

COMESA Secretariat Signs Sub-Delegation Agreement with Malawi to **upgrade Mchinji Border Post**



Source: The Nation Online

Mchinji border Post

COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Malawi have signed a 3.54 million Euros agreement that sub-delegates the implementation of coordinated border management activities under the broader Trade Facilitation Programme at Mchinji border post between Zambia and Malawi on the Malawian side.

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Malawi, Ms. Christina Zakeyo, and Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, separately signed the sub-delegation agreement in Lilongwe and Lusaka earlier in the week ending January 22. The project will support the implementation of key pillars of One Stop Border Post (OSBP) operations.

Some of the major activities to be implemented under this agreement include upgrading the customs e-management system and bandwidth, improving inter-agency connectivity,

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implementation of the Trade and Transport Corridor Management System, capacity building, training and sensitization of National Trade Facilitation Committee and Border Agencies among others. The signing of the sub-delegation agreement comes a month after a similar agreement was signed with the Zambian Government to upgrade its side of the border post at Mwami.

This new development is part of the 48 million Euros Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) with COMESA financed under the 11th European Development Fund (11 EDF) whose objective is to deepen regional integration, improve inclusive regional economic growth and enhance the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

Principal Secretary Zakeyo stated that the signing of the sub-delegation agreement came after an assessment of existing challenges conducted at Mchinji border post in early 2020. She thanked the European Union for the support rendered under the programme through COMESA Secretariat to improve the facilitation of trade at Mchinji/Mwami border post. Ms Zakeyo added that the support is a testimony of the continued and strengthened collaboration between Malawi and the European Union.

COMESA Offers 18 Scholarships to Students Undertaking Master's Degree in Regional Integration

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COMESA Secretariat has awarded 18 scholarships worth USD50,100 to citizens who are students admitted to pursue a master's degree programme in Regional Integration at Kenyatta University of Kenya and the University of Mauritius.

This sponsorship has been facilitated through support from the European Union and the Organization of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the TradeCom II Capacity Building programme. In 2010, the 28th COMESA Council of Ministers meeting decided to establish a professional or graduate school on Regional Integration to foster cooperation in research and development in the COMESA region in line with Articles 127 and 128 of the Treaty.

Following this decision, COMESA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with participating Universities to offer training and undertake conventional researches as tools for analyzing impacts and supporting innovations to address development challenges in the region.

According to trade experts at COMESA Secretariat, the two-year Masters of Regional Integration programme is a unique multi-disciplinary professional course designed to build the capacity of public sector officials working on trade, economic integration and international cooperation issues. In addition, the programme is relevant to private sector stakeholders, including private firms/ organizations, media practitioners, chambers of commerce, manufacturer and consumer associations. The programme is hosted by Kenyatta University and is to be offered in

collaboration with 21 other universities in COMESA Member States. So far, COMESA has signed a memorandum of understanding with 6 universities, including Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Mauritius (Mauritius), Open University of Mauritius (Mauritius), ISGE (Burundi), University of Zambia and University of Zimbabwe.

The programme offers tailor-made courses best suited to provide sound conceptual, policy and practical training to foster all areas of integration in COMESA, including economic, social and political integration. By expanding the pool of experts, the programme is expected to address capacity constraints and strengthen implementation of various commitments, including legal, economic, social and political areas in Member States. Commencement of this programme could not have taken place at a better time than when Member States are engaged in multiple negotiations e.g. the Tripartite Free Trade Area, the African Continental Free Trade Area, Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and other bilateral agreements, all of which require high technical skills and evidence based analysis.

Based on the Scholarship Award Criteria, Kenyatta University received 13 scholarships in these inaugural scholarships, whereas the University of Mauritius received 5 out of a total of 30 students who have commenced learning under the programme. The students undertaking the virtual studies in the two universities hail from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, as well as Ghana and South Africa.

Secretary General Kapwepwe and her staff were also commended for the technical support rendered during the inception and development of Malawi's project. The Government of Malawi desires to build on current trade facilitation efforts through programs such as the COMESA Trade Facilitation Project. "The interventions at Mchinji border post are expected to enhance efficiency and ultimately reduce the cost of doing business and the support is therefore, timely as Malawi grapples with the negative effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Ms Zakeyo added.

In her remarks, Secretary General Kapwepwe explained that the modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities provide an opportunity for Malawi to take ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities. The COMESA Secretariat will provide technical guidance.

Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and COMESA stated that "We welcome the signing of the agreement as a major step towards reduction in hindrances to trade at the border and that will lead to increased seamless flow of goods between Zambia and Malawi."

By the end of the implementation period of the project, it is expected that clearance times and costs for goods processed through the border posts will be reduced. Likewise, the number of reported non-tariff barriers and cases of corruption and harassment will also record a reduction, while on the other hand, it is expected that there will be a significant increase in revenue collection through increased trade flows.

COMESA Mourns Two Malawi Ministers



Hon. Lingson Belekanyama



Hon. Sidik Mia

Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe has described the deaths of two Cabinet Ministers that occurred recently in Malawi as devastating to the nation and region as a whole. In a message of condolences addressed to the President of Malawi His Excellency Lazarus Chakwera, the SG regretted that the region has continued to lose lives that can contribute to the deepening of regional integration.

"The death of the two Ministers has robbed the families, the Government, people of Malawi and the COMESA Region of two dedicated and hardworking political leaders who were committed to economic development and transformation for the benefit of the citizens of their country and the region," Ms Kapwepwe said.

She noted with sadness that the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to claim the lives of many people in the region, but was encouraged that the Government of Malawi, like most governments in the region, has put up measures to control the further spread of the virus.

"We call upon all COMESA Member States to come together and develop strategies and action plans that will harmonize efforts

to protect people from the pandemic and also continue with the safe movement of essential goods and people across our borders," the SG added.

On 12th January, the Government of Malawi announced the demise of Honourable Sidik Mia, Minister of Transport and Honourable Lingson Belekanyama, Minister of Local Government respectively.

"We call upon all COMESA Member States to come together and develop strategies and action plans that will harmonize efforts to protect people from the pandemic and also continue with the safe movement of essential goods and people across our borders," the SG added.

Secretariat 'Opens' for Business

The COMESA Secretariat has resumed virtual operations after having a three-week break during the festive season from 19 December 2020 to 11 January 2021. Most members of staff led by Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and her two Assistants Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget in Charge of Programmes and Dr Dev Haman in Charge of Administration and Finance have reported for work.

However, operations are still being conducted virtually due to the escalating cases of COVID-19 both in Zambia the host country and the region as a whole.

The Secretariat successfully transitioned to working virtually with most meetings and programmes being conducted online since March 2020.

SG Kapwepwe Appears Before Zambia's Parliamentary Committee on Budgets

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe appeared before Zambia's Parliamentary Committee in charge of Budgetary Affairs on Friday 22 January and gave an update on various regional integration activities and levels of implementation.

With a specific focus on Zambia, Ms Kapwepwe briefed the law makers on different programmes and projects that COMESA is implementing and its benefits on the people and the country. She mentioned different EU funded projects but singled out the Kanakantapa Cassava cluster under the umbrella of the COMESA Federation of Women in Business -COMFWB, formerly (FEMCOM), as a key programme that is directly benefitting the locals.

COMESA, through COMFWB has in the past provided over USD12,000 to renovate and upgrade the facility in Kanakantapa, Chongwe used to process the cassava into starch, flour, chips and many other products..

The Secretary General added that from the time COMESA started supporting the Cassava Cluster facility, which is mostly run by women farmers, the plant has been able to produce high quality cassava starch which is on high demand in the mining sector.

"The cassava starch produced by the women in Kanakantapa in Chongwe is of high quality and they already have a market in the mining industry especially on the Copperbelt and northwestern province,"

She also informed the Parliamentarians



SG Kapwepwe appearing virtually before the Zambian Parliamentary Committee on Budget in Lusaka

about the Textile Cluster located in Villa Elizabeth area in Lusaka where machinery has been bought to help improve production of textile and already they are producing COVID 19 protective gear such as face masks which were part of the donation made by COMESA to the Ministry of Health in 2020.

COMESA also supports leather clusters in different districts namely Chingola, Kitwe, Kafue, Kabwe and Ndola-- All this support is through the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM).

Ms Kapwepwe also urged the Committee to embrace technology as the only way that development shall be realized in the country and beyond. She further tipped the committee on the need to create regional value chains of production as the best way to leverage on the different competitive advantages possessed by the various member States.

"We need to also realize that working in silos as individual Member States may compromise our resolve to create stronger industries that will ensure high

production of quality goods and services, and therefore you need to come up with policies that will help these industries to work together as regional value chains," Madam Kapwepwe added.

Ms Kapwepwe further said that for the economy of Zambia to benefit from the various Trade Agreements, priority should be given to the private sector as they are the final players in the various policies that Government signs and ratifies at the regional level.

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CBC Partners with the Trade and Development Bank for the Digital Financial Inclusion Programme

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) in partnership with the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) convened a high level Public-Private Dialogue, under the theme, "Towards the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy for Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) on 20th January 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda.

The public-private dialogue brought together nine pilot-study countries, Central Bank Governors, Ministers of Finance, ICT Regulators, manufacturers, Mobile Network Operators, commercial banks and MSMEs to consider and validate the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy and Framework for SMEs.

During the dialogue, deliberations attached great importance to partnerships, regulatory dialogue and consumer protection as key success factors for the digital financial inclusion of SMEs.

Speaking during the official opening ceremony, Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget said the formulation of the policy on Digital Integrated Common Payment will be the foundation of an infrastructure that supports African SMEs to grow into prosperous businesses over the coming years.

"We've seen a willingness from competitive forces in the industry to prepare a strong pathway that will facilitate eased digital payments across markets," said Amb. Cheluget added.



Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget

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"We've seen a willingness from competitive forces in the industry to prepare a strong pathway that will facilitate eased digital payments across markets," said Amb. Cheluget added.

CBC Board Chairperson Mr. Marday Venkatasamy disclosed that digital payment system platform dividend for COMESA and Africa at large, can be enormous with potential gains in growth of regional trade (sourcing and supply) which is currently below 20%. "But turning this vast potential into reality will require the collective efforts of our governments, the private sector, and development partners," he added.

CBC has been implementing the Digital

Financial Inclusion Program to support the design, development and deployment of an integrated digital financial services infrastructure that is low-cost and fraud resistant, that serves Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, particularly women and youth, who are at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

At the same event, the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) president, Admassu Tadesse, pointed out that financial inclusion involves multiple stakeholders, from policymakers and regulators to private industry, including employers, educational systems, communities and individuals.

The meeting noted that facilitating and promoting MSMEs' participation in Digital Financial Inclusion can accrue benefits such as economic growth, macroeconomic policy effectiveness and job creation.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry Rwanda Mr. Michel Sebera and the Chairman of the Rwanda Private Sector Federation, Mr. Robert Bafakulera, and also attended the dialogue.

The Draft Model Policy Regulation Guidelines/Rulebook for a digital integrated regional common payments scheme for SMEs was presented and validated during the public-private dialogue. National committee meetings will precede a second validation meeting of the edited report of the common policy framework.

HOW TO WEAR A MEDICAL MASK SAFELY

who.int/epi-win

Do's →



Wash your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for tears or holes



Find the top side, where the metal piece or stiff edge is



Ensure the colored-side faces outwards



Place the metal piece or stiff edge over your nose



Cover your mouth, nose, and chin



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Avoid touching the mask



Remove the mask from behind the ears or head



Keep the mask away from you and surfaces while removing it



Discard the mask immediately after use preferably into a closed bin



Wash your hands after discarding the mask

Don'ts →



Do not Use a ripped or damp mask



Do not wear the mask only over mouth or nose



Do not wear a loose mask



Do not touch the front of the mask



Do not remove the mask to talk to someone or do other things that would require touching the mask



Do not leave your used mask within the reach of others



Do not re-use the mask

Remember that masks alone cannot protect you from COVID-19. Maintain at least 1 metre distance from others and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, even while wearing a mask.

EPI·win



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