

COMESA Calls on Member States to Utilise Online Payment Platform, REPSS



Nine out of 21 countries are currently live on the COMESA Regional Payment and Settlement System (REPSS) since it was launched some six years ago. The value of transactions processed on the system has however been increasing, a sign that the platform is steadily being accepted in the regional trade bloc.

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe has stated that implementation of REPSS is a great milestone in COMESA's quest to achieve regional economic integration and all Member States need to get on board. Once fully operational, REPSS is expected to significantly contribute to the expansion of intra-COMESA trade by facilitating online payments of all intra-COMESA transactions.

This move is expected to foster a reduction in

transaction and operational costs and bring about a switching of relationships for trade transactions from between commercial banks and foreign correspondents to commercial banks and central banks thus making intra-regional trade transactions cheaper.

"This system could also reduce the need for foreign exchange for intra-regional trade. I therefore would like to state with confidence that REPSS is a very important instrument to take lead as the preferred and strategic payment system under the Continental and Tripartite Free Trade Area arrangement," said Ms Kapwepwe.

She was speaking in her address to the symposium for the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks, organised by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) to

deliberate on the role of financial integration for the promotion of export competitiveness in the COMESA region. It was held virtually on 24th March 2022.

The meeting heard that among other positives, REPSS will also eliminate mistrust among traders as the Central Banks play a key role in the transactions. The system will also assist the region achieve Regional Financial Integration because it will bring about macroeconomic stability, financial system soundness, introduction of compliance with various international standards and practices in the financial sector to ensure regional harmonization and reforming the legal system to enable cross border enforceability of contracts.

to page 3

Use of Technology Key to Boost Intra-Africa Trade

Africa CEO's Roundtable Conference

Leveraging Regional Integration for the Continent's Development



COMESA will continue to leverage on technology to create cheaper and easily accessible processes under its Trade Facilitation Programme to further deepen intra-regional trade and take advantage of recent revelations that the bloc has a trade potential of over USD\$100bn.

Using digital platforms coupled with advocacy, sensitization and information dissemination, the bloc is expected to help deepen intra-regional trade which in turn will enhance intra-African trade.

In line with this, COMESA Secretariat has so far pioneered several instruments, projects and programs under trade facilitation such as the Yellow Card Scheme, Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG), Simplified Trade Regime (STR), simple rules of Origin, Certificate of Origin and One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) to assist further push intra-trade levels.

Digitalization of trade Instruments including e-CO (the Electronic Certificate of Origin), Online information exchange platform, E-Trade, E-Logistics and E-Legislation are some of the key interventions that are expected to boost trade in the region.

This was said by Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe during the African Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) Roundtable Conference organized by the African Union Commission on the side-lines of the Expo Dubai 2020 held in the United Arab Emirates on 15 March 2022.

Madam Kapwepwe featured on the panel which was highly interactive where she detailed different COMESA programmes and interventions meant to bring about trade and infrastructure development and promotion of small-scale Cross border traders which is mainly conducted by women and youths.

She added that being one of AU's eight building blocs, COMESA has been focused on implementing practical programmes and improving connectivity. These are programmes that directly impact on the lives of people by either making doing business easier and making the environment of the ordinary people better through by having regulations that are speaking to each other such as championing the Free Movement of Persons and visa relaxation.

COMESA institutions were also mentioned as playing a key role in facilitation trade and investment beyond the COMESA region. "AS COMESA, we are focused on practical

interventions. Our institutions are spread across Africa to save the continent. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. These are institutions that are producing positive results for all to see and we call for them to be fully embraced for the development of our continent,"

COMESA Institutions include the African Trade Insurance (ATI) that deals in credit and political risk insurance, the Trade and Development Bank (TDB), the COMESA Competition Commission (CCC), the judicial arm COMESA Court of Justice, the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) and the African Leather and Leather Products Institute among others.

Featuring on the same panel, COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash highlighted the different programmes that are being implemented in the 21 Member States by her organization which has continued to score positives in empowerment of women and youth and particularly small-scale traders.

During the same event, the AUC launched the 2021 African Integration Report.



Malawian Renews Commitment to Regional Integration

COMESA Calls on Member States...



Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe receives the letter of credence from Malawian High Commissioner to Zambia Margaret Constance Kamoto

The Government of Malawi has renewed its commitment to regional integration as championed by COMESA. High Commissioner of Malawi to Zambia, Her Excellency Margaret Constance Kamoto states that Malawi has always believed in the ideals of COMESA and continues to positively contribute to the deepening of regional integration among the 21 Member States.

She was speaking at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka on 21 March 2022 when she was formally accredited as Permanent Representative. Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Kapwepwe received the Letter of Credence.

Ms Kamoto acknowledged the negative impact of COVID-19 on intra-regional trade and called for measures to cushion the impact on traders and businesses. She applauded COMESA Secretariat for its unwavering financial, technical and material support rendered towards Malawi's economic development agenda adding that with the finances received, the country has embarked on massive industrialization, investment and trade growth efforts but still needs support amid COVID-19 setbacks.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has proved to us that regional integration can play a critical role in meeting the supply and demand needs of goods and services in our region and its time that Member States take advantage of the situation by standing together to boost intra-African trade by

producing goods and services which will benefit us," she added.

SG Kapwepwe congratulated the High Commissioner for joining the team of Permanent Representatives accredited to COMESA whom she described as conveyor belts between the regional trade bloc and Member States.

The two leaders discussed many areas of mutual interest including the need for Ratification of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA). SG Kapwepwe used the occasion to appeal to countries that have not ratified the TFTA, Malawi included, to do so soon so that it can be actualized. Eleven countries have so far ratified the TFTA and only three more ratifications are needed before the Agreement enters into force.

"We urge Malawi to complete the ratification of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement so that it enters into force and economic operators can then utilise the immense market opportunities offered. We will count on your support on this matter," Ms Kapwepwe said.

The TFTA is a deliberate strategy mooted by Africa's leading economic blocs-COMESA-EAC-SADC to strengthen their cause for economic growth through joint planning, design, coordination, and implementation of policies and programmes amongst themselves. Malawi signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement on 10th June 2015.

Speaking at the same event, Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, Tarek Amer said this year's symposium was timely, because the trade and investment financing gap for Africa and for the COMESA region was very high estimated to be over USD\$100 billion. He was represented by Dr. Naglaa Nozahie, who is the Governor's Advisor on African Affairs at the Central Bank of Egypt.

Mr Amer said Regional Financial Integration has been identified as a key element in strengthening the financial sector and regional integration as it will induce foreign direct investments and development of physical infrastructure required for enhancing intra-regional trade.

The Bank Governor stressed that despite the enumerated benefits, achieving regional financial integration is constrained by differences in national legal regulatory and oversight regimes among the member countries and inadequate harmonization of national financial integration operating schemes as well as rules and technical standards.

"As you are aware, regional payment and settlement system is a powerful tool to enhance implementation of Regional Financial Integration. This will indeed contribute to increasing volume of trade among member countries by making trade transactions cheaper to use than that charged by correspondent banks," He stated.

The Governors also held their 25th Meeting, which was the first Virtual Governors' meeting since the outbreak of Covid-19.

India, Canada Seek Partnerships with COMESA



Above: Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe receives gift from Indian High Commissioner to Zambia Shri Ashok Kumar during the courtesy call



Secretary General in Charge of Administration and Finance Dr. Dev Haman with Canadian High Commissioner to Zambia Pamela O'Donnell during a courtesy call

The Governments of India and Canada have expressed interest to enhance their level of collaboration and partnership with COMESA. Representatives of the two governments met the Secretary General (SG) and Assistant Secretaries General of COMESA separately in Lusaka and stressed the need for the organisation to re-establish cooperation agreements for the mutual benefit of all peoples in the respective region and countries.

India's High Commissioner to Zambia His Excellency Shri Ashok Kumar met the SG on 21 March 2022 at the Secretariat and revealed that

his government is in the process of developing an action plan that will enhance collaboration with the COMESA region in the areas of industrial development, drugs and Pharmaceuticals, ICTs, energy trade, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Science and technology and Agriculture. The action plan will also mainly focus on capacity building in the 21 Member States.

He added that his government views COMESA as an all-weather friend and intends to intensify regular and sustainable engagements considering that India's development partnerships are to be guided by Africa's priorities

so as to liberate the continent's potential and build local capacities while creating opportunities locally.

"We will continue to keep our markets open and make it easier and more attractive to trade with India and we shall also support investments in the COMESA region," Ambassador Kumar stated.

In her welcoming remarks, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe thanked India for extending her support to the COMESA region. The SG was however quick to point out that the Member States of COMESA need India to help develop smart infrastructure that will connect them to the seaports.

Ms Kapwepwe stated that India has the technical know-how on most sectors including energy, infrastructure and Telemedicine and thus the need for the country to assist the region in various sectors through knowledge transfer.

"We are looking forward to India helping build value chains in different sectors including aquaculture and help to create cross border value chains. We also need help in Agro-processing technology for our SMEs and start-ups because these are the engines of economic development," Madam Kapwepwe said.

The two agreed that once the Memorandum of Cooperation is renewed, COMESA and India will among other things conduct Joint market research aimed at supporting the SMEs. She however urged the High Commissioner to engage the COMESA Business council in order for the parties to develop business opportunities that will contribute to economic development of the COMESA region.

India's Trade with COMESA Member States was over USD10 billion in 2020 with India's exports amounting to USD7.9 billion while imports were pegged at USD2.5 billion.

.....Collaboration with Canada

Canada's High Commissioner to Zambia and Tanzania who is also special Representative to

COMESA, Pamela O'Donnell met the Assistant Secretaries General for Administration and Finance and for Programmes Dr Dev Haman and Dr Kipyego Cheluget on 15th March 2022, respectively.

In her maiden visit to the Secretariat, Ambassador O'Donnell was on a familiarization tour to learn about COMESA programmes and levels of implementation in the various Member States. This was in addition to having discussions on possible areas of collaboration.

The Canadian envoy indicated Canada's willingness to help the COMESA region in various sectors of development including agriculture and climate change mitigation, ICT, trade facilitation, renewable energy production and trade facilitation.

Ms O'Donnell said her country is committed to seeing economic development on the African continent further stating that development, economic growth, peace and security all go together as they bring stability in the economic space of a region and in turn improves the living standards of people.

"We as diplomats are tasked to promote democracy, peace and security, good governance, diversity and inclusion as a way of helping those vulnerable societies in many parts of the world.

Dr. Dev Haman, who was acting Secretary General at the time, stated that COMESA is committed to being a highly competitive region in the global landscape though it was important to do a self-introspection regarding the factors that make it possible to succeed economically especially after the COVID pandemic.

"As a region we have been proactive and put in place measures that will mitigate loss of revenue and lives during pandemics like the COVID 19. To this effect Ministers of Health from the region shall soon convene a meeting where they shall discuss strategies that will cushion the impact of pandemics that may come in the future," Dr Haman added.

COMESA and Partners in Quest for Sustainable Fish Trade

COMESA in collaboration with IGAD, EAC, SADC, IOC, Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA) and the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation (LVFO) have renewed their partnership of working together in implementing a programme on sustainable development of Fisheries commonly known as ECOFISH in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Region.

The partnership, started three years ago after a 28 million Euros finance agreement was signed by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), on behalf of COMESA, EAC, IGAD and SADC, with the European Union (EU). Over the years, the implementing partners have been steadily implementing the agreed programs amid the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

In view of this, COMESA Secretariat hosted the 3rd Steering Committee Meeting on 17 and 18 March 2022 in Lusaka during which the teams could track the progress and performance of the program and make recommendations for implementation. Apart from COMESA Secretariat, fish experts from IGAD, EAC, SADC, IOC, LTA and LVFO participated in the meeting which was held both physically and virtually.

Assistant Secretary General for Programs Dr Kipyego Cheluget officially opened the meeting and urged the team to make recommendations that will help the fish and fish industry sector to grow and be sustainable. He pointed out that majority of fisheries value chain actors are small-scale and live primarily in coastal and inland lake areas in the region.

He lamented that despite the significant importance of fisheries as a sector especially the small scale and the potential to contribute significantly to global poverty alleviation, many small-scale fisheries

in the EA, SA and IO region are not in a good state, and people dependent on these remain impoverished and most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

He added that, the development of the blue economy may also have detrimental consequences on small-scale fisheries that have to compete with other sectors for the use of coastal areas, inland lakes and rivers. The ECOFISH program is designed to create awareness and tackle some of these challenges.

"We are therefore optimistic that the present Steering Committee meeting will guide ECOFISH program to have special attention to small-scale fisheries and create an understanding of the concept of sustainable development and its implications to the sustainable management of the inland and marine fisheries in EA-SA and the Indian Ocean region". Dr Cheluget said.

COMESA, EAC, IOC, IGAD, SADC, LTA and LVFO are also collaborating in harmonizing of Monitoring Control Surveillance which is expected to strengthen capacities in the sustainable development of the fisheries resources.

Speaking from Mauritius, Head of Cooperation at the EU to the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles, Mr Milko Van Gool reiterated the EU's support for both inland and marine sustainable fisheries in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region.

IOC Secretary General Prof. Vêlayoudom Marimoutou urged the team to focus on successes recorded so far and make recommendations on how best to implement the remaining activities for the benefit of the region and partners.



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



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



facebook.com/ComesaSecretariat/



[@twitter.com/comesa_lusaka](https://twitter.com/comesa_lusaka)