

COMESA Institutions Hold Awareness Forum in Mauritius



The first joint awareness Forum for the 12 COMESA institutions, was conducted in Port Louis, Mauritius on 15 – 16 April 2024, attended by over 120 local and international delegates.

The forum, conducted under the theme «Economic Integration for a Thriving COMESA Anchored on Green Investment, Value Addition, and Tourism,» aimed to enhance the visibility of the COMESA institutions and enable them to showcase their key programs and products. The event also aimed to demonstrate how Member States, such as Mauritius, can derive the highest benefits from their membership.

It was organised by the COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the Government of Mauritius and financially supported by the Trade and Development Bank (TDB), which is one of the 12 COMESA institutions.

The Forum follows a Council of Ministers' Decision made in November 2023 that COMESA Institutions should organize awareness workshops in Member States to sensitize

stakeholders about their activities and the opportunities available in the COMESA Region.

Opening the forum, Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration, and International Trade for Mauritius Hon. Maneesh Gobin appreciated his country's membership to COMESA. He said this has greatly contributed to the diversification and consolidation of the small economy for the benefit of the people.

"We need partners like COMESA and its institutions to venture into new, high growth potential sectors such as the blue economy, the digital economy, renewable energy, life sciences and property development among others," Hon. Gobin said.

He noted that Mauritius has over the years moved from a monoculture economy based on sugar production to a successfully diversified economy with key sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and services. The country is now classified in the upper-middle

income category with a Gross Domestic Product of USD 13bn and per capita GDP of over USD 11,000.

He called for further diversification of the economy taking into consideration the Free Trade Agreements which are important as they open up markets and lead to trade reforms and trade facilitation adding, "We need to have a more visible presence in Africa, make our membership in COMESA and the African Union really count."

Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe said the Forum was an opportunity for the public, private sector, and the ordinary people to learn more on why the COMESA institutions were established and how they benefit the people, hence the importance of rolling them out in different Member States.

She cited key programmes and products that some of the institutions are implementing for the benefit of Mauritius and other Member States, including USD\$415 million Regional

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COMESA, EAC Project to Accelerate Horticulture Sector in Ethiopia

Research has shown that Ethiopia's horticulture sector is growing rapidly and is an important element in the country's efforts to diversify exports and contribute directly to poverty reduction. To ensure the continued growth of the sector through increased, exports, income employment, and food security, the Ethiopian Ministry for Agriculture and Horticulture Development Sector, is collaborating with the COMESA – East African Community Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) Project in enhancing growth of the Horticulture Sector in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration, the Ethiopian Agriculture Authority, and the Ethiopia Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association are also involved in the project.

The CEHA program was created in 2022 through public and private sector partners to better coordinate policy, value chain development programs, financing, research, and development. The project aims to accelerate the growth of the fruit and vegetable subsector of the COMESA and EAC regions. The priority value chains over the short term are avocado, onion, and Irish potato in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The programme is set to be launched in July this year. A pre-launch engagement mission to enhance horticulture development in the region, spearheaded by the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) Chief Executive Officer, Dr John Mukuka, was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in February this year.

This meeting identified the key challenges affecting the horticulture landscape, including: post-entry quarantine for seed movement and the need for capacity building and support in regulatory systems. Potential opportunities were discussed

and centred on leveraging European Union-funded projects and CEHA platforms, emphasizing the need for stakeholder coordination and infrastructure development.

The Ethiopian delegation led by the Ethiopian State Minister for Agriculture and Horticulture Development, Hon. Dr Meles Yemen, underscored the importance of the horticulture sector as a key driver of employment and poverty reduction. He remarked that the agricultural system faces challenges due to its tropical nature and diverse production, with an emphasis on the need for policy harmonization, support for local seed production, stakeholder coordination, and infrastructure development. The avocado initiative was highlighted as a significant export opportunity endorsed by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, requiring logistics support and infrastructure development.

The meeting reflected a shared dedication to develop the horticulture sector and provided a valuable opportunity for CEHA to engage with Ethiopian horticulture stakeholders and identify areas for collaboration and support.

Key meeting recommendations highlighted the need for policy harmonization, support for local seed production, stakeholder coordination, infrastructure development, and capacity building.

The partnerships underlined the need for accelerating commercial integration of East African horticultural value chains into national, regional, and international markets to promote the growth of horticultural markets.

The next critical actions and steps will involve further discussions on research, seed certification, and collaboration with regional bodies such as IGAD and COMESA.

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Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) under COMESA. This programme has a USD\$ 400 million credit facility for infrastructure projects covering renewable energy, ICT and Transport and USD\$ 15 million for technical assistance.

Under the renewable energy project, Mauritius intends to reduce carbon emissions by 30%, phase out the use of coal to produce energy and to produce 35% of its electricity needs from renewable sources by 2030.

TDB President and Group Chairman, Mr Tadesse Admassu encouraged the participants to take advantage of the presence of the different heads of COMESA institutions to get informed about their operations. He added that the institutions are meant to help the Member States and the region develop and hence the need to interact with stakeholders for the benefit of both parties.

In attendance were the following Chief Executive Officers: Mr Manuel Moses, Africa Trade and Investment Development Insurance Agency; Mr Teddy Soobramanien, COMESA Business Council; Ms Jedidah Ndebele, COMESA Clearing House; Dr Lucas Njoroge, COMESA Monetary Institute; Dr. Mohamedain Seif Elnasr, Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa; Mr Nicholas Mudungwe, Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute; Mr Chikakula Miti, COMESA Federation of Women in Business and Dr John Mukuka, Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Other representatives were Mr Boniface Makongo, Director of Competition, COMESA Competition Commission, Mr Ronald Kasapatu representing ZEP-RE, and Mr Mahmoud Mahgoub from the COMESA Regional Investment Agency.



Students of Mbuluzi High School in Eswatini with COMESA and Eswatini Civil Aviation officials, during sensitization forum on careers in aviation.

Promoting women in aviation: Eswatini Hosts Pioneering Workshop on Gender Equality in Aviation

The aviation sector, known for its high technical demands and significant economic impact, has historically seen lower participation rates of women, especially in technical and leadership roles.

As part of a broader initiative to tackle these disparities and foster an inclusive environment that supports the careers of women in this dynamic field, COMESA is leading an initiative to sensitive girls on the range of careers available in aviation.

On 10 – 12 April 2024 the Kingdom of Eswatini, in collaboration with COMESA, hosted a three-day workshop in Sibane, Eswatini aimed at promoting gender equality and expanding career opportunities for women in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region's aviation sector.

This event is part of the European Union- funded programme on Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) implemented by COMESA and partner regional economic communities; East African Community, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Indian Ocean Commission and the Southern African Development Community.

The event saw significant participation from government officials, industry leaders, and stakeholders from across the aviation industry.

It focused on several key areas, including the need to transform the sector's corporate culture to be more inclusive and appealing to female talent.

Discussions and training sessions highlighted the necessity of adapting workplace policies that support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in aviation.

"The African continent boasts of over 52% female population but has less than 5% in the aviation sector. There is therefore "ample room" for all to ensure that the imbalance in supply and demand is filled in the coming years," the Eswatini Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade Director, Ms. Lungile Portia Dlamini said when she addressed the participants.

COMESA senior gender mainstreaming officer, Tsige Tadele Biyazen said that "The aviation sector needs to transform its masculine corporate culture and identity so as to attract, promote and retain female talent."

She added that relevant opportunities need to be created at state, regional and international level for more women to pursue a career in the aviation sector and, similarly, to advance their career on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

One of the main themes of the workshop was the importance of education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

fields, which are crucial for careers in aviation. The event emphasized the need for policies that not only promote gender equality but also actively support women's education and career advancement in the aviation sector.

The workshop ended with school awareness visitations to Mbuluzi and Ka-Schiele High Schools led by The Eswatini Civil Aviation Authority (ESWACAA) and professional women in aviation to highlight and inspire the learners on what aviation fields to choose.

The commitment displayed at the workshop reflects a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and gender equality in driving the aviation industry forward. As the sector continues to expand, fostering an inclusive environment will be key to harnessing the full potential of the workforce.

The ongoing collaboration between COMESA, the Eswatini Government, and other stakeholders is expected to pave the way for more inclusive and equitable growth in aviation across Eastern and Southern Africa.

“The aviation sector needs to transform its masculine corporate culture and identity so as to attract, promote and retain female talent.”



IOC Secretary General H.E. Prof. Velayoudom Marimoutou (L) with Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe signing the MoU in Port Louis Mauritius. Standing (R) The Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon. Maneesh Gobin and the President and Chairman of the Trade and Development Mr Admassu Tadesse.

COMESA, IOC Signs Pact to Entrench Collaboration

COMESA and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) have signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen their partnership that initially started in 1999. The revamped MoU is intended to deepen the existing collaboration which the two regional economic communities deem highly successful.

It covers among other areas, governance, peace, security and regional stability, regional trade and an inclusive economy, sustainable development through support and protection of people by preserving natural resources (land and sea) and maritime safety.

Other areas are development of the ocean industry and the blue economy, as well as joint programmes to mitigate the effects of climate

change, promotion of health, capacity-building and promotion of mobility and employability among young people.

The signing ceremony was conducted, Monday 15 April 2024, in Port Louis, Mauritius, with COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe and IOC Secretary General Prof. Velayoudom Marimoutou signing for their respective organizations..

Ms Kapwepwe said the areas of cooperation outlined in the MoU are very pertinent and timely as they seek to address the key challenges that COMESA and IOC Member States continue to face in economic and trade operations.

"I am very confident that this MoU will further help to promote the interest of our common Member States and will assist them to emerge as poles of economic growth, trade and investment," Ms Kapwepwe said.

Prof. Marimoutou said both organisations are unwavering in their commitment to enhance regional governance and stability as outlined in the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals commonly known as Agenda 2030.

While COMESA as a regional block is also spearheading the African Union's Agenda for

the deepening of regional integration, Prof. Marimoutou said the IOC is poised for the promotion of regional integration at the same time defending the cause of the small island States of the region and those of the African continent.

"As we embark on this journey, let us remember the importance of unity, collaboration and shared purpose," he stressed. "Together, we can overcome challenges, seize opportunities and build a brighter future for generations to come."

The signing ceremony was witnessed by the Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of Mauritius, Hon Maneesh Gobin on the sidelines of the COMESA Institutions Awareness Forum at Hennessy Park Hotel.

Established in 1982, the IOC currently has five Member States namely the Union of Comoros, the Reunion Island, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. It is the only regional organisation in Africa that is exclusively made up of islands and it promotes the specificities of its Member States on continental and international scenes.

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HE. Gen. Fred Mwesigye presents his Letter of Credence to the COMESA SG, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe

Uganda's has enough stocks to support drought hit States in Southern Africa

New Permanent Rep to COMESA assures

Drought hit COMESA Member States in southern African region can benefit from Uganda's bumper harvest, says Gen. Fred Mwesigye, the country's newly Permanent Representative to COMESA.

Gen. Mwesigye (Rtd) who is Uganda's High Commissioner to Zambia was speaking at the COMESA Headquarters in Lusaka, Thursday 4 April 2024, when he presented his letter of credence to COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe. He noted the devastating effects of climate change in the Southern part of the continent, and stated that Uganda had a surplus of maize and other crops available to assist COMESA Member States affected by the drought.

"We have recorded a bumper harvest in maize, and we are ready to supply maize to Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to help cushion the deficit caused by the drought," he added.

During the brief accreditation ceremony, Gen. Mwesigye (Rtd) expressed Uganda's support for COMESA and emphasized the country's commitment to intensified cooperation with the regional bloc to fulfill the aims and objectives of the COMESA Treaty.

SG Kapwepwe commended the government of Uganda for its commitment and dedication to the ideals of COMESA. She highlighted Uganda's active participation in regional integration programs and noted that Uganda, as a founding member of COMESA, has continued to benefit from its membership.

Uganda is one of the Member States with the highest ratio of intra-COMESA trade as percentage of Global COMESA trade by MemberStates. It

recorded a positive growth in 2021 intra-COMESA total export values, from US\$ 608 million in 2020 to US\$ 755.3 million in 2021. Additionally, Uganda has benefited from the COMESA Adjustment Facility, with a total approved allocation of 5.59 million Euros since 2014.

"The Fund has been used for the construction of border markets and border export zones. Furthermore, a budget of 2.76 million Euros under the Regional Integration Implementation Project phase II has supported the construction of the Border Export Zones in Uganda," Madam Kapwepwe said.

Under the agriculture and industry sector, COMESA provided support to six countries, including Uganda, through the Digital Regional Food Balance Sheet initiative, to strengthen systems for agri-food data and information generation and dissemination in the region.

A \$740,000 grant fund for Climate-Smart Agriculture was also provided in five districts in eastern Uganda. The project successfully piloted the integration of Climate-Smart Agriculture into agricultural production systems and demonstrated a two to three-fold yield increase for maize and beans.

"It transformed 24 community groups into 15 producer cooperatives, promoted produce bulking and storage for profitable marketing, and initiated mechanization of Climate-Smart Agriculture to reduce costs and labour input," the SG stated. Several other programs are being implemented in Uganda, including the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), the 50 Million African Women Speak Programme, and the Peace and Security Programme.

COMWARN Yields Dividends to More Member States

The recent National Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on the COMESA Conflict Early Warning System (COMWARN) Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (SVRAs) in Burundi highlighted the significant benefits derived by Member States since the program's inception about 15 years ago.

Conducted from 4 - 8 March 2024, the gathering delved into comprehensive discussions on the anticipated structural vulnerability and resilience drivers in Burundi. Participants explored various options for enhancing resilience across eight thematic areas identified by COMWARN SVRAs: Economy, Education, Environment, Governance, Health, Military, Security, and Social issues.

Organized by the Governance, Peace, and Security Unit (GPS) at the COMESA Secretariat, the event received commendation for its inclusive engagement from stakeholders in Burundi. The meeting underscored how the COMWARN program aligns with the vision set forth by the Policy Organs of COMESA in establishing a regional Conflict Early Warning System, which has yielded tangible results over the years.

Dr. Oita Etyang, Head of GPS, acknowledged the unwavering commitment of Member States since the COMESA Secretariat was entrusted in 2009 to develop an early warning system. He highlighted the pivotal role played by technical experts from both government and non-government sectors in ensuring the robustness of the COMWARN SVRA methodology and its outcomes.

The consultation in Burundi saw the participation of five Permanent Secretaries and twenty-five Directors from various ministries and agencies, alongside civil society organizations and other stakeholders.

Uganda initiated the series of National Multi-Stakeholder Consultations on COMWARN SVRAs in 2017, followed by Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Malawi in subsequent years.

Out of the nine SVRA consultations conducted thus far, Zambia, Malawi, and Kenya have volunteered to

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Members of the Joint Border Committees meeting with GLTFIP officials

Burundi, DR Congo to Establish Joint Border Committees

Small-scale cross-border traders between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo have agreed on Terms of Reference (TORs) that will pave the way for the establishment of Joint Border Committees. These committees will assist in making trade faster, safer, and cheaper across the border.

With support from the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Project (GLTFIP) financed by the World Bank, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) convened a three-day technical meeting from 26 to 28 March 2024 in Burundi to assist the two Member States in

setting up JBCs along their common borders. The implementation of the JBCs is in line with the Bilateral Trade Agreement between Burundi and the DRC signed in April 2022.

GLTFIP Coordinator Mr. Adrien Ndayisaba said the two countries negotiated and agreed on the TORs for establishing, managing, and governing JBCs, including their sustainability beyond the project life. During the Bujumbura meeting, the delegates also developed a joint roadmap for the implementation of the JBCs, which are a practical way of implementing the Coordinated Border Management (CBM) concept.

Currently, tradable commodities, particularly agricultural products, face various regulations, leading to multiple inspections and other controls by border agencies. The meeting noted that the uncoordinated application of these regulations and controls often frustrates the seamless flow of trade across borders, making small-scale cross-border trade costly and risky.

"With JBCs, SSCBT in the Great Lakes region will never be the same. JBCs will be a strong pillar for the implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime between the two countries, which is scheduled to be launched in the second quarter of the year," Mr. Ndayisaba said.

Besides creating a platform for dealing with Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), the JBCs provide alternatives for grievance redress mechanisms for cases of abuse and harassment of women and youth in trade, including gender-based violence. Furthermore, JBCs foster social integration, and the resultant cooperation makes small-scale cross-border trade safer, cheaper, and faster.

Representatives from Burundi and the DRC, drawn from Ministries in charge of Trade, Finance, Agriculture, and Health, border agencies, Central Statistics Offices, and Cross-border Traders' Associations, attended the meeting.

COMWARN Yields Dividends ...



Delegates at the COMWARN SVRA Meeting in Bujumbura, Burundi

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undergo the AU Country Structural Vulnerability Resilience Assessment (AU CVSRA) and the AU Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy (AU CSVMS). This move, guided by the COMESA Policy Organs, aims to enhance synergies and prevent duplication of efforts.

These developments underscore the growing recognition and utilization of COMWARN across Member States, indicating a collective commitment to regional peace and security.



EU delegation with COMESA staff led by ASG Admin and Finance Dr. Dev Haman

COMESA, EU Dialogue on Enhancing Support

COMESA Secretariat held a dialogue meeting with representatives of the European Union to discuss the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework expected to cover a period of 3 - 7 years from 2025.

The Framework provides an opportunity for COMESA as a Regional Economic Community (REC) to access funding, capacity building and technical assistance to advance regional integration, promote sustainable development and address common challenges in collaboration with the European Union.

The one-day dialogue meeting held at COMESA Headquarters on 10 April 2024 was attended by staff from the COMESA Secretariat and from the EU delegation to Zambia and COMESA, with visiting representatives, George Dura and Camille Bing from Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTP), which is a part of the European Commission in Brussels.

Following new developments and realities, the European Union has come up with a new framework

called the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), replacing the European Development Fund (EDF), as the primary financial instrument for enhancing regional integration and cooperation for sustainable economic development of the region.

Mr Matthias Reusing team leader of the European Green deal, Rural Development, Trade Sector at the EU Delegation to Zambia and COMESA led the EU team while COMESA was led by the Assistant Secretary General Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman.

Dr Haman described the dialogue as a testament of the shared commitment to fostering sustainable growth, inclusivity and prosperity across sub-Saharan Africa.

He commended the EU for having a long history of providing financial and technical support to COMESA and Africa as a whole and increasing its current budget for the next Multi-Annual Financial

Framework to address development priorities and emerging challenges and opportunities.

"...addressing our regional issues, requires a collaborative, multi-faceted strategy that transcend borders. And these collaborative approaches need to be done consultatively at all levels," he added. "It involves forging partnerships, leveraging expertise and aligning resources to achieve impactful, lasting outcomes together."

Mr Reusing said the EU is determined to continue providing technical and financial support to the COMESA to ensure that regional integration is deepened for economic development and sustainable growth.

The meeting discussed the regional Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which falls under the NDICI. By leveraging on these new developments from the EU, RECs can enhance their capacity to drive regional development agendas to fully achieve their strategic objectives.

COMESA DIARY

Date	Activity/Event	Venue
15 -16 April	COMESA Institutions Awareness Forum	Port Louis, Mauritius
14 – 19 Apr	Workshop on the Development of COMESA/TDB Regional Public Private Partnership Guide-lines	Kigali, Rwanda
7 -10 May	Launch of the COMESA – EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) National Chapter/AU fertilizer Summit	Kenya
13 – 16 May	RAERESA AGM & Consultative Workshop	Egypt
21 23 May	Launch of the CEHA National Chapter	Uganda



President Prithvirajsing Roopun (R) with COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe at State House.

COMESA Institutions Awareness Forum:

Mauritius President lauds COMESA

The President of Mauritius, H.E. Prithvirajsing Roopun, has commended the COMESA Secretariat and the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) for organizing the inaugural Awareness Forum for COMESA Institutions in Mauritius.

He emphasized the importance of the forum in facilitating the exchange of information on the operations of these institutions for the benefit of local communities and government entities.

President Roopun reiterated Mauritius' commitment to regional integration, a cornerstone of COMESA's objectives. He pledged his government's full support to the principles of the regional bloc, which currently constitute 21 Member States. These remarks were made during a meeting with Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe at State House in Port Louis, Mauritius, on Tuesday, April 16, 2024, on the sidelines of the Awareness Forum.

and the Government of Mauritius for active involvement in COMESA programmes, highlighting their significant contributions to advancing regional integration. The first-ever Awareness Forum saw participation from approximately 120 delegates, engaging in fruitful discussions with 12 Heads of COMESA Institutions and their representatives. Funded by the TDB, which is one of the most successful COMESA institutions, the two-day event marked an important step towards enhancing cooperation and understanding among COMESA Member States.

The SG Kapwepwe was accompanied to State House by the Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Administration, Finance Dr. Dev Haman and the Executive Support Officer Maluba Sinyambo and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mauritius.

SG Kapwepwe commended the President



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