around 10%. The COMESA Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021-2025 aims to raise this figure to 25%.

“Effective implementation of CBM is a crucial strategy that can significantly contribute to achieving this ambitious goal,” remarked COMESA Director of Trade, Dr. Christopher Onyango,

during his address at the Coordinated Border Management Implementation Workshop held in Lusaka, Zambia, on March 20 – 22, 2024.

The workshop aimed to collaborate with stakeholders to coordinate various activities aimed at enhancing efficiency and competitiveness. This workshop followed the decision of the 42nd COMESA Council of Ministers in November 2021, which adopted Regional CBM guidelines and an Implementation Strategy.

These documents were developed to assist member states in implementing CBM, transitioning from national to regional implementation using a standardized approach based on international benchmarks.

“If properly designed, implemented, and adequately resourced,” Dr. Onyango emphasized, “collaborative border management can deliver a range of benefits to governments and the private sector alike.”

These benefits include cost and efficiency

improvements, promoting good governance and integrity to meet the increasing policy and procedural requirements at borders. Additionally, there is a growing expectation from the private sector and heightened awareness of costs, leading to political pressure for competitiveness as countries aim to attract trade and tourism.

By developing a regional implementation blueprint, bilateral arrangements for CBM implementation will be simplified, fostering a culture of shared services where collaborative operating models and facilities can be created to deliver strong performance and service delivery.

To date, several interventions aimed at enhancing CBM have been undertaken at selected border posts in the region. These include upgrades to facilities, processes, and procedures at border posts such as Chirundu (Zambia/Zimbabwe), Mwami/Mchinji (Malawi/Zambia), Nakonde/Tunduma (Tanzania/Zambia), Moyale (Kenya/Ethiopia), and Galafi (Djibouti/Ethiopia).

“Effective implementation of CBM is a crucial strategy that can significantly contribute to achieving this ambitious goal,” Dr. Christopher Onyango



Amb. Rachid Mohammed Abdul Wahid presents his letter of accreditation to COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe

Secretary General Urges Ethiopian Ambassador to Facilitate Accelerated Accession to the Free Trade Area

The Secretary-General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has urged Ethiopia's newly accredited Permanent Representative to the organization to assist expedite his country's ratification of the COMESA Free Trade Area agreement.

During the accreditation ceremony of Ambassador Rachid Mohammed Abdul Wahid on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, in Lusaka, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe acknowledged Ethiopia's progress in the ratification process, which will allow it to participate in the COMESA Free Trade Area, now with 16 out of 21 member states participating.

Ms. Kapwepwe stated, "COMESA has been providing technical support to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan to fast-track Ethiopia's accession to the COMESA FTA."

She outlined several COMESA-supported projects in Ethiopia, including a 5.6 million Euros funding signed in 2021 to enhance coordination of border management and trade and transport facilitation programs at the Moyale and Galafi borders, linking Ethiopia to Kenya and Djibouti, respectively.

COMESA also supported the development of Ethiopia's national and regional AGOA strategy and provided training on Rules of Origin, World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, and Non-Tariff Barriers for customs, public officials, and the private sector.

In the agriculture and industry sector, the Secretary-General cited the program on Prioritizing Sanitary

and Phyto Sanitary Investments for Market Access (PIMA), where Ethiopian experts received training to ensure the sustainability and institutionalization of this framework.

Furthermore, equipment has been funded for the Ethiopian National Metrology Institutes and Legal Metrology Organizations, supporting the development of a Legal Metrology Legislative Framework for Ethiopia in line with International Organization for Legal Metrology and World Trade Organization requirements.

With support from the African Development Bank, COMESA has trained pharmaceutical enterprises in Ethiopia, such as Africure Pharmaceuticals Limited and Kilitch Estro Biotech Limited, to ensure that pharmaceutical products consistently meet safety and quality requirements as required by the

regulatory authority.

Ambassador Wahid expressed Ethiopia's appreciation for its membership in COMESA and recognized the organization's pivotal role in promoting regional integration, economic development, and cooperation among its member states.

"We firmly believe that by working together, we can address the common challenges facing our region and unlock the immense potential for growth and development," said Mr. Wahid, who is also the Ambassador of Ethiopia to Zambia.

He pledged to strengthen the partnership between Ethiopia and COMESA and contribute constructively to its activities to advance the objectives of the regional bloc. <https://fic.kr/s/aHBqjBITct>



COMESA staff attending the accreditation ceremony of the Ethiopian ambassador.



European Union Programme Manager, Ms. Christiane Haziyo (L), Ambassador Dr. Mohammed Kadar (R) and other team members visits Mwami-Mchinji One Stop Border Post.

COMESA and EU Delegation Visit Zambia-Malawi Border to Witness Impact of Upgrading Project

The Mwami-Mchinji One Stop Border Post (OSBP) is among four borders that have undergone significant upgrades with technical and financial support from the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.

The upgrades include the installation of smart gates, baggage scanners, metal detectors, an advanced mini-lab, rapid testing equipment for Port Health inspectors, biometric web cameras, passport readers, and new furniture. These

enhancements are aimed at boosting border efficiency and reducing the time required to facilitate the import, export, and transit of goods and services at the Zambia-Malawi border post.

The improvements have already shown promising results. Revenue collection at the border has surged from approximately K50 million to over K120 million, as reported by Assistant Commissioner Alex Malama Chiwama of the Zambia Revenue Authority. Furthermore, clearance times have plummeted from an average of eight

days to just 12 hours.

To assess the impact of the upgrading project, a joint team comprising representatives from COMESA, the European Union Delegation to Zambia, and the Zambian government visited the border on 15th March 2024. Their visit aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the upgrades in enhancing trade facilitation and border operations between Zambia and Malawi.

ICT experts endorse Draft Policy and Regulatory Frameworks on Roaming and Interconnections

Stakeholders in the ICT sector have endorsed Draft Policy and Regulatory Frameworks on Roaming and Interconnections aimed at addressing high and uncompetitive tariffs for international mobile roaming in the region and a weak regulatory regime for cross-border interconnections.

This follows a study that was commissioned under the programme on Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) funded by the European Union.

The validation of the policies and frameworks was conducted during a three-day workshop in Kigali, Rwanda, on 4 – 6 March 2024.

“Uncompetitive tariffs in the region are most persisting challenges in the regional ICT market that stifle the growth of the sector,” remarked the COMESA director of infrastructure Mr. Bernard Dzawanda at the opening of the workshop.

Director General in the Rwanda Ministry of ICT and Innovation Mr. Gordon Kalema informed the meeting that Rwanda has developed a National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy that outlines a comprehensive plan to leverage AI's transformative potential in key sectors as a step to address this challenge. It covers healthcare, agriculture, public services, education, finance, and smart cities. It was approved by Cabinet in April 2023.

The EGEE-ICT is a four-year programme that aims at supporting the effective review and/or development of various regional policy and regulatory framework in a harmonized manner that will contribute to enhancing competition, improved access to cost effective and secure ICT services in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean regions (EA-SA-IO).



Stakeholders participating in the validation workshop of peace building tools

Tools on Handling Children Affected by Armed Conflict Developed

COMESA Secretariat has developed three key documents that will help the region in handling issues of Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC). They include the CAAC Strategy and Technical Guiding Notes for involvement of Children in Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development.

The third are the Standard Operating Procedures on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups

These have since been validated by all the strategic partner organisations during a workshop held on 12-15 March 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya. The validation provided an opportunity to generate fresh ideas and inputs from the regional experts to enrich the three documents for finalization.

The documents will be critical in progressing the CAAC agenda in the region and at the national level

in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063.

The documents will be presented to Member States for validation later in the year and to the COMESA Policy Organs for adoption. This will then pave the way for roll out of the documents for use by the various stakeholders, according to Head Governance Peace and Security programme in COMESA, Dr. Oita Etyang.

The validation workshop was conducted in conjunction with Save the Children, with participation of the African Union Commission, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, the UN Mission in DRC (MONUSCO), the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), the East African Commission, academic institutions, civil society organizations and independent experts.



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