

The First-Ever Meeting of COMESA Ministers of Youth Affairs Conducted



Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports, Dr Ashraf Sobhy

The first-ever meeting of COMESA ministers of youth affairs took place, Tuesday, June 22, 2021. Its objective was to review the status of implementation of youth programmes and make policy decisions that will empower young people to meaningfully participate in civic and economic opportunities.

Specifically, the ministers reviewed and adopted a report prepared by technical experts who met last week and came up with several recommendations on how to implement the COMESA Youth Programme. This programme was approved in 2015 to deepen youth participation in socio-economic development and democratic governance.

To enable tracking the implementation, the ministers approved a framework to assist Member States develop their annual reports on youth engagement, participation, and policies. The reports will enable COMESA Secretariat to develop an annual regional report on youth.

The ministers also adopted the findings of baseline studies on youth in Member States, which will provide a framework for analyzing

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the opportunities and challenges that young people face regarding their participation in socio-economic development and democratic governance.

Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports, Dr Ashraf Sobhy, who opened and chaired the meeting, noted that the youth have the potential to carry forward the regional integration agenda and urged Member States to domesticate the ministerial decisions at the national and regional level.

"It's good that the youths are now being discussed at these meeting as they are key in economic development of any country's economy owing to

the fact that they are the majority in the world," Dr Sobhy said.

Other documents adopted at the meeting included the COMESA Youth Engagement Strategy and the Terms of Reference for the establishment of the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel, and the Recruitment, Deployment and Management System for the youth internship program. Member States agreed to initiate the process of institutionalizing the recruitment practices at national level.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe said the region should cultivate an enabling environment to empower youths to meaningfully participate in civic and economic opportunities.

"This can only happen by uplifting the youth to a level where they have decision-making power and opportunities in finding solutions to challenges facing their respective countries," she said. The meeting appreciated the support from development partners including the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), the African Union, United Nations Volunteers, and the International Trade Center (ITC).

As a result of these partnerships, several initiatives are underway including the COMESA, African Union/ African Governance Architecture (AU/AGA) youth engagement project. This project is spearheading youth participation in socio-economic development and democratic governance, supported by the SDC.

Among those that also addressed the over 70 delegates from the 21 Member States that attended the meeting were the Rwanda Minister of Youth and Culture, Hon. Rosemary Mbabazi and representatives of the AU/AGA and ITC, Ms. Hagar Azzoz and Ms. Ludmila Azo, respectively.

States Urged to Honour Contributions as Remittances Fall



File/Delegates attending an administrative and budget matters committee meeting, 2019

The 42nd Meeting of the COMESA Committee on Administrative and Budget matters met Wednesday June 23, 2021, with a call to Member States to meet their budgetary contributions to the annual budget of the Secretariat and its institutions. This follows a slow funding of the annual budget with four out of the 21 Member States having fully paid their contributions for 2021.

As of 21st June 2021, the Secretariat had received 21.6% contribution to the 2021 budget against 50% threshold requirement under the COMESA Treaty. The 50% is expected within one month from the beginning of the financial year to which they relate, and the remainder within six months from the beginning of that financial year.

Speaking at the opening of the meeting, Secretary General of COMESA, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe, noted that the slow remittance to the budget has resulted in the utilization of reserves to fund the planned activities.

"Over the years approved sanctions have not been rigorously applied on member States that have defaulted in paying their

contributions to the annual budget and this needs to change. This has been a major contributory factor to the financial position that we now find ourselves in, where a few member States fund the organization," said the Secretary General.

Article 171 of the COMESA Treaty provides for sanctions for Member States that are in arrears for more than two years.

The Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Matters comprise of technical experts in audit, administrative, budgetary, financial, and human resources matter. Its recommendations are presented to the Inter-Governmental Committee and eventually to the Council of Ministers for decision making.

Notwithstanding, consistent budget absorption was observed under Member States funding on operational expenditures in the first quarter of the year. Funds under grants however, had varied budget absorption rates based on their unique programming and expenditure requirements. The cooperating partners continued to honor their obligations and extended most projects timeframes to allow the

programmes to improve their budget absorptions.

To implement programmes in the midst of Covid-19 limitations, the Secretariat applied innovative modalities to increase budget absorption during these extended project timeframes.

"We have witnessed an upward trajectory in programme activities in the second quarter of the year as restrictions on movement of people in the region eases," said the Secretary General.

Meanwhile, Eswatini, D R Congo, Kenya, and Libya are now members of the COMESA Board of External Auditors (COBEA). This follows the decision of the Council of Ministers last year to adopt the COBEA as the official external audit entity of COMESA. Members of the board are drawn from the offices of the auditor's general in Member States.

The tenure of the four countries will be the 2020 to 2022 financial year. The COBEA team is expected to kick off the 2020 audit during this month.



Convention to Promote Trade in Agriculture Commodities



“The farmers need to have a dream register that will enable them look to the future instead of concentrating on the current situation,” Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe

The COMESA-SADC-EAC tripartite agreement and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) present huge opportunities for enhancing intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and food.

According to the Secretary General of COMESA, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe, while the African continent has the potential to feed itself as well as export to the rest of the world, trade data disappointingly shows that over the last 15 years the African countries have been net food importers.

Ms. Kapwepwe was the keynote speaker during the 7th Edition of Africa Fairtrade Convention (AFC) held virtually on 22nd June 2021. The event brought together producers, traders, partner organizations, Fairtrade movement, government, policymakers, among other stakeholders.

Organized by Fairtrade Africa (FTA), the Convention provided a forum to discuss improvement of value chains, trade relations, and conditions which translate to improved livelihoods for farmers and workers in Africa. FTA is an African producer organization, certified on

international Fairtrade standards producing traditional export commodities.

Ms Kapwepwe said that the AfCFTA will lead to a substantial increase in agricultural trade between regional economic communities (RECs), and particularly in semi-processed and processed agricultural products by removing all forms of intra-African trade barriers.

“Diversification of agricultural exports, away from primary commodities is key to intra-African trade expansion,” she said. “There is potential for intensifying intra-regional trade by building on localized comparative advantages within the region for selected regional agricultural value chains.”

The one-week convention will serve as a platform that will afford Fairtrade producers, traders, buyers, public and private sector to deliberate on trade and agriculture, particularly within the COVID-19 context and in the light of the emerging opportunities, and trends in the international trade in agricultural commodities.

Speaking earlier, Fairtrade International Board Chairperson Lynette Thorstensen said the growing threat of climate change and the COVID 19 has become louder than ever, and this has brought prices of commodities very high for the common person.

In this regard, her organization was willing to provide justice and fair trade to all farmers to protect them from various forms of exploitation as the only way to reach a people centered recovery which will be successful and resilient.

She added that the board has so far spent over 10.5 million euros in farmer support in the world with over 300 million euros going towards supporting those in Africa.

“The farmers need to have a dream register that will enable them look to the future instead of concentrating on the current situation,” she added.

Among those that addressed the meeting were Ms. Mary Kinyua, Board Chair, Fairtrade Africa from Kenya and Norman Kativu, youth representative and Fairtrade Africa board member from Zimbabwe.

Zambia, Zimbabwe Develops Implementation Plan for the Joint Industrialization Programme



The Zambia-Zimbabwe Technical Working Group (TWG) on the Joint Industrialization programme has agreed on an action matrix to guide the implementation of the programme and provide a timeframe for achieving the set targets.

The programme is intended to promote industrial cooperation and increase competitiveness of goods produced within the two countries. The TWG has also agreed to immediately establish committees comprised of technocrats from the ministries of industry, commerce, trade and agriculture to work jointly to advance the different pillars agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding.

Speaking at the 3rd Joint TWG meeting held virtually on Friday 18 June 2021, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget said the Joint Zambia-Zimbabwe Industrialization Programme holds the best promise towards achieving COMESA's industrialization goals.

"In COMESA, we take this programme seriously as it will set the pace towards achieving the aspirations of the region as we regard it as a Flagship Project," he said.

Article 99 of the COMESA Treaty calls for COMESA Member States to cooperate in the field of industrial development and to coordinate their policies in establishing agro-industries to achieve regional sustainable and inclusive economic transformation.

The Programme is also a tool for the implementation of the COMESA Industrial Strategy whose vision is to have a globally competitive environmental-friendly, diversified industrial sector which is based on innovation and manufacturing as tools for transforming regional resources into sustainable wealth and prosperity for all.

The government of Zambia has placed industrial

development at the core of its development agenda in its 10-year National Industrial Policy. According to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Mr Mushumba Mulenga, the additional policy and strategic measures will create an enabling environment to enhance inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

Dr Mavis Sibanda, the PS in the Zimbabwe counterpart Ministry, said the timing of the programme was most appropriate as it coincides with the commencement of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

"The AfCFTA promises a greater opportunity for both countries to widen access to global supply chains and export higher value goods and services," she noted. "Increasing African intra-trade through Regional Value Chains (RVCs) provides African manufacturing firms economies of scale and linkages to value chains connected to the global market."

The implementation of the Joint Industrialization Programme is in line with the Zimbabwe National Development Strategy and the Vision 2030.

Both PSs appreciated the support the joint programme received from COMESA and cooperating partners such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). UNECA commissioned a study on "Assessing the Feasibility of Establishing and Managing a Common Agro-Industrial Park between Zambia and Zimbabwe" which was validated in May 2021. UNECA has further committed to support the development of the project's policy, legal and regulatory framework.

Other cooperating partners that attended the meeting included the African Development Bank, Trade and Development Bank, UNIDO, Afreximbank and UNECA. The regional private sector was also represented.

New Reporting Guidelines for Implementing the Regional Youth Programme

Implementation of youth programme in the COMESA region is set to improve following the development of guidelines on reporting progress. The draft Guidelines were presented to the first Technical Committee on Youth on 14 June 2021. They will be used to monitor the implementation of commitments and priorities in the COMESA Youth Programme and other continental and global frameworks on youth.

The Youth Programme is intended to empower young women and men in the region through key focus areas; deepening research, documentation and knowledge sharing, accelerating implementation of the African Youth Charter and the UN World Programme of Action for Youth and enhancing active involvement of youth in political participation, civic engagement, socio-economic development and regional integration.

The guidelines are part of the 2016 decisions made by the COMESA Council of Ministers who directed the Secretariat to develop them as a monitoring tool to ramp up implementation of youth programme in Member States. This will ultimately stimulate and expand decent and productive work opportunities for youth in the public and private sector, spur youth entrepreneurship and skills development for greater employability.

Speaking at the technical meeting, COMESA Director of Gender and Social Affairs, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde said the Youth Programme will contribute to the broader development goals of poverty reduction and sustainable and inclusive development, social and political stability, and peace and security within the COMESA region.

"Cooperation of Member States on these programmes will not only deepen regional integration process, but also result in higher and sustainable levels of socio-economic growth," she said adding that the Programme is already integrated in the COMESA Social Charter and the Gender Policy.

The COMESA contributes to the African Union frameworks on youth such as the 2006 African Youth Charter, which focuses on employment, sustainable livelihoods, education, health, youth participation, peace and security, and law enforcement, among others.



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe signing the book of condolences at the funeral house in State Lodge

TRIBUTE TO HE. DR KENNETH KAUNDA

We received the news of the demise of the founding father of Zambia, H.E. Dr Kenneth David Kaunda, with a deep sense of sadness and immense loss. Dr Kaunda was one of the great sons of the continent whose contribution to the liberation of Africa and enhancement of regional integration is immeasurable.

Dr Kaunda was not only a leading freedom fighter for the independence of African States, but he played a key role in the establishment of regional economic communities including the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) the precursor to the

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, COMESA.

A long-time champion of regional integration, Dr Kaunda remained a constant inspiration through the vision of our founding fathers which continues to shape and guide our actions.

Our region will forever remember him for his visionary leadership that firmly believed that economic independence of African States can only be achieved and sustained through unity, peace and self-reliance. His vision is now our

vision of a fully integrated economic community that is prosperous, internationally competitive, and ready to merge into the African Economic Community. We cannot honour this great Pan African more, than by remaining true to his vision.

His commitment to peace laid a solid foundation for Zambia that has over the years ensured the country remains a beacon of peace in the region. Amidst daunting challenges, he successfully steered his country Zambia to independence and beyond, while actively supporting other regional States to achieve their own self-rule.

During this period of national grief, COMESA stands in solidarity with the Kaunda family, the people and the Government of Zambia and we pray for God's comfort and strength at this difficult time.

We pray for his soul to rest in eternal peace.

Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe
Secretary General





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