

Building Regional Capacities in Trade Negotiations



COMESA, World Trade Institute collaboration will give fresh impetus to ongoing Trade in Services negotiations

The World Trade Institute and COMESA have conducted a training course for COMESA Member States aimed at strengthening human and policy-making capacities on Trade in Services. The course took place virtually from 6 – 8 December 2021.

It was attended by trade and trade law experts from Member States that deal in multilateral, regional and sub-regional trade negotiations, to sharpen their skills in analysis, formulation and implementation of Trade in Services policy frameworks.

The training was designed to widen participants knowledge on the key concepts and legal obligations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the COMESA Regulations on Trade in Services, and the Protocol on Trade in Services under the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Director of Trade and Customs in COMESA, Dr

Christopher Onyango described the training as critical for COMESA trade liberalization programme.

"Whereas significant progress has been made in liberalizing trade in goods in COMESA, the same is not the case as regards the services sectors despite existence of a framework for trade in services," he said when addressing participants at the opening of the training on Monday.

Currently, all COMESA Member States are involved in negotiations on seven Trade in Services sectors that have been prioritized for liberalization namely: communication, finance, tourism, transport, business, construction and energy-related services.

Dr Onyango observed that effective participation of Member States in multilateral, regional and sub-regional trade negotiations will ensure that the outcomes of such negotiations bring about desired results to bolster trade and contribute to the broader human development.

Two resource experts; Dr Jan Bohanes and Pierre Sauvé from the World Trade Institute, University of

Berne, Switzerland, conducted the training which broadly covered economics, law and policy of trade in services. Critical topics covered included the importance of Trade in Services to the economy and its potential for enhancing exports within the region and globally.

Other topics were COMESA Treaty obligations to Member States under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services and other regional trade agreements; best practices for negotiating services globally and in regional trade agreements; sharing of best experiences in services development and liberalization of regional integration groupings.

Participants acknowledged that Trade in Services sector presents the greatest potential to spur economic growth and create employment opportunities through value added to manufactured, agricultural, and mining products. Services also promote innovations and technology transfers critical for enhancing productivity and competitiveness. The relevance of the services sector has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which information, communication and technology services have taken centre stage in all aspects of life.

AMDA and COMESA join hands to enhance modern and sustainable energy access in COMESA states



The Africa Minigrid Developers Association (AMDA), represented by Chief Executive Officer, Jessica Stephens, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) represented by the Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two organizations. The signing of the MOU underscores the two parties' shared efforts to promote sustainable energy access and the energy trade in the COMESA region.

Under this agreement, AMDA and COMESA agreed to enhance the quality of data collection and dissemination about the minigrid sector in the region, improve the availability of financial instruments that increase the sustainability to the sector and support programmes that build synergies with the agriculture, health and education industries. This will be supported by the overarching commitment to work with COMESA states to develop and implement policies and regulations that are supportive of minigrids as a tool to help Africa achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7: universal access to affordable and clean energy by 2030.

"The signing of the MoU is part of our efforts as AMDA to create the right policy and finance environment that will help African nations meet their growing energy and climate resilience needs," Ms Stephens said.

This notion of cross-continental action was reiterated by Ms Kapwepwe:

"COMESA recognizes that the key challenges faced by most of COMESA member states include inter alia low-level access to modern energy, weak development of energy infrastructure, lack of appropriate financing mechanisms and unclear regulatory environments for private sector involvement in renewable energy projects. We believe that by implementing the regional infrastructure Finance Facility Project (RIFF) and working with organizations such as AMDA, we can see a modern, sustainable energy systems develop in COMESA member states."

The Africa Minigrid Developers Association (AMDA) is the leading body representing private sector minigrid developers on the continent. We work with governments, donors, funding partners and the wider energy sector to build an optimal energy network that will meet the current and future needs of African economies. AMDA's work focuses on improving the financial and regulatory landscape for the decentralized utilities sector ensuring that we can collectively tackle the energy access challenge in order ensure that we eliminate energy poverty. Today, AMDA represents over 35 companies, who operate minigrids in 15 Sub-Saharan countries

Zim Trade Receives €98, 000 Worth of Equipment and Technical Support

Cotton Research Institute release new varieties after getting €105,000 Cotton Fibre High Value Instrument

COMESA has supported the Zimbabwe National Trade Development and Promotion Organization (ZimTrade) with over Euro 98,000 worth of equipment, trainings and technical interventions.

The equipment which includes laptops, Tablets, servers and other accessories were handed over to ZimTrade Director of Operations Similo Nkala by the project Manager Mr. Fambaoga Myambo at the COMESA Clearing House offices in Harare today 17th November 2021.

The support will enable ZimTrade, to improve statistics that assist the Zimbabwean business community, to develop, promote and facilitate export of their goods and services to the world. The support comes under the Regional Integration Implementation Programme (RIIP II) under COMESA Adjustment Facility through Regional Integration Support Mechanism funded by the European Union.

Mr Nkala appreciated COMESA stating: "We used to have a lot of challenges in gathering statistics that informs trade decisions by the various sector players, but now this equipment will help us generate accurate and timely statistics for business decisions."

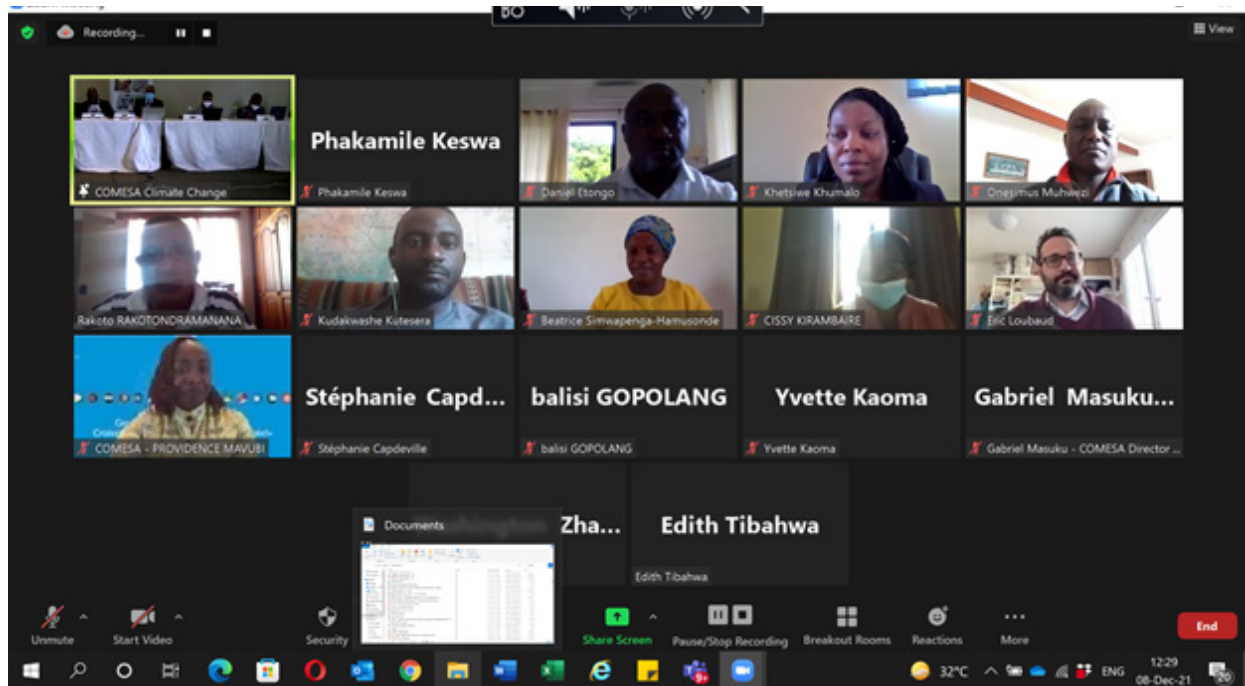
By working closely with other partners, industry experts and development cooperation partners, Mr Nkala said that ZimTrade provides a comprehensive suite of value-added services that is aimed at enhancing the quality of products and services by the country.

Meanwhile, the Cotton Research Institute based in Kadoma, Zimbabwe has started developing new cotton varieties after a long time. This follows the procurement of a Cotton Fibre High Value Instrument (HVI) at a total cost of Euro 105 000 through the COMESA RIIP I project.

The HVI is a computer aided instrument that tests different fiber quality parameters



COMESA Member States Meet to Validate Regional Resilience Framework



Delegates that attended the meeting virtually

COMESA Secretariat convened a regional meeting to validate the climate change Regional Resilience Framework (RRF) implementation plan and Resource Mobilization Strategy. The meeting took place on 8 - 9 December 2021 and provided a platform for Member States and key stakeholders to review and provide inputs to the draft RRF implementation plan and Resource Mobilization Strategy.

Participants were drawn from Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, D.R Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They included senior officials from selected ministries responsible for planning, disaster management and mitigation units, agriculture, environment, health and

other stakeholders who have a key role in mainstreaming resilience.

The meeting discussed the implementation plan, financing opportunities and strategies for the regional resilience framework interventions. COMESA Climate Change Unit Programme Manager Edith Tibahwa said the recommendations from the meeting will help domesticate the framework to strengthen national resilience-building efforts.

"We expect this meeting to roll out an implementation roadmap of the COMESA Regional Resilience Framework," she said. Representatives from the African Union Commission (AUC), the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on

Development (IGAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are among the participants.

COMESA is implementing a regional climate change project with funding from the European Union under the Intra-African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA)+ programme.

The overall objective is to increase the resilience of the COMESA region (and its Member States) to climate change and achieve the UN's sustainable development goals. The specific objective is to improve regional and national adaptation and mitigation responses to climate change challenges faced by COMESA Member States at operational, institutional and financial levels.

Zim Trade Receives €98, 000 Worth of Equipment and Technical Support

of cotton. It also informs both cotton seed varieties and the final lint quality produced in the cotton industry.

The head of the research Institute, Mr. Washington Mubvekeri told a monitoring mission by the COMAid team that the support by COMESA helped revive the activities of the institute that had stopped due to poor

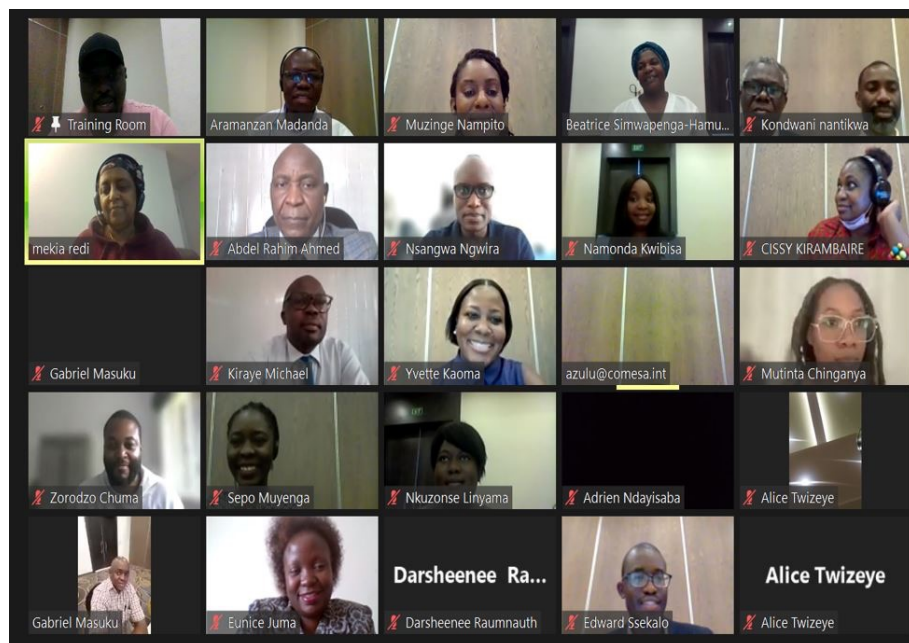
equipment.

"As we speak now, we have released two new seed varieties on the market and we are expecting to release two more varieties by 2022 and by the year 2024 we should be able to release four more new varieties," Mr Mubvekeri said.

With the equipment in place, the Research Centre is expected to accommodate more farmers from the current 300,000 to way over 400,000 to use the facility for testing the cotton in the coming year.

The COMAid Coordinator, Mrs Hope Situmbeko, commended the efforts of the institute which she noted, will contribute to the COMESA

Mainstreaming Gender in COMESA



A virtual group photo of the delegates

Twenty-eight staff from COMESA Secretariat and its institutions have been trained on gender mainstreaming techniques to enhance application in the implementation of regional integration programmes. The training is also expected to strengthen institutionalisation and accountability mechanism for gender mainstreaming practice in COMESA.

Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde, who organized the four-day hybrid training forum, said mainstreaming of gender is an obligation of all COMESA staff in line with the COMESA Treaty, which provides for the twin track approach to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women.

"The full inclusion of women in all parts of society including the economy, is of utmost importance. Without the active participation of half of the population of our region, we will not reach the regional, continental and global goals on gender equality and empowerment of women,"

she said.

Pursuant to this goal, the Secretariat has created a Gender Technical Working Group as a multisectoral approach to continue advocating for women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in all activities and programmes.

Over the years, COMESA Member States and institutions have also made commitments and directives to mainstream gender in all activities and to support initiatives on women in business. This has been done through Decisions of the Council of Ministers.

Staff from the Secretariat, COMESA Court of Justice, African Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), and the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) participated.

The training workshop was conducted from 29 November to 2 December 2021 in Lusaka, Zambia and online.

50MAWSP national focal points meet to review progress

The 50 Million African Women Speak Project (50MAWSP) national focal points (NFPs) met Monday 6 December to review progress on the implementation of the initiative in the COMESA Member States. NFPs from 13 Member States attended the meeting, out of the 16 Member States where COMESA has launched the initiative.

The one-day meeting provided the Member States and the COMESA Secretariat an opportunity to share updates on activities which have been undertaken, share experiences, and provide feedback.

Opening the meeting, the COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde thanked the NFPs for their dedication to working on the platform, and challenged them to make sure it grows and succeeds.

"50 Million African Women Speak is a critical intervention for the transformation of women in our region and the African continent as a whole. During the recent COMESA Summit of Heads of State held on 23 November in Egypt, 50 Million African Women Speak received resounding endorsement from the highest COMESA Organ as a viable vehicle to empower our women economically.

"When this stamp of approval comes from such a high office, we as the primary drivers of the platform are left with no option but to make sure it works." Mrs Hamusonde said.

The Director informed the delegates, who were meeting for the second time this year, that one of the recommendations they had made at their meeting in March to include SMS-based registration on the platform had been effected, making the platform more friendly for users who do not have access to email. She added that various other platform enhancements were under development.

During the same meeting, Libya was officially welcomed to the NFPs' forum, which was also attended by Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The 50 Million African Women Speak initiative is jointly implemented by COMESA as the lead agency, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Under the Project COMESA is directly responsible for 17 of its 21 Member States, with four Member States (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda) under EAC.



Participants at the Training of Trainers Workshop

Civil Society Trained on Conflict Early Warning Tools

COMESA Secretariat working with the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Regional Economic Communities have conducted a four-day training of trainers' workshop for 12 countries on conflict prevention and peace building in the continent.

The workshop was conducted on 7 – 10 December in Nairobi, Kenya and focused on the AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) Africa Reporter Tool, the AU/COMESA Structural Vulnerability Assessments (SVAs), the COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) and the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) methodology.

Twenty-four focal persons from Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Seychelles, Madagascar, Zambia and Malawi attended the training. Representative from the Southern Africa Partnership for Prevention of Conflict (SAPPC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) also part participated.

At the training, representatives from the

AU, COMESA and UNDP called for enhanced collaboration with the civil society as it is crucial in conflict prevention and peace building. Specifically, civil society have contacts on the ground who can be very useful in conflict early warning by monitoring the situation and thus anticipate the emergence of conflicts.

Besides, civil society organisations (CSOs) are strong in research and analysis, that can benefit state-level interventions by providing information and policy options. They are also known to build consensus around negotiations thus providing quality analysis which can go a long way towards the success of the talks.

COMESA Head of Governance, Peace and Security Ms Elizabeth Mutunga said the workshop was necessary to maximise effectiveness of all the potential partners.

"Our workshop is designed to equip civil society with the tools that exist in our organisations so that as they work with us, we can all reap the greatest synergies. Apart from the training, this will be a wonderful opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other."

The COMESA Peace and Security (GPS) Programme have nurtured strategic partnership with the Civil Society in conflict prevention and peace building since the programme was established in 2000.

GPS has conducted a study on the root factors of conflicts in the subregion to inform COMESA's entry point into peace and security matters in the region. The study and consultations found that conflicts were very complex and exhibited dynamism that called for use of multifaceted approaches and the actions of a wide variety of stakeholders working together to address them. Specifically, the consultations identified an important role for civil society organisations in all aspects of conflict prevention and peace building.

The West Africa Network of Peacebuilders (WANEP) from the Regional Office in Accra, Ghana and the Nigeria Country Network provided additional hands-on training based on their experience of field reporting using the Africa Reporter and the ECOWAS Early Warning (ECOWARN) Reporter.



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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