


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



SOMAWSP | Celebrating African Women in business

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

Visit www.womenconnect.org and nominate women entrepreneurs you admire and they could be featured on the SOMAWSP website.

Benedicte Mundele
Fresh Food entrepreneur,
Kivu, DRC Congo

50 MILLION AFRICAN WOMEN SPEAK
Connected. Networked. Empowered.
Connectées. Réseauées. Autonomisées.
متصّلات. مترابّلات. ذاتية التسيير

COMESA has launched a regional campaign to popularise a platform for women in business known as 50 Million African Women Speak (SOMAWSP). 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' will run on radio and social media channels over the next one month. It aims to promote the platform in Comoros, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe which are the Member States where COMESA is implementing the 50 Million African Women Speak Project.

The campaign invites women in the region to log onto the platform at www.womenconnect.org, or to download the SOMAWSP app from the Google or Apple stores. To participate, women will be 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 will be published on the platform and those who submitted them may have an opportunity to meet their role models.

The SOMAWSP 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 sees 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."

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Ease of Cross Border Movement of Persons Expected as Tripartite Ministers Approve Facilitation Guidelines



File: Rubavu/Goma on the Rwanda, DR Congo border

The Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee for Trade, Customs, Finance, Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs has 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 held on Thursday 4th March 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. These will be henceforth be harmonized with the national guidelines for smooth re-opening of air, land and sea borders for mass movement of persons and personal goods 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: "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, who is also the Malawian Minister for Health, Hon. Khumbize Chiponda

urged the Member/Partner States to ensure that they domesticate the tripartite guidelines and align them to 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 COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Taskforce, Dr. Stergomena Tax, 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, so as to reach consensus on pending issues, and in doing so facilitate safe environment for economic activities and trade, and as such, tripartite integration which are very critical to the creation of jobs and wealth, and the enhancement of standards of living of our citizens," Dr Tax who is the SADC Executive Secretary said.

Some of the areas, she said require uniformity includes the type of tests and protocols to be used for drivers and crews. These needs to consider efficiency and turnaround time for results and the need for mutual recognition of test results and validity period, so as 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.

6.8m Euros Border Post Upgrading Project Kicks Off

Activities have begun towards implementation of a €6.8 million project 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. These are Mwami, Chirundu and Nakonde respectively.

The first project implementation workshop was 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 activities will be carried out under the Zambia Border Posts Upgrading Project within a period of 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 information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments among other deliverables.

By the end of the implementation period of the project, 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 Mulenga said in a statement presented by the Director of Foreign Trade Mrs. Bessie Chelemu.

Among other issues discussed were on 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 necessary support to ensure efficient and 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.



COMESA Online Trade Platform Soon to go Live



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Eighteen out of 21 COMESA Member States have so far nominated focal point persons to be responsible for management of the COMESA Online Trade Portal and coordinate with national stakeholders to compile information needed to update the live platform at the country level.

The Platform was approved by the Council of Ministers in May 2020, but activation has delayed owing to slow pace of nomination of the Member States focal points.

The platform 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 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 as well as connecting 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

Thursday 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 potentials 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 Member States need to take ownership of the platform, as it has great potential to support increased intra-regional trade not only during the pandemic and beyond.

In the last four months, the Secretariat has trained all the nominated focal points and also provided demand-driven capacity building to ensure they

are well equipped to manage and coordinate implementation of the Platform at National level. This is aimed at ensuring that multiple stakeholders, including private sector players can use the platform.

According to Dr Cheluget, the successful implementation of the platform is an important step towards realization of COMESA Digital Free Trade Area initiatives. He called on the business fraternity in particular 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 business people.

Dates	NAME OF MEETING	VENUE	ORGANIZER
18 Mar 2021	Launch of the 50MAWSP in Ethiopia	Virtual	Secretariat
June 2021	21st COMESA Heads of State and Governments Summit	Virtual	Secretariat



Nakonde border post

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

There is need to shift approaches in border management in the region to focus more on facilitation as opposed to control in order to ease free movement of persons. This will facilitate 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 Tuesday 2nd March 2021. At the meeting, it was observed that free movement of COMESA citizens to other Member States has been constrained for years despite the adoption of the Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation 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 said Member States have so far agreed on a number of programmes which will eventually lead to the implementation of the above protocols. However, this will be achieved must faster if countries focused less on border controls towards border facilitation without compromising on their 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 is required, which unfortunately lacks in the level of disaggregation for evidence-based policy making.

"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 the Developing Capacity in Migration Statistics project. This project will help increase national capacity in migration data collection for the effective management of migration. It will enhance the availability, quality and comparability of migration data, which are key in effective migration management.

Migration has been referenced under the Sustainable Development Goals under 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. In addition, 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 COMESA region has been identified as a vibrant micro-entrepreneurial sector with significant potential to help alleviate poverty, contribute to food security as well as serve as an empowerment tool for women and the youth, if managed efficiently.

At the meeting, the following papers were also discussed: 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 Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD/EU) Migration Project in addressing Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The outcomes of the meeting of the Chief of Migration will be tabled before Ministers Responsible for Immigration for adoption.



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