

## Member States Invited to bid for Market Access Enhancement Funds



COMESA has launched a Call for Proposals to its Member States to bid for funding of up to 150,000 Euros to support market access. The funds will be provided under a Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) established with support of the European Union.

Key activities for support are under the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) financed through the 11 European Development Fund (EDF 11). This facility is meant to cater for priority needs of Member States on the implementation of the COMESA regional integration agenda at the national level. Only interventions related to Result Area 1 of the RECAMP are eligible for support.

Result Area 1 entails sustainable enhancement of the competitiveness and market access of small and medium enterprises and other firms in the targeted value chains/sectors. This is expected to enhance market access and business linkages in the targeted sectors.

Under the result area 1, the capacities of beneficiary firms related to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and regional standards and quality management will be improved. This includes the social and environmental standards required under the World Trade Organization and/or EU market.

The RECAMP is an innovative approach to regional cooperation which complements other support mechanisms available to the COMESA Secretariat and its Member States. Its objective is to increase private sector participation in sustainable regional and global value chains by enhancing their access to markets and improving business and investment climate.

The maximum threshold for any Member State's application is Euro150,000, while the minimum threshold will be Euro 50,000, per year. All eligible Member States have the opportunity to submit requests which will be assessed by the Secretariat with the successful requests will be awarded necessary resources for implementation, in line with the COMESA rules and procedures.

This is the first call of applications to be launched under the RECAMP programme and it is expected that member countries will take the opportunity and benefit from the facility.

Further information on guidelines and application process are available on the COMESA Website and EDF Programmes social media platforms.

### Tunisia Ready to Participate in the COMESA Free Trade Regime

Tunisia is ready to fully participate in the COMESA Free Trade Area regime (FTA) one year after giving notification of participation in the trade regime in March, 2020.

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File: 2019 COMESA Council of Ministers meeting

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To prepare for this, the COMESA Secretariat through the Division of Trade conducted a three-day virtual sensitization workshop for Tunisia on 20th April 2021, covering not only the FTA but other trade facilitation instruments as well.

Participants were drawn from the Tunisian government and the private sector. COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Kipyego Cheluget opened the event by welcoming Tunisia's decision to join the FTA.

"We welcome this decision by Tunisia," Amb. Cheluget said. "It is encouraging to note that traders and producers from Tunisia are already active in the COMESA market going by the number of notifications to the Secretariat of emerging NTB's already being encountered in its commercial transactions."

Besides the FTA, COMESA is implementing various programmes aimed at promoting regional integration through trade. They include infrastructure upgrading, enhancing competitiveness of industry and agricultural sectors and social programmes that address issues of gender, health and better use of natural

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and human resources.

The FTA was established in 2000 under the trade integration pillar and is one of the major milestone which has contributed to growth in regional trade which is now at an average of 7% every year with a higher increase reflected among participating Member States.

Notwithstanding, the region's potential for growth is set back by among other factors, non-tariff barriers, inadequate infrastructure, high cost of doing business, limited information on available market opportunities and supply side constraints.

Going forward, the Secretariat intends to address some of these constraints through

the implementation of the Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA) instruments such as the COMESA electronic certificate of origin and the COMESA online market and by increasing the scope of trade in services.

The COMESA FTA started off with nine Member States participating in a scheme that provides for duty free quota free trade and has now grown to 16 Member States with the participation of Tunisia.

Tunisia joined COMESA in 2018.





# Malawi President Attends the COMESA Businesswomen Summit



The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) held a Businesswomen Summit in Malawi on 19th April, under the theme "Realizing Gender Responsive Procurement and Smart Inclusive Financing." The President of Malawi HE Dr. Lazarus Chakwera graced the event.

During the Summit, a High-level Panel Discussion on "Financial Inclusion and the Need for Increased Investment in Women" was also conducted. Discussions featured the bankers' association, country heads of missions of the United Nations, African Union (AUSARO) the European Union and the African women leaders network among others.

President Chakwera spoke at the launch ceremony during which he emphasized the need for women to establish reliable sources of funding from within the country as well as the region to build their business.

"For a longtime now, women have lagged in business because of lack of access to finance as start-up for their businesses," he noted adding that his government is putting in place measures to increase women's participation in business activities.

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Further, he said the Malawi National Economic Empowerment Fund ought to be a key tool for bridging the financial gap experienced by entrepreneurs by providing business capital. He promised that his government shall prioritize business opportunities through a recent gazette directive known as "SME Order" to Government Ministries, Department and agencies to support local SME's.

This, he observed, will encourage women entrepreneurs to continue taking great strides and realizing their own economic independence.

COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ms. Ruth Negash said women's collateral status does not define their ability to become bankable

"Women are excellent money managers and not having collateral is not an indicator to that they are not credit-worthy," she said. "Most women were credit-worthy, as they are involved in complex financial processes through home-based institutions such as village savings and loan groups."

She added that despite limited incomes, women have skills to stretch meagre household budgets to feed their immediate family, help close relatives, be part of community and religious activities and still manage to run their small businesses.

"What remains now is for governments and financial institutions to create facilities to advance their businesses," she added.

COMFWB Malawi Chairperson, Barbara Banda said that access to financial services and financial literacy materials would empower the operations of women entrepreneurs to maintain their businesses and avoid the challenges they face.

According to Ms. Banda over 80% of Malawi's national budget is spent on tendering processes for goods and services, with women receiving about 1% of all bids.

Dr. Amani Asfour, the Chair of both Egypt COMFWB chapter and African Business Council said Malawi can adopt 30% of public procurement to go to businesswomen to start seeing more representation and economic growth. She cited lessons from regional countries such as Kenya and South Africa that have adopted policies of awarding public procurement for women businesses at 30% and 40% respectively.

"Firstly, Malawi could preserve specific portions that would be open to women, youth and disabled persons-led organizations in the bidding process. Secondly, government regulators and mobile network operators should start to offer more digital payment systems solutions," Dr Asfour said.

This will help women not only connect with one another, but also ensure that payments are processed quicker using digital technologies, she concluded.



## Ireland and COMESA Revitalizes Collaboration

The Government of Ireland and COMESA Secretariat have begun engagements to identify potential areas of future cooperation to boost their mutual relations. Last week, April 22, 2021, the Acting Head of Mission of the Irish Embassy in Zambia Mr. Pronch Murray and the Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe held a virtual meeting during which they discussed potential areas of partnership.

Ireland has supported the COMESA Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) particularly in the development of seed certification systems and had the potential of further upscaling.

Other potential areas of collaboration are in mitigating the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on member States and the promotion of digital technology and innovation to facilitate intra-COMESA trade.

Key in this priority would be the development of COMESA Digital Free Trade Area to promote trade through ICT platforms and tools to replace paperwork and need for physical contacts. Another potential area of support is women's participation in regional trade particularly on

improving their access to information and collection of gender disaggregated data.

Mr. Murray observed that the Irish mission in Zambia is accredited to COMESA hence enabling more robust interactions on potential cooperation. He said the Irish embassy's 2022 - 2026 strategy, which is expected to be finalized before the end of this year, also provides an opportunity to chart the way forward for the embassy programmes in Zambia and COMESA for the next five years.

Secretary General Kapwepwe noted that COMESA and Ireland had a good relationship

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and pursued their common interest through the European Union, which is one of the major development partners for COMESA.

She commended Ireland for its commitment to Africa following citing its recent commemoration of 40 years of diplomatic existence in Zambia. Other issue discussed is the COMESA peace, stability, and security programme. The Secretary General explained that COMESA has developed early warning systems to manage potential conflicts.

“This is a potential area of collaboration to support Member States in early warning and monitoring mechanisms, as opposed to waiting for conflict to escalate,” she said.

She emphasized that peace and stability were essential for trade and that this was a strong pillar for COMESA which had been supported very strongly by the EU in the past

The two agreed to further engage on the highlighted issues and develop a programme to work on.

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