

Regional-Wide Post-Covid-19 Recovery Plan is a Top Priority



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe flanked by Assistant Secretary General- Administration and Finance (R) and staff during the virtual meeting with the Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Hon Nandcoomar BODHA (not in picture)

COMESA and Mauritius have agreed on the need to prioritize a regional-wide post-Covid-19 recovery plan to assist Member States get their economies back on their feet. In a meeting conducted virtually between COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe and the Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Hon Nandcoomar BODHA, the two agreed on the need to focus resource mobilization efforts towards supporting the plan.

Minister BODHA, whose Ministry is in charge of coordination of COMESA programmes in Mauritius lauded COMESA Secretariat for cutting its budget by 10% and passing the benefit to the Member States. Hence, Member States will reduce their annual

subscriptions to the regional economic bloc by the same percentage. He urged the organization to adopt a No-budget increase policy to help the Member States in their economic recovery efforts.

Secretary General said COMESA has actively engaged development partners including the African Development Bank, the European Union and the World Bank among others, to support Member States during the pandemic and after.

So far, she said, various support facilities have been secured including a \$850,000 commitment from the AfDB to support the development of pharmaceutical products and creation of value chains for COMESA Member States. Further discussions are

underway to upscale this project with additional resources and expand its scope. COMESA is also conducting socio economic studies on the impact of the pandemic to Member States to support their recovery efforts. Further, it has set up a portal for exchange of information on essential goods that are available in the region. Ms. Kapwepwe said the platform will enable Member States to share information and connect buyers to suppliers thereby promoting and fostering regional intra-COMESA trade.

Other matters discussed included the implementation of the COMESA Free Trade Area Agreement and the importance to Member States avoiding introduction of any new trade barriers and resolution of the

pending ones to boost regional trade and support post-Covid-19 economic recovery.

"What we need is regional approach for economic recovery, with a harmonized plan for all member States as this will enable us forge partnerships with the development partners as opposed to going alone," the SG noted.

With regard to the ratification of the COMESA, EAC and SADC Free Trade Area, the Minister said Mauritius was looking forward to the conclusion of the negotiations on Rules of Origin and Market Access to ratify the Agreement. The Tripartite was launched in 2015 and has so been signed and ratified by eight countries, six short of the required threshold of 14.

"Negotiations have been lengthy as some of the products involved are sensitive," the Minister noted. "It would be important to share the outcomes of bilateral negotiations with all parties regarding market access."

The SG said lack of funding had also slowed down the tripartite negotiations and this situation also been exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic.

The two also discussed preparation of the 2021 -2025 COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) the ongoing which is currently underway. Minister Bodha said the development of the ocean economy, maritime security and climate change were the main priorities of the island States and should be placed top on the agenda of the next COMESA strategic plan.

Secretary General hailed Mauritius for setting the best example in the region in the management and containment of the Covid-19 pandemic. The country has flattened the curve and has no active Covid-19 cases.

COMESA Hails the new Continental One-Stop-Shop for Medicines



Source: <http://www.enabling-env.com/>

COMESA has welcomed the launch of the African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) as an invaluable One Stop Shop that will ensure access to safe and affordable quality medicines in Africa.

Launched in June this year, the digital platform is intended to serve as a consolidated online marketplace to facilitate the provision of COVID-19-related medical products by addressing supply chain issues such as shortages, delays in distributing supplies, accessibility and affordability.

Two weeks ago, COMESA and the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) joined hands to showcase the platform to key stakeholders, among them, ministers in charge of finance and health from the African continent. The aim was to demonstrate how the Platform will help address health challenges posed by the COVID-19 and how governments can scale up interventions to stop its further spread.

At the event conducted online, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe cited financial constraints as one of the biggest stumbling blocks to effectively manage the pandemic considering that majority, if not all economies in Africa have financially-strained health systems.

"By reducing costs through pooled procurement, this initiative goes a long way in easing the financial burden and strengthening national responses to the pandemic," she told the guests.

She added: "COVID-19 has shown the limitations of globalization and global supply chains, which have been easily disrupted due to the various lockdowns and the unprecedented shortages

of tradable commodities and services in our countries."

Of greatest concern in the region has been shortages or constrained supplies of essential pharmaceutical products, including medicines, Personal Protective Equipment and potential increases in substandard and counterfeit products. Consequently, the costs of these essential medicines and other health products have escalated thereby further limiting their access by health workers and the sick.

Ms Kapwepwe informed participants that on its part, COMESA has in the immediate past developed a programme aimed at strengthening production capacity of pharmaceutical and medical supplies in the region - during and post Covid-19.

She said: "Evidence from analytical data indicate that there are various products in the medical industry that COMESA countries can produce and export to each other if the capacities of pharmaceuticals manufacturing enterprises related to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) Quality Management Systems (QMS) and Regional Standards are improved."

She added that it is against this background that the COMESA and ECA, in partnership with Africa Centre for Diseases Control, Afreximbank, and the AU Special Envoy, Mr. Strive Masiyiwa convened the high level virtual meeting, to showcase the opportunities offered by the African Medical Supplies Platform.



RISM Programme sensitizes over 600 Congolese stakeholders on the COMESA Rules of Origin



Source: <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/>

Over 600 stakeholders comprising of border officials and local economic operators from the Democratic Republic of Congo have completed trade related skills training designed to enhance better understanding of the potential opportunities that the COMESA market offers.

The training was provided under the COMESA Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) with funding from the European Union. This is part of a Grant Agreement signed in August 2019

of 489,600 Euros between COMESA and D R Congo.

The training covered the COMESA Rules of Origin, regional economic integration, national regulation of COMESA Rules of Origin, COMESA Preferential Tariffs, COMESA Simplified Trade regime (STR), the functioning of the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) and mechanisms and procedures to request and benefit from preferential tariff treatment within that framework.

RISM provides the regional business community the opportunity to benefit from the COMESA Free Trade Area such as preferential trade regimes that make them more competitive on the local and regional markets.

D R Congo has enormous potential, especially in agriculture and labor but its local industries have been negatively impacted due to lack of integration into regional and global value chains. Further, the lack of information, which is essential for decision-making limits export possibilities.

Participants from Bukavu, Uvira, Kinshasa, Kolwezi, Lubumbashi, Kasumbalesa, Goma and Bunia benefitted from the training. Similar trainings at D.R. Congo's borders which had been temporarily been suspended due to COVID-19 are set to resume as soon as the travel bans are lifted. An additional 200 participants from Kisangani, Matadi, Kananga, Mbuji Mayi are targeted in the next round.

Over the past few months, the RISM Programme, has funded training seminars and workshops to build the capacity of economic operators and state actors operating at border posts.

New Information Kit to Enhance Gender Mainstreaming



File photo: Women in Zambia celebrating at a COMFWB formerly FEMCOM women empowerment event in Lusaka

The COMESA Secretariat has developed modules for an online course on trade and gender which will help the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women in the region. This is part of an information kit presented to Member States in a virtual meeting of COMESA Gender Experts held on 21- 22 September.

The revision of the information kit was to prepare it for presentation to the Ministers of Gender for approval during their meeting set for early 2021.

The documents included the COMESA Trade and Gender Online Course Modules, the COMESA Gender Policy Implementation Action Plan, the COMESA HIV and AIDS Plan of Action and Tracking Matrix and the draft COMESA Gender Planning Guidelines, Checklists and Indicators.

Speaking during the opening of the two-day meeting, Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget said:

"It is necessary to address the gender concerns and gaps adequately using different mechanisms including gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment approaches to meet the aspirations of the Treaty."

The COMESA Treaty under Articles 154 and 155 promotes equal opportunity for women to access and control available resources in all sectors.

Dr. Cheluget said meaningful application of the mainstreaming approach will ensure availability of gender disaggregated data for the purpose of evidence-based planning or programming. This is in addition to providing gender analytical skills among technical staff as well as creating positive mindsets towards gender equality and empowerment of women.

All the documents were drafted by the Secretariat following the Council Decisions of the past years including the meeting for Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs held in Khartoum, Sudan in February 2018.

Participants were drawn from the ministries of gender, women affairs, trade and commerce.

COVID 19 Preventive Measures Yielding Positive Results

According to the latest COMESA Situational Update, the monthly rate of increase of COVID 19 has been declining due to the preventive and mitigation measures that have been put in place by governments to contain the spread of the pandemic.

The latest Situational Update Number 31 compiled by the COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) states that this decline, and the high numbers of COVID-19

recoveries recorded so far in the region, may explain the current strategies by governments to reopen up various sectors including education, business, tourism, ports of entry and other transport services.

However, the report states that even though the overall number of cases are still rising, the monthly rate of COVID-19 infections reported is declining and this can also be attributed to low levels of testing.

For the past seven months, countries in the region have been battling to control the spread of COVID-19 which has had a serious economic impact leading to business closures, disruption of agricultural production, loss of employment and revenue.

The region recorded the highest increase of COVID-19 cases in the initial months of March and April 2020. During this period, the numbers rose from around 1,000 cases by end of March to almost 10,000 by end of April representing 526.14%. Since then, the monthly rate of increase has been declining mainly due to cocktail of measures that have been put in place.

The COMESA Diary

29-30 Sep 2020	Fifteenth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Rules of Origin Organised by: COMESA Secretariat, Venue: Virtual
30 Sep 2020	Second Steering Committee Meeting for the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Organised by: COMESA Secretariat, Venue: Virtual
1 Oct 2020	Second Steering Committee Meeting for the Trade Facilitation Programme Organised by: COMESA Secretariat, Venue: Virtual
6-8 Oct 2020	Fifth Meeting of the Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee Organised by: COMESA Secretariat Venue: Virtual
6-9 Oct 2020	Nineteenth Meeting of the Legal Drafting Sub Committee Organised by: COMFWB (Formerly FEMCOM) Venue: Virtual
12 Oct 2020	Sixth Meeting of Sub-Committee of Heads of Customs (Experts Meeting) Organised by: COMESA Secretariat Venue: Virtual
13-15 Oct 2020	Twentieth Meeting Legal Drafting Sub Committee Organised by: COMESA Secretariat Venue: Virtual



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051. Lusaka, Zambia



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



facebook.com/COMESA/



[@twitter.com/comesa_lusaka](https://twitter.com/comesa_lusaka)