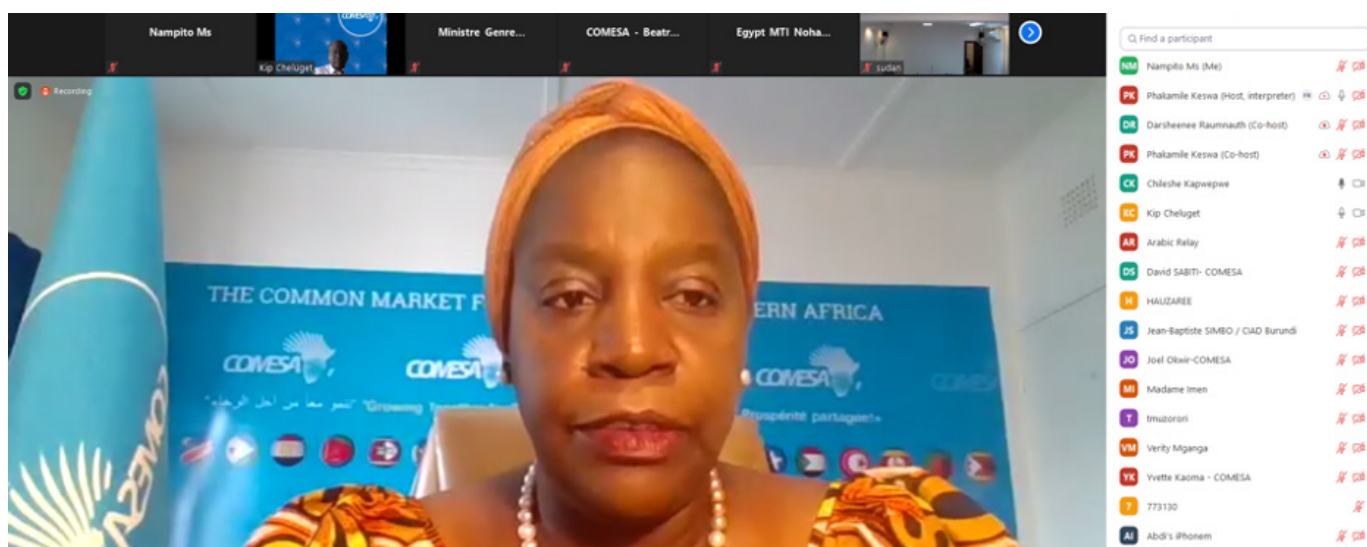


Gender Ministers Approve Key Documents for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment



SG Kapwepwe delivering her statement during the opening of the 11th Meeting of the COMESA Ministers Responsible for Gender

Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs from the COMESA Region recently met and approved several toolkits and documents which are expected to help the region promote gender equality, women empowerment and social development. The one-day Ministerial meeting held virtually via zoom on 29 March noted that women have continued to be negatively affected by many challenges including COVID-19 which has contributed to most of them recording slow progress.

Speaking during the official opening of the meeting, Zambia's Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry Hon. Christopher Yaluma used the occasion to encourage the Ministers and Member States (MS) not to relent in their efforts of empowering women and fighting poverty. He described the meeting as crucial as it was being held at a time when Africa is grappling with COVID-19 and women are bearing the major brunt of it.

"Gender inequality remains a major challenge affecting the regional integration agenda. women entrepreneurs continue to experience different forms of harassment and many

gender specific non-tariff barriers," He added "This meeting has the opportunity to change this situation by implementing instruments that can support women and improve their welfare," Hon. Yaluma said through his representative at the meeting Hon. Elizabeth Phiri, Minister of Gender Affairs.

He highlighted the importance of the normative frameworks being developed by COMESA to advance gender equality and social development in the region. He also added how COMESA has been doing commendable work when it comes to the inclusion of gender in trade matters. To overcome the challenges that COMESA Member States face, the Minister added that there needs to be concerted efforts from all stakeholders and that starts with the deliberations, adoptions and implementation of important policy frameworks such as the ones presented during the meeting.

Minister Yaluma highlighted Zambia's unwavering support to COMESA's initiatives and stated that Zambia was the first country to launch the 50 Million African Women Speak Project.

During the same event, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe appreciated the support from Member States and said this work on gender and social development will accelerate the achievement of inclusive development goals and is in line with COMESA's vision in the Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) 2021-2025, African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

She reminded the MS of the need to take keen interest in the implementation of COMESA policy frameworks, and Council Decisions related to gender equality, women empowerment and social development across sectors to ensure that the 'no one is left behind' doctrine is realised.

Among the documents that were approved during the highly interactive meeting was the COMESA Gender Policy Implementation and Tracking Plan, the COMESA Online Course on Gender and Trade, the COMESA Social Charter Toolkit and the HIV and AIDS Policy Implementation and Tracking Plan. The Secretariat was urged to disseminate these important documents to Member States.

COMESA Women Celebrate their Heroines on 50 Million African Women Speak platform

- 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform users pick out the women who inspire them most
- Dozens of women leaders nominated from all over the COMESA region



Businesswomen from countries in the COMESA region have spoken out on who their female role models are as part of a campaign named '30 days of women in business'. The campaign which is running on the 50 Million Women African Speak platform (50MAWSP) in celebration of the international women's month of March invites platform users to name the women who inspire them.

Two weeks into the campaign, dozens of users from Tunisia to Kenya to Zambia and Eswatini have had their say, nominating well-known women leaders who run large enterprises, as well as women who may be out of the limelight but are an inspiration to those in their communities.

Among those nominated were Mrs. Tabitha Karanja of Keroche Breweries, a leading beverage producer in Kenya, leading Zambian banker and Absa Zambia chief executive officer Mrs. Mizinga Melu, and former Democratic Republic of Congo First Lady Mrs. Olive Lembe Kabila.

The 50MAWSP users cited reasons such as passion exhibited by these women leaders, their entrepreneurial achievements, the fact

that they have defied the odds, and their ability to break through male-dominated spheres for picking them out as the women who inspire them most.

Women who wish to participate in the campaign are required to visit www.womenconnect.org or to download the 50MAWSP app, and to then submit short stories about their most admired business women, giving reasons why, and what they would tell them if they had a chance to meet them in person. The most compelling of these submissions are being published on the platform and those who submitted them may have an opportunity to meet their role models.

Nominating Mrs. Tabitha Karanja, a Kenyan platform user, Ms. Sheila Karwitha Mabe, wrote: "Your growth and tenacity in the brewing industry, a business dominated by our male counterparts, has not only given the women of today hope and confidence of a bright future in contributing greatly to the economy of this country but also, motivated us to start our businesses. You have spearheaded the journey to Women in Leadership not only in Kenya but across Africa."

Ms. Precious Limamu, a Zambian user, picked Mrs. Mizinga Melu as her inspiration and stated thus: "Seeing you get to such great heights gives me assurance that I too can climb the ladders of success despite being female."

In another moving tribute, a user from Eswatini had this to say about her heroine, Ms. Sindisiwe "Sindi" Dlamini, "Your passion for women moving forward is infectious and I would love to see you break into the African markets primarily as a stepping stone into international markets. You're a trailblazer despite the obstacles that come with being a voice of hope to young women and I pray you keep doing what you do relentlessly because I and so many others appreciate you."

The COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs Mrs. Beatrice Simwapenga Hamusonde expressed her delight at the responses from women all over the continent, "When we rolled out this campaign we were focusing on the COMESA region, but we are excited to see so many women from all over Africa interacting and celebrating one another.

"This feedback affirms one of the key objectives for the 50 Million African Women Speak platform, which is building deep and beneficial connections among women on the continent for them to tap into their knowledge and resources to start, grow, scale up and sustain their businesses and ultimately achieve economic empowerment."

The '30 days of women in business' campaign covers Comoros, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, the countries where COMESA is implementing the 50 Million African Women Speak Project.

CMI Develops User's Guide on Fiscal Stress Testing for Central Banks

The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) has developed a user's guide on Fiscal Stress Testing for Central Banks and Ministries of Finance whose main objective will be to assist Member States better understand how to deal with fiscal risks.

CMI Director Mr Ibrahim Zeidy states that addressing fiscal risks is a key element of the COMESA Multilateral Macroeconomic Surveillance Framework and the fiscal stress test examines how the public finances would respond to fiscal risks.

He was speaking during the opening of the validation and training workshop which enabled participants from Member States to review and approve the Users' Guide. According to financial experts, a comprehensive disclosure and analysis of fiscal risks can help governments to ensure that fiscal policy settings respond to a range of potential future economic and fiscal shocks. This also helps governments monitor and manage specific risks and avoid abrupt and disruptive changes in policy when risks materialize.

Fiscal stress test is therefore, an important activity that all countries are required to perform for prudent public finance management, in order to understand how public finances would respond to significant economic and/or financial shocks.

"It is important for COMESA Member States to be conducting fiscal stress tests and therefore we believe this validation

workshop will go a long way in equipping the experts with the right tools to conduct these stress tests," Mr Zeidy said during the workshop which was held virtually from 22 to 26 March 2021.

One of the key roles of government is to develop the National Budget as a guide towards achieving specific development and social objectives. However, more often fiscal outturns differ substantially from the budget forecasts, owing to factors outside the government's control such as deviations of economic growth from expectations, terms of trade shocks, natural disasters, calls on government guarantees, among others, thus posing challenges to the attainment of the government's intended objectives.

Specifically, the occurrence of fiscal risks, defined as the deviation of fiscal outturns from initial forecast, leads to additional government obligations, revenue losses, larger public debts, and occasionally, refinancing difficulties and crises.

The 49 delegates drawn from 12 Central Banks and Ministries of Finance were taken through identifying specific fiscal risks and designing stress test scenarios for fiscal stress tests. They were trained to be able to undertake fiscal stress testing for individual risk factors and to interpret results correctly for effective macroeconomic management. They also used the opportunity to share knowledge and experience on fiscal stress testing in member countries.

Nine COMESA Countries Receive COVID-19 Vaccine



COVID-19 vaccines have started being rolled out in more COMESA countries. As at end of March 2021, nine COMESA countries have received the vaccines and are administering it on their citizens.

The COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) reports that vaccination efforts are gaining momentum in the region as more countries receive their first batches.

"Analyzed according to the raw numbers of doses administered, the data indicates that so far Rwanda has administered the highest number of doses followed by Malawi, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius and Egypt," COMWARN states in its latest Situational Update on COVID-19.

Most countries have prioritized health workers, security personnel, government employees and the elderly.

However, if the daily dosages are juxtaposed by population (per hundred people) the data shows that Seychelles, Malawi, Tunisia and Rwanda have administered more doses of vaccines. Seychelles, for example, has so far vaccinated about 70% of its population, according to COMWARN.

Some of the vaccines approved by COMESA Member States include Oxford/AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer/ BionTech, Sinopharm, Johnson and Janssen (J&J), Sinovac, Sputnik V, among others.

COVID-19 cases have continued to surge in the region since January 2021.

Dates	NAME OF MEETING	VENUE	ORGANIZER
June 2021	21st COMESA Heads of State and Governments Summit	Virtual	Secretariat

Gender Experts Meet to Review Programme Implementation



File: Women in COMESA region

COMESA Gender and Women's Affairs experts held their 13th Meeting on Monday 22 March 2021 and discussed progress on the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women through implementation of policy and legal frameworks, council decisions, programmes and projects.

The objective of the three-day virtual meeting was to consider the progress made by both the Secretariat and Member States on the implementation of the Decisions of the Tenth meeting of the COMESA Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs held last year and related Council Decisions.

As a way of ensuring progress towards attaining national, regional, and continental goals on gender and women empowerment, Member States and the Secretariat are obliged to provide updates on the implementation of the Council Decisions.

The agenda of the meeting included the report on the 50 Million African Women Speak Project- an initiative which fits well in the current times where digital platforms hold the answer to access to information, services, and market opportunities for women in business. They also received an update on the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative and the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project both of which have a very strong focus on the creation of a conducive operating environment for small

scale cross border traders -majority of whom are women.

The meeting received and discussed a report on the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) initiative, which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of Small, and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) including women and youth in selected value chains and access to markets.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Permanent Secretary in Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr Mushuma Mulenga appreciated the meeting coming shortly after the international Womens' Day when governments, private sector, community groups, professional associations, women's networks, celebrate women around the world, and their achievements in social, economic, cultural, and political spheres.

"It is the period when we celebrate, raise awareness about women's equality, calling for gender parity, economic empowerment of women, and elimination of violence against women and girls," he said.

Speaking during the same meeting, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr. Kipyego Cheluget said despite the progress recorded so far in the advancement of women, current data shows that majority of them globally work in the informal sector,

and experience gender-based violence more than men.

"The issue of diseases like HIV is still high among females than males, illiteracy rates are higher among females than males, more women than men have limited access to information and business opportunities, fewer women than men are in decision making positions, and that COVID-19 has negatively affected women more than men among many other issues," he noted.

Within this broad spectrum of issues that affect women and men, the COMESA Secretariat has been involved in redressing the legal and policy gaps including programme implementation disparities that contravene the rights of women, men, girls, and boys in the cultural, social, political, and economic spheres.

To promote gender equality, Dr Cheluget said the Secretariat is pushing for the availability of gender statistics to support gender responsive planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for mainstream programs in COMESA.

To this end, the Secretariat is working towards generating gender disaggregated data to strengthen availability of regional gender statistics in different sectors including small scale cross border trade.



COMESA and Partners Agree to Enhance Trade in Animal/Products under AfCFTA



COMESA Secretariat held a one-day consultative meeting with Member States and other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on optimizing returns from intra-Africa trade in Animals and Animal products under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The virtual meeting discussed many issues including reinforcing multi-lateral cooperation for disease prevention and control, integration of informal trade in animals and animal products into formal trade and access to information on available market opportunities and market potentials within the region.

Other matters discussed included trade complementarity and the need for creating value addition opportunities to create diverse markets within Africa and financing the animal resources sector to boost productivity and development of the sector.

The consultative meeting came up with a communique in which they called for integration of AfCFTA-animal resources development strategies into national AfCFTA strategies. This is in addition to identifying opportunities for investment along the value chains to enhance export capacity. They also called for the development of productive

capacities in the animal resources sector to advance industrial competitiveness and economic transformation among several other recommendations.

Zambia's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Fisheries Dr Benson Mwenya who was represented by the Director of Animal Production Dr Chibwe Kaoma commended COMESA Secretariat for organizing the meeting whose outcome is expected to help the region deepen trade in animal and animal products.

He pointed out that being a land linked country, Zambia knows firsthand the struggles faced in trying to improve the livestock sector.

"Lack of access to markets and market uncertainty for animal and animal products has kept the country's livestock production and productivity stagnant," he said. "The AfCFTA therefore gives an opportunity for our producers to increase livestock production and productivity and create more jobs especially for women and youth."

According to the experts, many COMESA countries face similar challenges when accessing regional markets which include stringent SPS requirements, exotic quality

standards, lack of market information, lack of linkages among enterprises in various countries, poor communication networks and inter-connectivity, lack of harmonized procedures and grading standards, transboundary animal diseases and competition from cheap imports from other regions.

In an effort to address some of these challenges, the COMESA Secretariat has been facilitating and coordinating the implementation of the Livestock Development Strategy for Africa (LiDeSA) and the COMESA Livestock Policy Framework in the region.

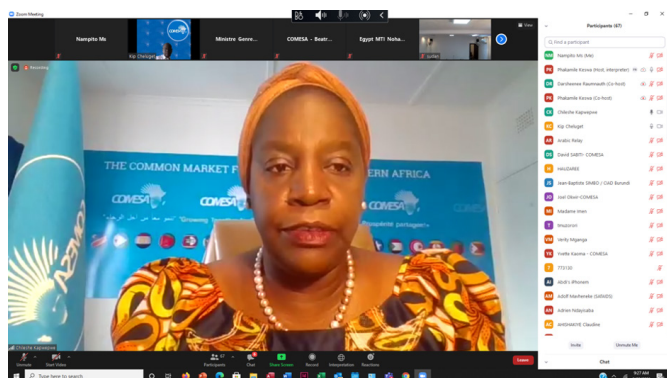
Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget says these policies are assisting the Member States to address some of the identified challenges.

"We are witnessing Member States increasing their attention to the agricultural transformation and enhancing value chains and expanding agro-processing and opening up their economies to domestic and international investments," Dr Cheluget said in a statement presented by the Director of Agriculture and Industry Mrs Providence Mavubi.

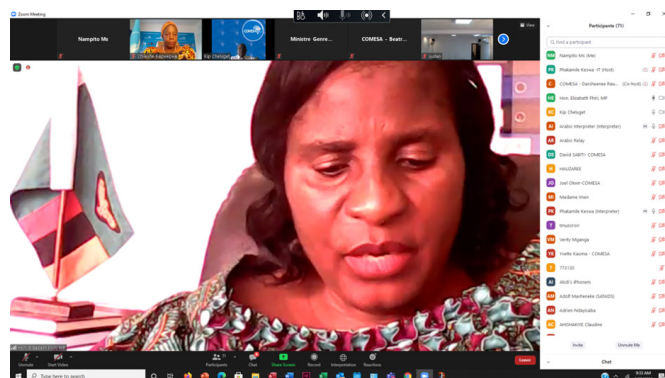
He noted that the creation of the AfCFTA will play a major role in complementing COMESA's efforts in creating greater market opportunities, triggering more trade and investment and allowing greater value addition.

The ASGP also mentioned the need to develop infrastructure such as animal source food processing plants, abattoirs, quarantines and laboratories, including strengthening surveillance system, early detection, reporting and containment of the problems in collaboration with other RECs. African Union InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) Officer in Charge Mr Talal Kishlat also addressed the meeting and called for increased collaboration with Member States and partner organisations.

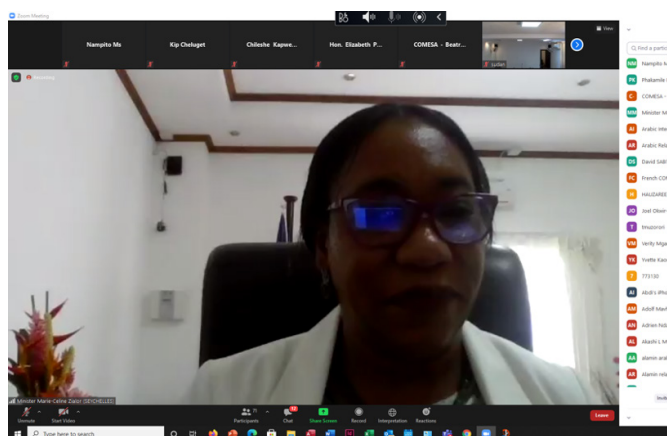
Photo Focus: Ministers that partipated in the 11th Meeting of COMESA Ministers of Gender and Womens Affairs



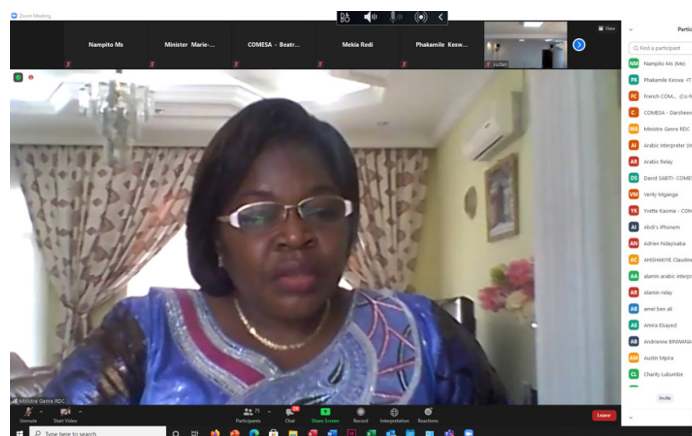
SG Kapwepwe delivering her statement during the opening of the 11th Meeting of the COMESA Ministers Responsible for Gender



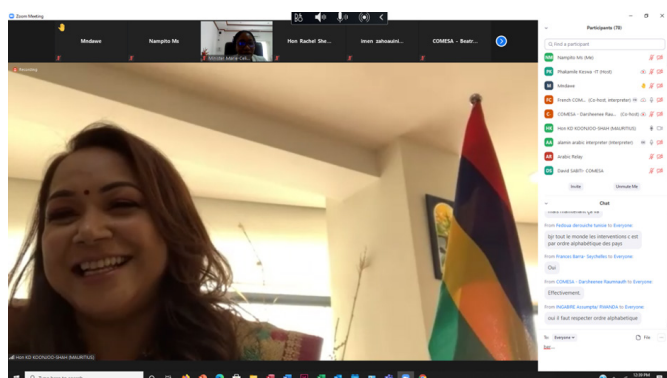
Hon. Phiri of Zambia



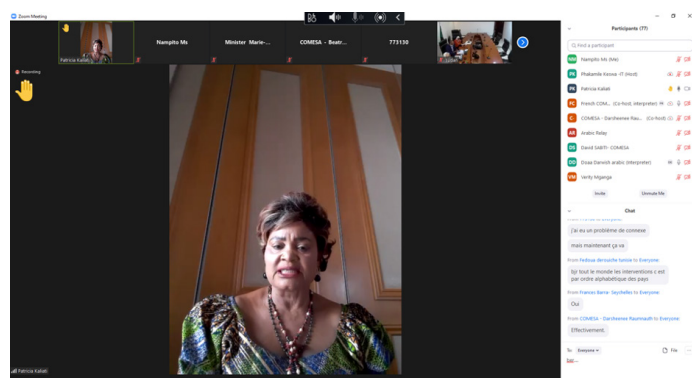
Hon. Marie-Celine Zialor, Minister for Family, Youth and Sports of Seychelles Chaired the meeting



Hon. Béatrice Lomeya Atility, Minister of State for Gender, Family and Child of DRC



Hon. (Mrs) Kalpana Devi KOONJOO-SHAH- Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare of Mauritius



Hon. Patricia Annie Kaliati, Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare of Malawi



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



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