

COMESA deploys election observers in Zambia

Country goes to the polls this week for presidential, parliamentary, and civic elections



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe flagging off the election observers with Mission leader, Amb. Ashraf Rasheed (2nd right) and Assistant Mission leader Ms. Hope Kivengere (3rd right).

COMESA has deployed a 40-member election observer mission in Zambia for the August 12 General Elections. The observers drawn from 10 Member States were flagged off on Sunday, August 8, 2021, by the Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

In the days preceding the elections, the observers will meet various electoral stakeholders including political parties, and exchange views with other election observer missions.

The observation process will be guided primarily by the constitution and legal framework of Zambia, in consistence with the relevant international and regional instruments including the COMESA Guidelines on Election Observation.

The Mission includes observers from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Zimbabwe and staff from COMESA Secretariat. It is led by Ambassador Ashraf Gamal Rashed of Egypt assisted by Madam Hope Kivengere of Uganda. The two are Members of the COMESA Committee of Elders.

Prior to deployment, the observers were conducted on a two-day training by the Secretariat and key stakeholders including the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the national police, political analysts, civil society and the media. The training covered among others, the COMESA election observer principles and methodology, observer responsibilities, and on the Zambia electoral process.



COMESA- Africa CDC joint initiative to enhance vaccination uptake



The involvement of opinion leaders in enhancing the understanding of Covid-19 vaccines holds the greatest promise in removing barriers to vaccine uptake in the African region, according to regional health experts that attended a two-day webinar on strategies to improve Covid-19 vaccines roll-out and uptake in COMESA Member States.

Health sector stakeholders in the webinar named vaccine hesitancy and delivery as key barriers to vaccine uptake in the region. The event was organized by COMESA and the Africa Centre for Disease Control on 4 – 5 August 2021 for Member States to share their experiences on the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination.

In attendance were government officials led by Permanent Secretaries, health professionals, international partners, civil society organizations, regional economic communities among others. Rwanda vaccine distribution strategy plan was cited as a best case-study for having vaccinated over 380,000 people in three weeks after receiving its first consignment of 350,000 doses.

Speaking when he opened the webinar, Rwanda Minister of Health Dr. Daniel Ngamije, said strong leadership from the highest level, efficient coordination mechanism, effective partnerships and community engagement, using opinion leaders as success factors to vaccine rollout and uptake.

"There is a cost to pay in containing the Covid 19. Not doing what is required will cost more. It is a matter of time for this to become obvious for those still undermining the impact of this pandemic," he said.

As a way forward, Member States were called upon to support the implementation of the African CDC programme on Saving Lives, Economies and Livelihood Trusted Vaccines, which focuses on vaccines procurement, strengthened in-country vaccines logistics and roll-out, establishing vaccination centres, community engagements, monitoring side effects, genomics surveillance, digital support, and technical assistance.

The meeting called on the Member States to support the new Africa CDC Public Health Order which focuses on strengthening public health institutions and public health workforce, expanding manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics and respectful

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action-oriented partnerships
COMESA Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe encouraged Member States to learn from each other and to adopt strategies to improve vaccine awareness and overcome existing barriers to vaccine uptake and roll out, despite the challenges faced in accessing vaccines due to limited global supply.

She congratulated Egypt, for commencing manufacturing of Sinovac vaccine, and other member States such as Rwanda, which are preparing to localize vaccine manufacturing.

"This is a great achievement in addressing challenges related to vaccine equity. They are examples of the existing political will in the Member States to boost capacity of local manufacturing of vaccines, other medicines, and health technology," she said.

In his address, presented by his deputy Dr. Ahmed Ouma, the African CDC Director Dr. John Nkengasong said 51 Member States in Africa had started vaccinating their people with over 61 million people vaccinated. Out of this number only 18.7 million people have completed the vaccination.

"Generally, Africa has administered 5.18 vaccine doses per 100 people compared to 53.50 globally, in which about 46 Member States have less than 10% vaccine coverage," he said.

Dr. Ouma, expressed concern that many COMESA Member States were currently reporting multiple COVID 19 variants of concerns with at least eight reporting Alpha, Beta, and Delta, five States reporting Alpha, four reporting both Alpha & Beta, one reporting Alpha, and three have not reported any variant of concern.

The forum addressed among others, vaccine hesitancy, Adverse Event Following Immunization, strategies on vaccine rollout, risk communication and community engagement activities among others. Besides Rwanda, other countries that shared their experiences included Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



New policies to promote digital financial services

COMESA Business Council (CBC) in partnership with Africa Nenda convened a High-Level Public-Private Dialogue, on 27 July 2021, under the theme, Towards the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy for Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

The Dialogue brought together over 200 participants from the nine pilot-study countries of the CBC Digital Financial Inclusion Program, to validate and adopt the draft model policy and Rulebook for digital retail payments platform.

Stakeholder groups represented comprised Central Banks; Ministries of Finance; ICT Regulators; manufacturers; Mobile Network Operators; commercial banks; FinTechs; Microfinance Institutions; and MSMEs.

Arising from the Dialogue, a raft of recommendations were made on the Draft Model Policy for The Digital Payments Platform for MSMEs in COMESA, and the Draft Guidelines/Rulebook on the Operation of the Digital Payments' Platform. They included the adoption of the proposed policy measures in the draft policy framework and the Rulebook to guide operation of the digital payment subject to the proposed changes.

Others were to strengthen collaboration between Public and Private sector players, empower women and youth to benefit from digital payment initiative for MSMEs in COMESA region, address the pricing of digital payment aspects related to taxation because it is a critical component in determining access and usage of the digital financial services.

The meeting proposed measures for the reduction of the cost of devices especially end user devices like Smartphones etc. in this regard, there is need to work with Suppliers in the region to ensure that devices are affordable especially for the bottom of

the financial pyramid.

In addition, the inclusion of Chambers of Commerce as one of the key stakeholders in the capacity building program for MSMEs on Digital Financial Literacy were recommended as well as the development of tailored made solutions like bundles for MSMEs to facilitate access to Digital Financial Services.

On the way forward, the Dialogue proposed that the CBC embark on the assignment of business modelling on a Regional Digital retail payment platform for MSMEs in COMESA region. Thereafter, to undertake the digital skills capacity building project for MSMEs, to address some of the key challenges affecting digitisation of industries in COMESA-with a keen focus on payments and e-commerce. This will be done in collaboration with Africa Nenda.

Keynote speakers included the Chairperson of the CBC Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, who underscored the importance of digital financial inclusion.

"Due to the adverse effects that COVID-19 has had in all aspects of our lives, we recognise more than ever, the critical importance of digital financial inclusion to empowering and transforming the lives of all people," he said.

Others were the Assistant Secretary General- Programmes at COMESA Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget, Governor of Bank of Zambia, Hon. Christopher Mvunga, Deputy CEO of Africa Nenda, Mr. Akinwale Goodluck, Chair of the Africa Business Council, Dr. Amany Asfour, Chairman of the Bankers Association of Zambia, and CEO of Standard Chartered Zambia Mr. Herman Kasekende, and CEO of the CBC Ms Sandra Uwera. The meeting noted the importance of supporting women and other particularly vulnerable and marginalized market segments.

COMESA, Corporate Council of Africa forge partnership

MoU will strengthen US-Africa engagements and knowledge sharing

The COMESA Business Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Corporate Council of Africa (CCA) towards forging new pathways for stronger US-Africa engagements which will include developing a joint implementation plan to facilitate joint programmes for knowledge sharing.

The signing ceremony took place on 27 July 2021 on the margins of the 13th US-Africa Business Summit. CBC Chairperson Mr Marday Venkatasamy described the occasion as a major milestone in the US-Africa business collaboration and partnership.

"Through this MOU we strengthen the relationship to facilitate closer collaboration, joint advancement of the private sector business agenda, and provide a platform for consolidating the voice of the Private Sector," said Mr Venkatasamy.

The ceremony marked the beginning of the journey towards solidifying the relationship between the Councils for the period of two years, 2021 to 2023.

Expounding on the significance of the partnership, President and CEO of the CCA Ms. Florie Liser welcomed the new partnership:

"With the COMESA Business Council being one of CCA's oldest and longest standing partners, we welcome this MOU and look forward to collaborating to support greater U.S.-COMESA trade and investment and stronger ties amongst our businesses."

Apart from knowledge sharing, the parties are expected to develop a joint implementation plan for business to business and business to government facilitation, public and private sector dialogues, conferences and special events and trade missions.

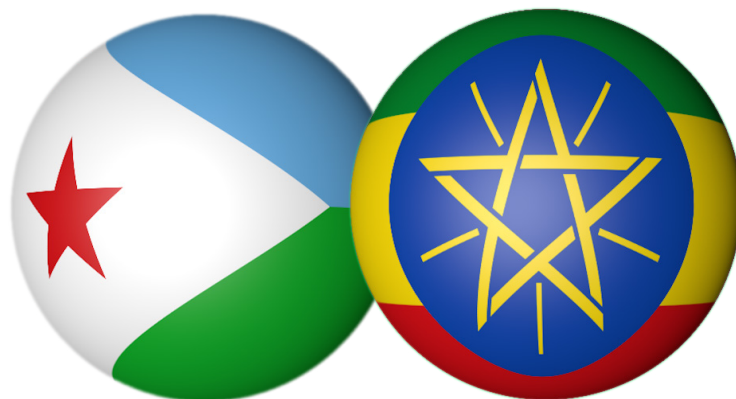
The key focus areas will be on trade facilitation, trade-related infrastructure development, services sector development, small and medium-sized enterprise sustainability, agribusiness, regional value chains and value addition. Others are investment promotion and facilitation, women's business leadership and capacity building/technical assistance.

The U.S.-Africa Business Summit is CCA's flagship conference and is considered essential for those doing business on the continent as well as the U.S. and African leaders shaping U.S.-Africa economic engagement.

With over 100 speakers, the Summit hosted African Heads of State and Key Ministers, US Government Cabinet and Senior Officials, and more than 1,200 private sector executives and stakeholders from across the United States and Africa.

COMESA, Djibouti Signs €2.5m Agreement

The funds will be used to upgrade Galafi Border Post between Djibouti and Ethiopia



The COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Djibouti have signed an agreement that sub-delegates the implementation of coordinated border management activities at the Galafi border post, on the Djibouti- Ethiopia border. A total of EUR 2.5 million is allocated to this project under the European Union funded Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP).

The objective of the sub-delegation agreement is to enhance Djibouti's progressive participation in regional and international integration agenda through progressive removal of trade barriers at the border. Djibouti will receive support in the development of improved and harmonized regulatory frameworks and procedures at its border crossing to Ethiopia. This is in line with international and regional standards and best practices.

Activities will focus on automation of border processes and inter-connectivity of border agencies, upgrade priority cross-border infrastructure and procure equipment aimed to improve cross-border trade and transport facilitation at the Galafi border post between Djibouti and Ethiopia. The project will support capacity building of national stakeholders and the technical assistance to the Djibouti National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in border management and coordination.

This project is part of the EUR 48 million COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP), financed under the 11th European Development Fund, through a grant

agreement of the EU with COMESA, signed in November 2018. The TFP has five key result areas, covering among others, deepening regional integration, improving inclusive regional economic growth and enhancing the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, and Mr. Ali Daoud Abdou, Secretary General from Ministry of Commerce of Djibouti, signed the sub-delegation agreement in Lusaka and Djibouti this week.

In his remarks, Mr. Ali Daoud Abdou appreciate the support from COMESA and the EU which enabled his country to conduct border assessment studies, facilitate national consultation meetings with national stakeholders from public and private sector in Djibouti.

"This support facilitated the development of action plans to support trade facilitation across the Galafi border post and along the Djibouti Corridor," he said and affirmed his government's commitment to support effective implementation of the Project.

Ms. Kapwepwe said COMESA will facilitate financial, logistical and administrative processes in line with the contractual obligations. She said the funds will also support capacity building for stakeholders on innovative and state of the art border operations and the implementation of a border information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation

instruments, among other deliverables.

Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA said: "This agreement is a testimony of the continued commitment by COMESA towards its core values. Deepening regional integration, improving inclusive regional economic growth and enhancing competitiveness of the COMESA region transpire in today's milestone on the Djibouti corridor."

Mr. O'hara Aidan, the Ambassador to the European Union in Djibouti stated: "We welcome concrete actions like the support to the modernization of Galafi, a central border post between Ethiopia and Djibouti. It is part of a wider EU effort to promote regional integration improving the business climate, attracting the private sector, and stimulating trade."

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COMESA develops a virtual knowledge management portal

COMESA Secretariat through the Climate Change Programme has developed a virtual knowledge management portal. The portal is intended to promote national and regional sharing of information on diverse activities on climate action being undertaken in the region.

The portal was activated on 14 July 2021 during a webinar which brought together COMESA Member States and non-members. It was developed by the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), a longstanding COMESA partner and will be populated with content by users (Member States).

The portal is expected to increase understanding of critical issues around climate change, while providing a broad knowledge-hub to strengthen cooperation between technical organisations and Member States. It will respond to the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) pilot programmes coordinated by COMESA involving five member states: Eswatini, Madagascar, Seychelles, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It is also part of an initiative to organize key information in one place and enable the region to access and share knowledge with ease.

Speaking at the event, COMESA Climate Change Programme Manager, Ms. Edith Tibahwa said majority of member states are highly vulnerable to climate-induced risks. These include crop failure and livestock losses due to prolonged drought and more frequent and severe floods and destruction

of infrastructure as recently experienced in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Malawi, among others.

"COMESA has therefore continued to address some of these emerging challenges by supporting member states to develop and implement sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, promote the adoption of climate smart innovations such as Climate Smart Agriculture," she said.

Regional dialogues and consensus building on major climate change issues have also been facilitated particularly in international negotiations and capacity building. This has assisted member states in dealing with the challenges of climate change and reduced the vulnerability of populations.

COMESA CSA Programme provides support to countries in the ACP regions to manage

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the climate change challenges that hinder development. The programme is funded by the European Union Commission under the Intra Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries (Intra ACP) Global Climate Change Alliance plus (GCCA+) programme.

FANRPAN Chief Executive Officer and Head of Mission, Dr Tshilidzi Madzivhandila said the initiative will further strengthen the long existing partnership between two organizations.

"Our partnership will surely address the critical knowledge and information needs required to successfully meet challenges brought about by the climate change in the COMESA region," he said.

He stressed the need for such innovative interventions amidst COVID19 Pandemic to enable technical cooperation at national, regional, and continental levels.

Participants were encouraged to regularly visit the portal as it will serve as a valuable source of timely information such as the events leading up to the 26th Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland.

The webinar was attended by stakeholders directly involved in exchanging climate change information and knowledge and was an opportunity for sharing experiences among the network members and non-member states and promote cooperation among states. Others were representatives of research/scientific community, civil society, the private sector, and farmers' groups.



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



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