

Madagascar Launches 50 Million African Women Speak Platform



File/ A tourism enterprise in Antananarivo, Madagascar

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform was unveiled Friday 9 October in Antananarivo, Madagascar making the country the fourth COMESA Member State to launch the digital networking platform.

The national launch of the platform was presided over by the Minister for Population, Social Protection and Advancement of Women, Hon. Michelle Bavy Angelica at an event held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants

.....
“The 50 Million African Women Speak platform brings to life the adage that every dark cloud has a silver lining. While the...”
 -Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe

gathered physically at the launch venue were joined virtually by several invited guests.

COMESA's high-profile participation was led by Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, with Assistant Secretary General Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget and high-profile representatives from the African Development Bank also among those in attendance.

Chief Guest Hon. Bavy said the platform was living up to its name by giving women an avenue through which to speak to each other.

“The 50 Million African Women Speak platform takes on its full meaning thanks to the interaction of millions of African women beyond geographical borders and language barriers, which allows them to exchange and learn, to build relationships, to flourish and to be inspired by the opportunities offered,” she remarked.

She commended COMESA and the AfDB for their support over the last two years which has made it possible to realize the platform.

The COMESA Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe noted that the platform was being unveiled at the perfect time as businesses move online.

“We are all aware that our countries now operate against the backdrop of economic devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this devastation has spared no one, it is undeniable that women have suffered worse than their male counterparts,” Ms. Kapwepwe noted.

She said, however, that the platform was a practical initiative to immediately redress this situation.

“The 50 Million African Women Speak platform brings to life the adage that every dark cloud has a silver lining. While the

pandemic might have devastated and ultimately marked the unfortunate end of some business activities as we previously knew them, it has imposed upon us the requirement to embrace a new normal where our marketplaces are online and our business engagements are virtual,” the Secretary General said.

She urged Malagasy women to take advantage of the platform to connect with other businesswomen in Madagascar as well as the COMESA region, and to use it to showcase their goods and services.

Ms. Kapwepwe thanked the funding partner, African Development Bank for the financial support which has made the 50 Million African Women Speak Project possible in 36 countries across the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs, as well as the Government of Madagascar for its support in implementing the initiative. She urged the government to devote the required resources to ensure its sustainability.

The 50 Million African Women Speak 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. Launch events in 11 other COMESA Member States are planned. The next launch is scheduled for 15 October 2020 in Eswatini.

Regional Research Forum to Unveil Interface Between Intra-COMESA Trade and the Continental FTA



The 7th COMESA Annual Research Forum will take place from 19 – 21 October 2020 and this year, the focus is how intra-COMESA Trade can be harnessed through interface with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA).

The virtual event which is being funded by COMESA, the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union (EU) will bring together the academia, think tanks, government officers and the private sector from across the region and Africa, to discuss emerging topical issues in regional integration.

The theme for this year is: “Harnessing Intra-COMESA Trade through the Interface with African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA)”. According to the COMESA Director of Trade, Dr Christopher Onyango, the theme is motivated by renewed impetus towards consolidation of a single continental market and the role of COMESA in the realization of this goal. COMESA is the largest economic bloc with a membership of 21 member States, a combined GDP of US\$ 769 billion, a combined population of over 583 million and therefore a critical pillar in the realization of the African Economic Community.

The African regional integration roadmap considers the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the building blocks of the African Economic Community as stipulated in the Abuja Treaty of 1991 and the AUs Agenda 2063. COMESA is among the eight RECs in Africa recognized by the AU.

“Making up a third of Africa, the vastness of COMESA should be complemented with its

dynamism and high trade growth,” Director of Trade, Dr Christopher Onyango says.

He adds that since the launch of the COMESA Free Trade Area in 2000, intra-COMESA export of goods has risen from \$1.5 Billion to about \$10.8 Billion (2019), excluding small scale (informal) trade estimated by UNCTAD and Economic Commission for Africa at about 40% of total trade.

“These figures are still not impressive in absolute terms, but the growth is remarkable. What is even more remarkable is the potential as well as the possibility of introducing wholly new products and industries through innovation given the extensive market created by the AfcFTA,” he adds.

The unveiling of the AfcFTA on 30th May 2019 following ratification by 24 countries (against the threshold of 22 out of the 55) members of the African Union presented a historic opportunity towards fostering structural transformation and strengthening inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development.

“Through evidenced based research, the 7th Annual COMESA Research Forum will unveil the interface between the AfcFTA and the RECs with

Harnessing Intra-COMESA Trade through the Interface with African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA)



a specific focus on boosting intra-COMESA trade," says Dr Onyango.

Key topics in this year forum include: COMESA industrialization programmes and the AfCFTA; AfCFTA opportunities and challenges to boosting Intra-COMESA Trade; COMESA Role in Implementation of the AfCFTA; COMESA trade in services liberalization and the AfCFTA; and AfCFTA and COMESA trade regimes.

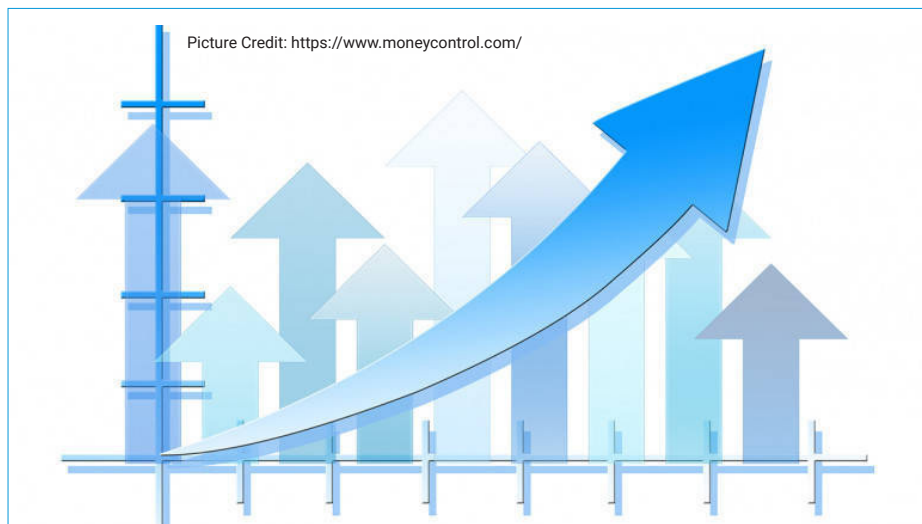
Launched in 2014, the COMESA Research Forums provide a platform for exchange of expert ideas and evidenced-based recommendations on policy interventions which have influenced key decisions making in COMESA's integration agenda.

The forums are made possible through call for papers under a contemporary themes which is informed by the COMESA Council of Ministers Decisions, the Tripartite Free Trade Area or the

continental free trade area negotiations and aspirations as well the global economic and trade dynamics.

The research papers are presented for peer review at the forum by prominent scholars and peer reviewers and the selected best papers are published in the COMESA flagship publication "Key Issues in Regional Integration". To date, seven editions have been published.

Notable Rise in Trade Barriers as Countries Responded to Covid-19



There has been a notable increase in the number of Non-Tariff Barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic period as countries increasingly took discretionary measures to contain the spread of the virus.

COMESA Director of trade Dr Chris Onyango told delegates attending the fifth Meeting of the COMESA Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee last week, 6-8 October 2020, that during the COVID 19 era, measures put in place by Member States have disrupted global value chains, radically reduced dependency on imports and rallied States towards the path of protectionism.

"Despite the significant milestones in dealing with NTB issues including rules, regulations, working procedures and online NTB monitoring systems, they have remained a major hindrance to growth and expansion of intra-COMESA trade," he said.

He implored countries to continue reviewing and improving existing regulations and mechanisms taking into account changing eco systems,

understanding key causes, analyzing regulatory regimes, production techniques and technological advancements.

Though largely legitimate, behind-the-border measures have increasingly become more prohibitive to free flow of goods across borders. The Director called for effective regulations given that open borders are vital in ensuring safe and cost-efficient supply of medicines and medical supplies.

"Member States should simply avoid introducing NTBs to allow trade to thrive for in the end, no single party benefits from restraining trade. I can

"Despite the significant milestones in dealing with NTB issues including rules, regulations, working procedures and online NTB monitoring..."

-Dr. Chris Onyango

attest to you delegates that even in the imposing countries on aggregate, competitiveness in production and market prices are comprised, and consumer welfare undermined by constrained choices, tastes and preferences," Dr Onyango stressed.

The meeting brought together experts from various areas to discuss trade and trade-related matters which are termed as salient pillars of regional economic integration. It was attended by delegates from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Somalia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

The mandate of the Committee includes trade promotion, rules of origin, non-tariff barriers, trade remedies, trade negotiations, and other contemporary trade policy issues which are cardinal to the smooth flow of regional trade.

Meanwhile, the Director appealed to Member States to nominate their focal persons to enable the utilization of the online portal that was developed by the COMESA Secretariat for exchange of information on availability of essential products and promote them.

The online platform is among the innovative mechanisms COMESA Member States can take advantage of while addressing bottlenecks occasioned by Coronavirus and boost preparedness to any future pandemics.

The three-day meeting covered key issues in regional integration including updates on economic and trade performances, developments in internal markets, including NTBs, implementation of Trade Facilitation Projects under the European Development Fund (EDF-II) programme and updates on negotiations under the Tripartite and the AfCFTA.

COMESA Regional Economy Poised to Shrink by 0.6% in 2020



Picture Credit: <https://www.aa.com.tr/>

A report from the Fifth Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee meeting of COMESA which was held virtually has indicated that the region's average growth slowed down in 2019 to 5.2% from 6.0% in 2018 and is projected to decrease to 0.6% in 2020.

The slowdown in growth was experienced in most COMESA member countries except Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda and Seychelles that registered improved economic growth in 2019 compared to 2018. The impressive growth of above 5% in both years in these countries, reflected among others, improving growth fundamentals, with a gradual shift from private consumption toward investment and exports.

COMESA Region experienced a slowdown in growth in 2019 as compared to 2018. This is largely attributed to lower commodity prices over the period. The region is currently going through an unprecedented economic and health crisis following the spread of COVID-19 pandemic to the region since the beginning of 2020.

The contraction is attributed to among others: the impact of containment measures that includes quarantine, lockdowns, travel restrictions and border closures, among others.

Regarding Monetary Policy and Exchange Rate developments, the reports states that monetary policy stance varied depending on the extent to which countries are exposed to domestic and external shock. Generally, Central Banks in the region pursued an accommodative monetary policy stance, for economies where inflation pressures were muted.

However, in 2020 the banks face new challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic including a shift of priority to crisis management objectives instead of strictly price stability.

In order to overcome these challenges, a number of Central Banks in the region have already instituted measures in response to COVID-19 pandemic, with most of them loosening monetary policy, allowing the exchange rate to depreciate and at times conducting foreign exchange interventions to smoothen exchange rate fluctuations.

At the same time, economic disruptions brought about by COVID-19 have resulted in tightening of global financing conditions, unprecedented capital outflow and sharp decline in remittances and tourism receipts.

The report further states that although fiscal policy is key in addressing the current challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic, monetary and exchange rate policy can also play an important role in dampening the economic shock.

Governments in the region have instituted a

number of fiscal measures geared towards containing the COVID-19 pandemic, including provision of health services and extended unprecedented support to households, firms, and financial markets.

The report also highlight that region's average government debt as a share of GDP was 50.5% in 2019 as compared to 50.9% in 2018. However, this is projected to increase to 54% in 2020 due mainly to COVID-19 pandemic.

The report therefore recommends that the immediate challenge for most countries in the region will be stopping the COVID-19 pandemic and countries should double their efforts to sustain public health gains including contact tracing, quarantine and isolation, treatment and stopping the spread.

The meeting also recommended that Member countries should use macroeconomic policies to speed up recovery that should include fiscal, monetary and more flexible exchange rates that would permit exchange rate depreciation. Fiscal stimulus in the short run should target public health, crisis response and income support to the most vulnerable.

In the medium term, the meeting recommended for structural transformation and economic diversification of individual economies in the region because COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that with disrupted trade channels, local manufacturers have been able to rise to the occasion. There is therefore needed to sustain emerging pharmaceutical and medical supply industries in a post Covid-19 era.

.....
COMESA Region experienced a slowdown in growth in 2019 as compared to 2018. This is largely attributed to lower commodity prices over the period.
.....



COVID 19 has Triggered Growth in Zambia's Leather Industry



ZALIA Chairperson Steven Kanyanta shows the tanned goat skin leather during the Monitoring Mission by CAF/RISM

The negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19 has not spared the leather industry in Zambia as the industry is feeling the pinch of the pandemic due to massive disruptions in the way business is done. Several small and medium entrepreneurs in the sector have folded altogether, while some have joined forces to stay afloat.

Industry players say that the confinement of people indoors by COVID-19 had limited movement which led to low utilization of footwear. This has prompted the Zambia Leather Industries Association (ZALIA) to call on its members to utilize the cluster initiative to overcome the challenges associated with the pandemic.

On 6th October 2020, a Monitoring and Evaluation Mission conducted by the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF) through

its Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) project was in Kafue district of Zambia visiting leather projects.

Speaking at the project site, Chairperson of ZALIA, Mr. Steven Kanyanta said COVID has provided an opportunity for the leather sector to grow exponentially as demand for the local products has increased due to a decline in importation of shoes from other parts of the world.

Mr Kanyanta who accompanied CAF/RISM Coordinator Hope Situmbeko on the mission said that his association has embarked on resuscitating the clusters all over the country to start working together to enhance their productive capacity and meet the current high demand of leather products in the country.

"In as far as COVID 19 has had a negative impact on the leather sector such as lack of raw materials that we source from other parts of the World , we have seen an opportunity to develop our sector and ensure that we produce to meet the market needs in the country and this we shall do through the cluster initiative," Mr Kanyanta added.

One of the beneficiaries to the RISM support, Edward Mungala described the COVID-19 as a game changer which pushed him out of his shoe manufacturing business and opted to join another shoe-maker in order to earn an income.

Edward who is also a beneficiary of the COMESA Support through the COMESA Adjustment Facility said the skills gained through RISM has enabled him to forge a business partnership to leverage on each other's strengths.

"I have now learnt that working together is better than alone. I was completely finished because there was no business and I decided to join my friend so we can build the business and its working now but we just need more support in terms of equipment," Edward said.


During the mission, the team also visited the Kafue Leather Cottage owned by Mr. Wilson Mutale. With vast experience in the leather sector he has trained over 80 farmers in vegetable tanning through the project. The vegetable tanning techniques have enabled reduction of the turnover period from 90 days to just 48 hours making the goods more readily available for the market



COMAid Coordinator Hope Situmbeko(L) admiring a leather shoe during the monitoring mission at Chuhungu Leather Studio

The COMESA Diary

13-15 Oct 2020	Twentieth Meeting of Legal Drafting Sub-Committee Organised by: Secretariat (Legal/Finance/Audit) Venue: Virtual
14 Oct 2020	Sixth Meeting of Sub-Committee of Heads of Customs Organised by: Secretariat (Trade & Customs) Venue: Virtual
14-15 Oct 2020	Technical Meeting of Experts on the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) Organised by: Secretariat - Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (Trade and Customs Division) Venue: Virtual
19-21 Oct 2020	Seventh COMESA Annual Research Forum Organised by: Secretariat (Trade & Customs) Venue: Virtual
11-12 Nov 2020	41 st Meeting of the Administrative & Budgetary Committee Organised by: Secretariat Venue: Virtual
23-24 Nov 2020	41 st Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee Organised by: Secretariat Venue: Virtual
26-27 Nov 2020	41 st Meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers Organised by: 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)