

COMESA & EU sign EUR 7.6 Million Financing Agreement for Institutional Capacity Building



Left: SG Kapwepwe and Amb. Jankowski signing the Agreement

The European Union and COMESA have signed a EUR 7.6 million Financing Agreement for the COMESA Institutional Capacity Building Programme.

Secretary-General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe co-signed the Agreement with the Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia, who is also the Special Representative to COMESA, Mr. Jacek Jankowski on Wednesday, 16 December 2020 at the COMESA Secretariat.

The objective of the programme is to deepen regional integration in the COMESA region, and to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the COMESA Secretariat in the implementation of regional cooperation projects and engagement with its Member States.

The programme will support COMESA in the domestication and implementation of

regional commitments at Member States level. It will further facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue on regional economic integration, in the Tripartite framework of COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

In addition, the COMESA Institutional Capacity Building Programme will increase the coordination, management (operational and financial), implementation and procurement capacity of the Secretariat and

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enhance the production and dissemination of harmonised and gender responsive regional statistics. The programme will also address organizational challenges and constraints, aiming at more effectiveness and efficiency of the Secretariat's operations.

The COMESA Institutional Capacity Building Programme has four key result areas which includes improved monitoring and evaluation capacities for implementation of regional commitments at regional and national level, including gender mainstreaming, improved COMESA financial, audit and internal control systems and processes in line with international standards and with the recommendations expected from the anticipated 9 pillar assessment and strengthened ability to produce and disseminate regional statistics in line with the COMESA Statistics Strategy ensuring harmonisation and gender responsiveness.

The fourth result is about strengthened partnership, dialogue and communication on COMESA regional integration policies between the COMESA Secretariat and other COMESA institutions, COMESA Member States, key public and private stakeholders, as well as with the EU and its Member States.

In her statement, Secretary-General Kapwepwe described the programme as key and it would provide the necessary backing to achieve the set goals for the good of the Member States who remain the target beneficiaries. "This is an important and timely programme for us as a region, and it will help us strategize our priorities clearly and create public awareness with a view to mobilize resources where the gaps are," she said.

Ambassador Jankowski stated that the programme "provides an opportunity for the COMESA Secretariat and its Member



Senior officials from the two organizations after the signing ceremony

States to enhance their capacities in order to achieve the key milestones set under COMESA's Medium-Term Strategic Plan and to effectively implement regional commitments at national level." He further emphasized that COMESA's contribution is even more critical during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively affected trans-border trade and market access among Member States in the region.

The COMESA Institutional Capacity Building Programme is financed through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). It is in line with the EU and COMESA policies to enhance the capacity of both, the COMESA Secretariat as well as COMESA Member States, including the private sector, to deepen regional integration. The programme will be implemented over a duration of five years.

COMESA Mourns Eswatini Prime Minister



file Picture of the late Prime Minister Ambrose Dlamini (Left), SG Kapwepwe and the Minister of Trade Manqoba Khumalo

Secretary-General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe has sent a message of condolences to the Kingdom of Eswatini following the death of Prime Minister Ambrose Mandlovu Dlamini. The message pays tribute to the late Prime Minister who served the Kingdom and COMESA with distinction towards national development and sustainable growth of the region through the COMESA regional integration agenda.

"...I would like to convey our deep condolences to you, Your Majesty, Her

Majesty, the Queen Mother, the deceased's family, the Government and people of the Kingdom on the loss of the Prime Minister," the message reads in part.

Ms Kapwepwe added that she met the late Prime Minister in March 2019 during her maiden trip to the Kingdom of Eswatini as Secretary General of COMESA during which she saw firsthand his efforts to enhance implementation of COMESA programmes in that country.

The SG prayed that the almighty God would comfort and give strength to His Majesty King Mswati III, the Queen Mother and the late Prime Minister's family during this difficult time.

Prime Minister Ambrose Dlamini died while under medical care on 13 December 2020.



Djibouti & Tunisia Launch 50MAWS Platform



Djibouti and Tunisia have launched the 50 Million African Women Speak Platform (50MAWSP) bringing the number of COMESA Member States that have done so to nine.

Both countries have embraced the networking platform which is a tool that has been specifically built to create a new world of opportunities for women in the COMESA region and beyond. The 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

information sharing. The users will also be able to access financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas and across the borders.

The launches were held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants gathered physically in the capitals at one venue and were joined virtually by several invited guests including staff from COMESA Secretariat led by Secretary-General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe

Djibouti was first to hold the national launch on 9 December which was graced by the Minister of Trade His Excellency Hassan Houmed Ibrahim and the Minister of Women and Family Her Excellency Mrs Moumina Houmed Hassan.

The two Ministers commended COMESA Secretariat for the initiative and pledged Djibouti's commitment to ensure that many local women access the tool. They described the platform as important because it will address the need of many women in Djibouti who have long aspired to venture into business and access market opportunities

but have consistently been held back by the lack of access to the right information to get stated or the lack of markets.

"We are indeed pleased that Djibouti has joined other progressive Member States to launch this very important tool which will assist our women shake off poverty, trade more among each other locally and beyond our borders and become economically empowered," Minister Ibrahim said.

SG Kapwepwe commended the government and women of Djibouti for embracing the 50MAWSP which she described as timely and offers a new kind of marketplace, where stalls are online and business engagements are possible around the clock and beyond borders.

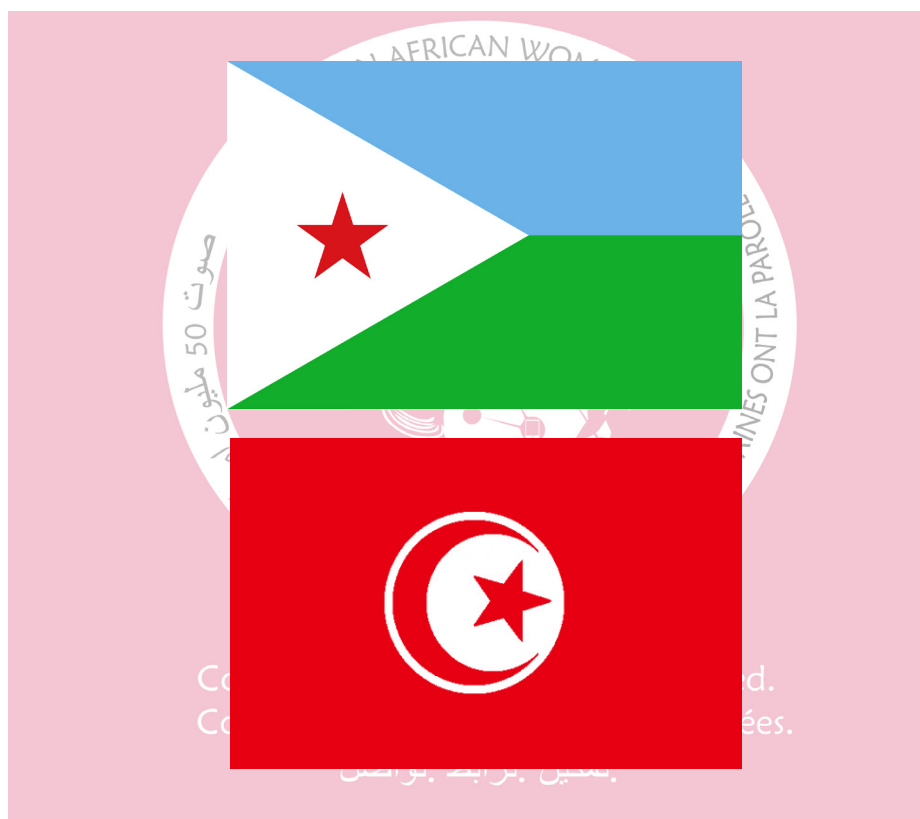
Tunisia held its national launch on Friday 14 December which was attended by the Minister of Women, Family and Seniors Honourable Mrs Imen Zahouani Houimel and the Minister of Trade Honourable Mohamed Bousaïed.

The two leaders acknowledged that the 50MAWSP would play a big part in helping women in Tunisia to rise above the social, economic and cultural barriers and pursue their development goals for their benefit and the country.

They commended the Secretariat for developing the platform which has been designed to provide carefully curated content to empower users with the comprehensive content on financial products, financial literacy skills and business management training among other important issues SG Kapwepwe urged both countries to fully take up ownership of the Platform and ensure its sustainability and growth as this would be the surest way for it to deliver practical benefits to the local women.

She added that the Platform is ideal in these times of COVID-19 because connections and transactions can continue smoothly online instead of physical interactions as has been in the past.

COMESA has targeted to launch the platform in 17 countries and so far the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Madagascar, Seychelles, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Djibouti and Tunisia have held successful national launches.



COMESA Holds Second Youth Leaders Bootcamp

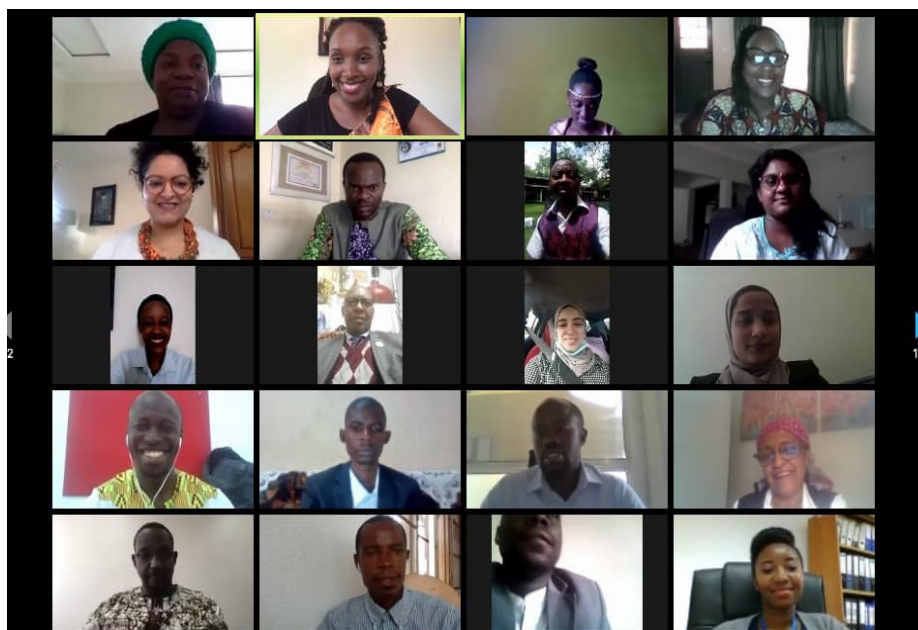
Twenty-one youths from selected Member States have participated in the second capacity strengthening bootcamp for youth leaders and policy makers which aimed at enhancing young people's participation in democratic governance and socio-economic development.

The bootcamp held virtually from 9-17th December 2020 was also meant to increase the youths' participation and engagement in policy formulation and implementation and increase their experience sharing.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Dr Kipyego Cheluget urged the youths to fully participate in the bootcamp and acquire skills which would enable them to participate in the national and regional development processes.

He commended Member States and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) for nominating the youth leaders and called for continued cooperation in implementing the regional programmes which will help the bloc achieve its vision of improving the standards of living of its people including the youth.

"I am quite confident that these bootcamps



Group photo closing ceremony of the second COMESA Youth Bootcamp

will produce young men and women with a lot of confidence and ideas to contribute to the development of their respective organizations, countries and the region," Amb. Kipyego said.

Training was conducted by facilitators from the MS Training Centre for Development Cooperation (MSTCDC). Participants were drawn from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Mauritius, Madagascar,

Rwanda, South Sudan and Tanzania.

The bootcamp is one of the key activities under the COMESA-African Union African Governance Architecture joint project on Youth Engagement in Democratic Governance and Socio-economic Development in Africa. The project aims at strengthening the capacity of youth and youth led organisations and networks to participate and contribute meaningfully to democratic governance and socio-economic development in the COMESA region and Africa.

The inaugural COMESA Youth Leaders bootcamp was held in December 2019 in Arusha, Tanzania. The main focus of that session was the role of youths in influencing cross-border policy and what kind of change narrative the youth could drive across COMESA in line with regional inter-state cooperation, trade and commerce facilitation.

A total of 49 youth leaders including those from the first bootcamp have so far been trained in the areas of policy formulation and implementation in democratic governance and socio-economic development.



Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget speaking during the bootcamp



AU Programme on Silence the Guns Extended for 10 Years



The implementation of the African Union (AU) programme on Silence the Guns in Africa has been extended for a period of ten years from 2021-2030, with periodic reviews every two years. The extension of the flagship project provides further opportunity for COMESA to consolidate and strengthen its contribution in the areas of peace and security.

This development was arrived at during the 14th Extraordinary Session on Silence the Guns in Africa Summit held virtually on 10 December 2020. The Summit agreed to extend the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa and Member States requested that the Commission Chairperson puts in place an institutional mechanism to coordinate the effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Master Roadmap.

Secretary-General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe led staff from the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) Unit in participating in the Session which was also attended by forty-one Heads of State and Governments from the continent.

"This is positive news and COMESA should continue leveraging on its comparative advantage in the realization of the continental aspiration of silencing the guns," reads a statement issued by the GPS Unit.

They added that going forward, COMESA should continue working closely with Member States in addressing the root causes of conflict as it is envisaged that this would contribute significantly to the efforts towards silencing the guns. The experts pointed out that the organization should continue disseminating structural vulnerability output to a wide number of stakeholders in Member States and develop appropriate response options through the novel Early Warning System (COMWARN) that is data driven and theory informed. This would ensure early warning diagnosis and early response.

From the meeting, the organization made several key resolutions which include continuing to provide capacity building and technical assistance to Member States on conflict prevention and conflict management and the need to create awareness of the available early warning tools and how Member States can access them. They will also continue collaborating with the AU and Regional Economic Communities in the area of peace and security while leveraging on each other's' technical expertise and resources.

The one-day Summit provided an opportunity for the Heads of State and delegations to take stock of the achievements and challenges in the Silence the Guns programme.

COMESA Secretariat Goes on Industrial Break

The COMESA Secretariat will be closed for three weeks from Friday 18 December 2020 to 8th January. Official business will resume on Monday 11 January 2021 when most members of staff are expected to report back. This was announced in a Statement by the Director of Human Resources & Administration Mrs Martha Elimu.

"2020 has been a very different and challenging year mainly because of COVID-19 which led to necessitated off site and telecommuting as the new way of working. We would like to thank all of us very much for the individual and collective commitment and efforts," the statement reads in part.

She further commended the various teams that facilitated the 2020 COMESA activities and programmes and most specifically the skeleton team that manned and maintained the Secretariat most of the time during the offsite telecommuting. The COMESA Secretariat retreated to off-site working on 30 March 2020 after COVID-19 cases was reported in most Member States including Zambia which hosts the headquarters.

"In the face of COVID-19 pandemic, we want to thank God that we are ending the year well even as we have had to make a lot of adjustments in the manner we work and conduct our business. We are happy that we have been able to adopt to this change positively," Mrs Elimu added.

Secretariat Bids Farewell to Senior Bilingual Administrative Assistant



Mrs Ahmed displaying the copper gift presented to her by COMESA

The Division of Human Resources and Administration (DHRA) held a brief ceremony on Wednesday 16 December to bid farewell to Mrs Maha Ahmed, the Senior Bilingual Administrative Assistant who is retiring on 31st December after serving the organisation for nine years under the Conferences Unit.

Joined by selected staff from other divisions and units, the outgoing employee was described as diligent, humble, kind and a team player.

Officer-in-Charge of the DHRA Dr Alick Mhizha described Mrs Ahmed as efficient, competent, alert and a reliable colleague.

"I want to urge those of us who are still working for COMESA to learn from the good experiences we shared with Mrs Maha and become that reliable and competent colleague whom everyone desires to have," said Dr Mhizha, who is also the Chief of Conferences. He is Mrs Ahmed's immediate supervisor.

The outgoing employee was showered with

various gifts from the DHRA and staff ahead of her departure when she clocks 60 years which is the retirement age for staff.

"I have been with COMESA for nine years

and it has been a memorable, pleasant and valuable journey shared with you all. Thank you for your support and you all have contributed to this journey in your unique ways," Mrs Ahmed concluded.



Mrs. Ahmed (middle in brown dress) with soon to be former colleagues



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