

Opportunities Abound for Turning Around the Low Intra-Regional Trade



Dr Kipyego Cheluget

Intra-regional trade among the 21 Member countries of COMESA is estimated at a 7%. This low performance is attributed to inadequate participation of all Member States in the COMESA Free Trade Area and the challenges they face in implementing regional commitments.

The situation is further aggravated by poor physical connectivity leading to high transportation costs, prevalence of non-tariff barriers, lack of information exchange about existing trading opportunities and prevalence of restrictive regulatory requirements in various markets.

Speaking during the opening of the 36th Meeting of the Trade and Customs Committee virtual meeting on Tuesday, October 27, 2020, Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes in COMESA, Dr Kipyego Cheluget said

despite these challenges, there still exist opportunities to leverage on.

“We need full application of the rules-based regime provided for under the COMESA Non-Tariff Barriers regulations and collective implementation of the commitments under the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement,” he said.

“We also need to accelerate the negotiations on Trade in Services and make meaningful commitments in sectors that impact

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-Dr Kipyego Cheluget

trading conditions in the region in terms of competitiveness such as financial sector, telecommunication, tourism and transportation.”

He added that the region needs to leverage more participation of the private sector in the integration process as business is the beneficiary of opportunities that are created by regional economic integration.

Among the issues deliberated upon during the three days meeting of trade and customs experts, was a report on Trade in Services containing modalities of resuming trade negotiations using virtual platforms. Before COVID-19, trade negotiations between countries took place in physical meetings.

The meeting also considered the development of customs training manuals on advance rulings, risk management and post clearance auditing, customs automation, amendments to the administrative provisions of the COMESA rules of origin and priorities identified for the Customs and Trade Facilitation Work Programme 2021-2023.

In July this year the Extra-ordinary Council of Ministers' meeting directed the Secretariat to establish an online platform to facilitate exchange of information about production and availability of essential products within COMESA Member States. The platform was set up but has not been operationalized awaiting Member States to nominate their focal points that will manage content at the national level. So far eight Member States have submitted nominations.

Appealing to the Member to complete the nominations, Dr Cheluget said:

“This is another opportunity to create a database on products, suppliers and regulatory requirements to address the information gap that has been identified as a constraint to the growth of intra-regional trade.”

To ensure that the COMESA trading arrangements and innovative trade and transportation instruments are used as benchmarks to African economic integration, Dr Cheluget spelt out the following priority issues: getting all COMESA Member States to participate in the COMESA FTA; identifying and eliminating NTB's; implementing trade facilitation measures including the COMESA digital FTA; advancing services liberalization and building effective platforms for trade promotion and e-commerce.

“As we address issues related to the trading environment, work in other areas of cooperation such as increasing supply of goods for trade, establishment of regional value chains and addressing other supply side constraints should progress at an equally urgent pace,” he said.

He urged the Committee to establish a roadmap for effective implementation of the COMESA FTA that can be managed through a transparent monitoring and evaluation framework.

The recommendations of the trade and customs experts meeting will be tabled before the Intergovernmental Committee and the Council of Ministers' Meeting scheduled in the last week of November 2020.

Former Judge President of COMESA Court Passes on: Hailed for Leaving an Enduring Legacy in the Regional Justice System



Former Judge President Nzamba Kitonga (middle) during a Court session in Khartoum in 2014

The immediate former Judge President of the COMESA Court of Justice Nzamba Kitonga who passed away on Saturday, October 24, 2020 has left an enduring legacy in the regional legal system. Justice Kitonga, served the COMESA Court for ten years, from 2005 to 2015 when the tenure of the Bench he led came to an end as per the provisions of the COMESA Treaty.

During this time, the regional Court made landmark rulings and Advisory Opinions that served to entrench the rule of law in the COMESA regional integration agenda and instill business and investor confidence. Among them was the ruling that ordered a refund of customs duty imposed on products from a Member State of the COMESA Free Trade Area by another.

Notable legal advisory opinions made under his leadership included the definition of the extent of immunities and privileges accorded to the COMESA institutions involved in commercial transactions stating: “the immunities and privileges granted to COMESA Institutions did not extend to commercial transactions between individuals or entities and the Institutions.”

It was also during his tenure that the regional Court moved to its permanent home in Khartoum, Sudan.

In a message of Condolences, COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe described Justice Kitonga as a valuable member of the legal fraternity and a champion of constitutionalism at both the national and regional levels.

“The Court continues to contribute to the

development of regional jurisprudence within the context of regional trade and investment and we cannot ignore the contribution he made to this development as a former leader of the Court.”

In his home country, Kenya, Justice Kitonga is celebrated for steering the Committee of Experts that drafted the country's' current Constitution among other notable achievements in his legal career.



Justice Nzamba Kitonga

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Congratulations to the New President of Seychelles



Picture Source: The Gurdian
New President of Seychelles H.E. Wavel Ramkalawan

COMESA has congratulated H.E Wavel Ramkalawan following his election and taking the oath of office as the new President of Seychelles. President Ramkalawan was elected during the Presidential and Parliamentary elections conducted on 22 – 24 October 2020.

In her message issued on behalf of the Chair of the COMESA Authority and the regional organization, the Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Kapwepwe applauded the people of Seychelles for exemplary and peaceful conduct of the elections. This enabled a smooth transition despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Your election marks a very important phase in the history of Seychelles in reaffirming the consolidation of democracy," the SG stated. "We look forward to enhanced collaboration and partnership with your Government as we continue to implement programmes aimed at deepening the integration and development of our region."

Seychelles has remained an active member of COMESA and continues to support and benefit from various regional integration programmes led by the regional economic bloc.

50 Million African Women Speak Platform Unveiled in D R Congo



Left to right: Zacharie Tshimbinda Bilolo, Secretary of Regional Integration and Francophonie, Béatrice Lomeya Atilite, Minister of Gender, Family and Children and Adrienne Binwana Lufuna Ngoy, Secretary of Gender, Family and Children

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform was on Thursday 22 October unveiled in the Democratic Republic of Congo with the country's Deputy Prime Minister Her Excellency Elysee Munembwe urging women to use it to do business with the rest of Africa.

The launch, which was the sixth in a COMESA Member State, was conducted through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local dignitaries who gathered physically at the launch venue were joined virtually by several invited guests. COMESA's high-profile participation at the event was led by Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, Dr. Kipyego Cheluget.

Speakers during the event emphasized the need for Congolese women to embrace digital approaches as one of the ways to ensure their businesses thrive after the pandemic. Congolese Deputy Prime Minister Mrs. Munembwe, who is also Minister of Planning, described the platform as an initiative which would contribute significantly to the economic empowerment of women in the D R Congo.

She lauded COMESA and the African Development Bank for their support through the 50 Million African Women Speak Project and pledged that her country would continue to drive the platform forward.

Dr. Cheluget represented Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe at the launch and observed that the 50 Million African Women Speak platform would help women start afresh following the devastation by COVID-19 pandemic.

"COVID-19 has redefined not only how we live our lives, but how we do business," Dr. Cheluget said.

"The 50 Million African Women Speak platform we are launching today presents a grand opportunity for a new beginning, and a chance for Congolese women to move their businesses to a digital platform which transcends national boundaries, allows them to set up virtual stalls and carry on with their endeavours in spite of COVID-19."

He thanked the funding partner, African Development Bank for the financial support which has made the 50 Million African Women Speak Project possible across the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs. He commended the government of DR Congo for its support and urged it to take full ownership of the platform to ensure its sustainability.

The 50 MAWS platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries.

Owing to the pandemic, national launch events of the platform will be held either virtually or as a hybrid of virtual and conventional launches. Launches are planned for Comoros, Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Malawi and Mauritius.

Addressing Bottlenecks Affecting Simplified Trade Regime in the Great Lakes



Cross border traders load commodities at Buanagana border point between Uganda and DR Congo

Issues affecting the operations of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) along the borderlands of DR Congo, Uganda and Rwanda formed the agenda of recent two-day tripartite meeting.

The virtual meeting was organized by the COMESA Secretariat under the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) to share experiences on the STR and other key issues impacting Cross Border Trade in the three project countries. Delegates shared experiences on trading under COVID-19 restrictions and the initiatives they have put in place to safeguard cross-border traders.

One of the best practices cited was the bulking of small consignment of goods and ferrying them as one thus limiting the number of traders crossing the borders to supply or buy products.

This was first meeting held since COVID-19 shut borders in most Member States early in the year. At the meeting, participants examined findings a sustainability study of Trade Information Desk (TIDs) which proposed that the desks should be operated by the private sector as Cross Border Traders Associations (CBTA) or cooperatives.

Currently, the Trade Information Officers are supported by the GLTFP which is coming to an end. The meeting also reviewed the roadmap for operationalization of joint border committees which are critical for trade.

The GLTFP is funded by the World Bank to facilitate cross-border trade between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda and increase the capacity for commerce and reduce the costs, time and harassment faced by traders, especially small-scale and women traders.

Project beneficiaries are primarily vulnerable families in borderland areas, cross border traders, especially women, and air travelers. The project also benefits youth by creating new opportunities for employment. The project addresses both formal and informal small-scale trade with a strong focus on gender.

The following led their respective country delegations to the meeting: Mr. Millan Bondenga, Ministry of Commerce in DR Congo; Mr Antoine Kajangwe, Director General of Trade and Investments, Rwanda, and Mr David Kiiza, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, Uganda.

The COMESA Diary

27 - 29
Oct 2020

36th Trade and Customs meeting
Organised by: Secretariat (Trade & Customs) **Venue:** Virtual

11-12
Nov 2020

41st Meeting of the Administrative & Budgetary Committee
Organised by: Secretariat **Venue:** Virtual

23-24
Nov 2020

41st Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee
Organised by: Secretariat **Venue:** Virtual

26-27
Nov 2020

41st Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers
Organised by: Secretariat **Venue:** Virtual



Trade Information Desk Helps Seal Illegal Trade Routes



The COMESA team at the Nakonde Trade Information Desk office

The establishment of a COMESA Trade Information Desk (TID) at the Nakonde border between Zambia and Tanzania has led to a massive reduction in the use of illegal routes by small scale cross border traders.

The TID which is run by the Cross-Border Traders Association CBTA was established under the COMESA Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) with support from the European Union in 2018.

Speaking during the monitoring and evaluation mission conducted by a joint team from COMESA and the Zambia Ministry of Commerce, Trade and industry in Nakonde on Monday, 21 October 2020, CBTA Secretary General Christine Phiri Sikombe confirmed that unlike before, majority of small scale cross border traders now use legal routes.

“Despite challenges faced in organizing informal trade, the TID officer has worked tirelessly to ensure that most traders are sensitized about the use of the TID office and membership to the CBTA has since increased from 200 in 2018 to 400 registered and paid up members by mid-2020,” she said.

COMESA team encouraged the CBTA to introduce cluster model to run their businesses.

COMESA RISM Program Assistant Mr Mwiinga Mwiinga said working in clusters would help the small-scale traders to maximize their profits as they sell their goods in large quantities. It will also help them to have better negotiating power especially when approached by the unscrupulous traders who take advantage of their solo operations.



Cross Border Traders Association Secretary General Christine Sikombe(in pink dress) addresses members of the COMESA team during the monitoring and evaluation mission in Nakonde



A small scale crossborder trader at Nakonde border

Zambian Leather Cluster Certified



CAF/RISM Coordinator Hope Situmbeko (R) hands over the ZABS certificate to a member of the Chingola Leather Cluster. On the left is the Konkola Cooper Mines Head of CSR Brian Siatubi

Chingola Leather Cluster in Zambia has been awarded a Standards certificate by the Zambia Bureau of Standards (ZABS). This means that the cluster's products have attained the stipulated standards and can now compete at the national and international markets.

The certificate was handed over to the Chingola Cluster by the Coordinator of the COMESA Adjustment Facility/Regional Integration Support Mechanism (CAF/RISM) programme, Ms. Hope Situmbeko during a monitoring mission.

The cluster was supported under CAF/RISM programme funded by the European Union. Under the support, members of the cluster received training in diverse skills including production, design and business management.

Chairperson of the cluster Margaret Foloshi appreciated the support which led to the ZABS Certification stating that her organization will now embark on mass production of leather products as the certificate had opened a wider market.

"We can now compete with other sector players in the country and beyond," Ms Foloshi said.

The cluster also expects to receive enhanced business from the Konkola Copper Mines according to the Manager in charge of Corporate Social Responsibility, Brian Siatubi.


Ms. Situmbeko who led a COMESA monitoring and evaluation team encouraged the cluster to take advantage of the COVID 19 situation and produce school shoes for the Zambian market. She noted that with most borders still closed, imports for leather products had dwindled hence placing the leather clusters in the country at a position to produce and supply the growing local demand.


"Work together and ensure you at least satisfy the Chingola demand for school shoes because the borders are closed and there are very little imports for the leather products," she said.

The COMESA team also visited Chisokone Leather Cluster in Kitwe, which specializes in the production of security and safety boots for various companies on the Zambian Copperbelt.



Members of the Chingola Leather Cluster at work

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