

COMESA



NEWS

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COVID-19 AGGRAVATED NON-TARIFF BARRIERS TO TRADE

Inside

About \$905m worth of intra-COMESA exports lost to COVID-19
COMESA- Africa CDC joint initiative to enhance vaccination uptake
Access to Electricity in COMESA Region is 60%
New policies to promote digital financial services
Zambian student invents a medicine dispenser

Editorial

Going digital to counter COVID-19



COVID-19 has negatively affected many areas of life and regional integration is no exception. Specifically for COMESA, the physical flow of intra-regional trade has been greatly affected and levels of transacted goods and services have recorded huge declines. Reports and studies released in 2021 have highlighted myriad areas that have been negatively affected and the amount of financial losses incurred.

An estimated \$905m worth of intra-COMESA exports has been lost due to COVID-19. This was mainly due to the measures that introduced in response to COVID-19. These strict measures, while designed to protect citizens from the risk of disease, greatly hindered intra-regional trade as they became significant barriers to trade as the pandemic aggravated Non-Tariff Barriers in the 21-member bloc. To ensure a uniform response, COMESA Secretariat working with the coordinating ministries in the Member States also developed regional COVID-19 guidelines to complement measures what had been put in place at the national level. The business community cites restrictions on the free movement of persons and delayed access to COVID-19 vaccines as new forms of non-tariff barriers which have not helped the conduct of business operations.

Nevertheless, every dark cloud has a silver lining, and on a brighter note, these World Health Organization (WHO) sanctioned restrictions have enabled the region to unlock its ICT potential, creating a virtual world that has become alive and vibrant. Throughout the third quarter, COMESA Secretariat working with the Member States has successfully held meetings virtually and programme implementation has been sustained as a result.

The bloc continued to advance regional integration using online platforms where exchange of information, webinars, workshops and meetings were conducted smoothly. Most trade facilitation tools are available online on the COMESA portal making it convenient for traders to conduct their business smoothly and stakeholders to interact. The region witnessed the launch of online trading platforms such as 'Sokokuu' to support mostly small scale traders, women and youths. The 8th Research Forum was successfully held and the innovations therefrom included a medicine dispenser developed by a Zambian student.

Cooperating partners such as the European Union (EU) channeled support to infrastructure development for coordinated border management at various COMESA borders which is expected to play a positive role in enhancing cross border trade. This and many other interventions signal a positive trajectory and pursuit of a prosperous region in spite of COVID-19.

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COMESA INSTITUTIONS

COMESA Clearing House
COMESA Monetary Institute
Trade and Development Bank
African Trade Insurance Agency
COMESA Competition Commission
PTA Reinsurance Company
COMESA Regional Investment Agency
Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute
COMESA Federation of Women in Business

Specialized Agencies

Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa
COMESA Business Council
Regional Association of Energy Regulators in Eastern and Southern Africa
East African Power Pool

Judicial Arm

COMESA Court of Justice

CONTENTS

- 1 COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated non-tariff barriers to trade
- 3 Sokokuu online trading platform launched
- 5 COMESA- Africa CDC joint initiative to enhance vaccination uptake
- 9 Countries Implementing the Simplified Trade Regime Set to Rise
- 11 Record attendance at the 8th COMESA research forum
- 13 Access to electricity in COMESA region is 60%
- 15 Building countries' capacity to report on climate change actions
- 19 ESREM validates tariff guidelines for the EA-SA-IO region
- 21 COMESA deploys election observers in Zambia
- 23 Gender disaggregated small scale cross border trade data for Zambia
- 29 COMESA, Corporate Council of Africa forge partnership
- 31 COMESA develops a virtual knowledge management portal
- 33 Ireland and COMESA revitalise collaboration

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COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated non-tariff barriers to trade



COVID-19 has exacerbated the non-tariff barrier restrictions on free movement of persons, according to the Chairperson of the COMESA Business Council, Mr. Marday Venkatasamy.

Speaking during the 16th CBC Board meeting conducted virtually on 1st July 2021, Mr. Venkatasamy said this was due to the emerging discriminatory practice of certain approved World Health Organization (WHO) vaccines being a prerequisite for international travel.

"The business community requests an appeal by the African Union against this inequitable practice," he added pointing out that the practice was coming at the time when Africa is exploring ways of developing its own vaccines.

To address some of the current constraints, Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe, said the COMESA Secretariat collaborated with CBC in developing regional guidelines on the movement of essential goods and services across the region during the

current pandemic period.

"This underscores the importance for consistent involvement and advocacy of the private sector in policy making processes and public-private dialogue to address some of the notable challenges in regional trade," she stated when she addressed the meeting.

She said digitization of industry remains a core pre-requisite for promoting trade and regional integration especially within this pandemic period, where there is a greater call for improving regional supply chains to advance industrialization and increase trade among COMESA countries.

In a performance report for 2020, presented at the meeting, the CBC had achieved several milestones in the midst of the pandemic including the establishment of the CBC Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Workgroup.

A regional Public-Private Dialogue on Digital Financial Inclusion was

conducted in January 2021, which brought together over 200 industry players to deliberate on policy areas for harmonization and to inform the Model COMESA Digital Common Payments Policy for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Besides the CBC Board of Directors, the meeting was attended by Presidents and Chief Executives of national apex private sector Associations and Chambers of Commerce from the COMESA region, key business leaders from Mauritius, Sudan, Kenya, Egypt, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Seychelles.



.....
This underscores the importance for consistent involvement and advocacy of the private sector in policy making processes and public-private dialogue to address some of the notable challenges in regional trade," Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe

About \$905m worth of intra-COMESA exports lost to COVID-19

Researcher recommends implementation of the electronic digital integration systems by exporting countries.

An estimated USD 905 million intra-COMESA exports were lost last year due to the response measures that Member States applied to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. This is according to research carried out by Mr Adam Willie, Principal Economist, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Enterprise Development of Zimbabwe.

The research paper titled: Digitalizing Trade in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in COMESA, was presented to the 8th Annual COMESA Research Forum, conducted virtually on 13 – 16 September 2021.

"The losses vary from one country to another. Egypt and Kenya had losses in excess of US\$100 million. DR Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia had losses in the range of US\$60m to less than US\$100 million. The rest of COMESA Member States had losses of below US\$20 million," Mr Willie observed.

Overall, he cited the high level of stringency on COVID-19 in government response policies in the region having significantly harmed to regional intra-exports in 2020. Government policy response stringency index for COMESA Member States averaged 53.18, with a minimum of 9 and maximum 82.3.

Mr Willie established that enhanced e-commerce would mitigate this loss

if applied regionally. However, the region is still low in the use of internet and implementation of information communication technology infrastructure needed for digitalizing trade. It is below the critical mass required to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19, according to the research.

"A 10% increase in the interaction variable of the COVID-19 proxy, and exporter internet use would increase intra-COMESA exports by 0.021%," Mr Willie noted. "Again a 10% increase in the interaction of the COVID-19 proxy, and exporter EDI systems would increase intra-COMESA trade by 0.12%."

The researcher pointed at the need for a robust legal framework that supports digitalizing trade which the region was found wanting. Hence, Member States should consider digitalization as a critical policy direction.

The findings of this study imply that the new norm of COVID-19 will continue to harm intra-COMESA trade. But this can be minimized through increasing internet use and implementation of the electronic digital integration (EDI) systems by exporting countries.

"COMESA Member States should implement the COVID-19 response measures together with trade digitalization in order to neutralize the pandemic's adverse effect on intra-regional trade," the researcher recommended. They should implement EDI systems such as ASYCUDA World



Mr Adam Willie

and Electronic Single Window systems."

Digitalization enables application of modern customs procedures such as electronic risk management; pre-arrival electronic submission of customs declarations; application and issuance of e-licences and digital certificates of origin and sanitary and phytosanitary; use of non-intrusive inspection, electronic tracing and tracking of cargo.

Eight research papers were presented at the forum for peer review. Their policy implications will be presented to the COMESA policy organs to inform decision-making. The research forum was attended by over 200 delegates comprising of academicians, policy thinktanks, government and private sector from within the COMESA region and across the globe.



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Sokokuu online trading platform launched



The COMFWB, AeTrade initiative aims at promoting online trade for women entrepreneurs

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) in collaboration with the African e-Trade Group (Ae-Trade) have launched an online Platform Sokokuu to traders in the COMESA region. The platform will enable traders to conduct cross border trade using ICT as a tool to minimize physical barriers. Sokokuu is a Swahili word meaning big market.

Two other COMESA institutions namely the COMESA Business Council (CBC) and the African Leather and Leather products (ALLPI) have already signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Ae-Trade on the operationalization of the Sokokuu platform.

Sokokuu will complement existing platforms such as the womenconnect which is used by women entrepreneurs in regional States to exchange information on availability of essential products within the region. The platform enables manufacturers and suppliers in different Member States to share information on their potential to produce and supply

products.

The AeTrade is a multi-stakeholder group of African professionals and businesspeople with a vision to develop and implement an e-empowerment program that will enhance intra-and inter-African trade. The group brings together public and private sector partners to develop projects that leverage the power of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for the benefit of Africa's present and future entrepreneurs.

Speaking at the launch during the 2nd COMFWB Annual Regional Trade Fair in Lusaka, 22 September 2021, Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Kapwepwe underlined the role of ICT in enhancing regional integration.

"Four years ago, COMESA decided to shift focus to promote digital economic integration and adopted the theme: COMESA - Towards Digital Economic Integration," she said. "The decision was based on the understanding that the region stood on the brink of a new industrial revolution, driven by new-generation information technologies."

The SG was represented by the Assistant Secretary General Administration and

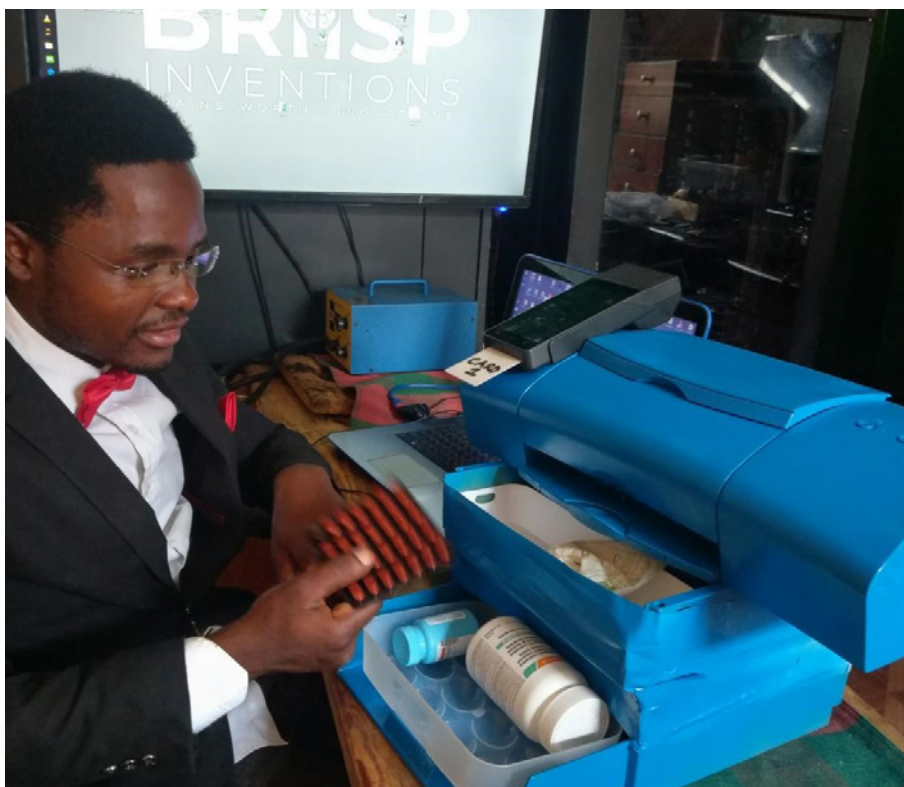
Finance Dr Dev Haman.

The adoption of the Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA) was intended to reinforce the implementation of the Free Trade Area, which was launched in October 2000 to facilitate COMESA regional integration. It is aimed at empowering traders to do cross-border trade using ICT as a tool to minimize physical barriers and provide the necessary infrastructure for enhancement of global trade.

Hence COMESA has embraced Sokokuu as a valuable tool especially at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic which has restricted physical contacts.

Speaking at the same event, COMFWB Chief Executive Officer, Ms Ruth Negash stressed the importance of creating an enabling environment to support adoption of e-commerce by ensuring women and girls' full access to ICTs, including digital devices and services.

Other organizations represented at the forum included the African Union, the United Nations Development Programme, the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat and Ae-Trade Group.



Zambian student invents a medicine dispenser

The technology, based on Smart Hospital model was submitted for the COMESA Innovation Awards Scheme

One of the challenges people face in developing countries is access to health facilities owing to long distances. Overcrowding by patients seeking medical assistance in the available health facilities is quite prevalent, while in some far-flung rural areas, people barely have access to health personnel.

This is what inspired Billy Munyenembe, a final year student at Information and Communication University (ICU) of Zambia to invent a medicine dispenser. Billy presented this innovation at the 8th Annual COMESA Research Forum 13 - 16 September 2021 for consideration in the COMESA Innovation Awards.

The technology, which he has named BRIISP Medicine Dispenser (BMD), is intended for remote dispensation of medicine by medical personnel as per prescription.

"If the patient has a prescription already,

he or she can use a card or a given code for medicine dispensation," said Billy a bachelor's degree student in Software Engineering. "With the ever-increasing queues at hospitals and ever-increasing number of patients, doctors barely attend to every patient that comes for medical assistance."

The BMD is designed to help people have access to medical assistance at any particular time without going to any health facility unless the situation is critical and needs serious medical attention. He says that it will also help evade stigma to those who are on anti-retroviral drugs.

"A lot of people who are HIV positive stop collecting drugs because of the stigma and the number of people with HIV, but not on ARVS, keep on increasing leading to more deaths," he said.

In his presentation, Billy observed that health care is one of the priority development areas for countries and requires special attention in the transition to the innovative management models

based on the use of advanced medical concepts and digital technologies such as the Smart Hospital model.

This is the second innovation that Billy has presented for the COMESA Innovation Awards. In 2019, he developed an energy solution to increase power access and reduce inconsistency of power supply. Known as BRIISP Power System (BPS), the technology sustains power almost in its normal range despite being used. The technology won the COMESA award worth \$10,000 to assist in its further development.

“.....
A lot of people who are HIV positive stop collecting drugs because of the stigma and the number of people with HIV, but not on ARVS, keep on increasing leading to more deaths,” Billy Munyenembe said.

COMESA- Africa CDC joint initiative to enhance vaccination uptake

The involvement of opinion leaders in enhancing the understanding of COVID-19 vaccines hold the greatest promise in removing barriers to vaccine uptake in the African region, according to regional health experts that attended a two-day webinar on strategies to improve COVID-19 vaccines roll-out and uptake in COMESA Member States.

Health sector stakeholders participated in the webinar themed “Vaccine hesitancy and delivery as key barriers to vaccine uptake in the region”. The event was organized by COMESA and the Africa Centre for Disease Control on 4 – 5 August 2021 for Member States to share their experiences on the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination.

In attendance were government officials led by Permanent Secretaries, health professionals, international partners, civil society organizations, regional economic communities among others. Rwanda vaccine distribution strategy plan was cited as the best case-study for having vaccinated over 380,000 people in three weeks after receiving its first consignment of 350,000 doses.

Speaking when he opened the webinar, Rwanda Minister of Health Dr. Daniel Ngamije, said strong leadership from the highest level, efficient coordination mechanism, effective partnerships and community engagement, using opinion leaders as success factors to vaccine rollout and uptake.

“There is a cost to pay in containing the Covid 19. Not doing what is required will cost more. It is a matter of time for this to become obvious for those still undermining the impact of this pandemic,” he said.

As a way forward, Member States were



There is a cost to pay in containing the Covid 19. Not doing what is required will cost more. It is a matter of time for this to become obvious for those still undermining the impact of this pandemic,” Dr. Daniel Ngamije said.

called upon to support the implementation of the African CDC programme on Saving Lives, Economies and Livelihood Trusted Vaccines, which focuses on vaccines procurement, strengthened in-country vaccines logistics and roll-out, establishing vaccination centres, community engagements, monitoring side effects, genomics surveillance, digital support, and technical assistance.

The meeting further called on the Member States to support the new Africa CDC Public Health Order which focuses on strengthening public health institutions and public health workforce, expanding manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics and respectful action-oriented partnerships.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe encouraged Member States to learn from each other and to adopt strategies to improve vaccine awareness and overcome existing barriers to vaccine uptake and roll out. This notwithstanding the challenges faced in accessing vaccines due to limited global supply.

She congratulated Egypt, for commencing manufacturing of Sinovac vaccine, and other Member States such as Rwanda, which are preparing to localize vaccine manufacturing.

“This is a great achievement in addressing challenges related to vaccine equity. They are examples of the existing political will in the Member States to boost capacity



Rwanda Minister of Health Dr. Daniel Ngamije

of local manufacturing of vaccines, other medicines, and health technology,” she said.

In his address, presented by his deputy Dr. Ahmed Ouma, the African CDC Director Dr. John Nkengasong said 51 Member States in Africa had started vaccinating their people with over 61 million people vaccinated. Out of this number only 18.7 million people have completed the vaccination.

“Generally, Africa has administered 5.18 vaccine doses per 100 people compared to 53.50 globally, in which about 46 Member States have less than 10% vaccine coverage,” he said.

Dr. Ouma, expressed concern that many COMESA Member States were reporting multiple Covid-19 variants of concerns with at least eight reporting Alpha, Beta, and Delta, five States reporting Alpha, four reporting both Alpha & Beta, one reporting Alpha, and three have not reported any variant of concern.

The forum addressed among others, vaccine hesitancy, Adverse Event Following Immunization, strategies on vaccine rollout, risk communication and community engagement activities among others. Besides Rwanda, other countries that shared their experiences included Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe



States urged to strengthen value chains for post COVID-19 economic recovery

Regional States should strengthen existing value chains both at the regional and global level and develop new ones to unlock the transformative potential in manufacturing and industrial sectors in COMESA. This will enable the region to fully participate in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) while keeping pace with changing production and consumption patterns both globally and regionally.

This was among recommendations that emerged from the 8th COMESA Annual Research Forum conducted from 13 – 16 September 2021. This recommendation is part of the strategic interventions to fast-track the recovery process from the COVID-19 pandemic that has negatively affected trade.

The forum further called for enhanced economic diversification in the region, maximizing on gains made in other sectors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These include financial services (mobile money and banking services) and telecommunications, the game-changing initiative in the AfCFTA and Afreximbank's Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS).

According to the forum's report, leveraging digital trade will generate adequate jobs and ensure transparent, simple, coherent and business friendly rules of origin, which are key to supporting intra-regional trade both in COMESA and across the African continent.

Besides, digitalization of trade instruments will further support economic diversification through adoption of e-trade, e-logistics, and e-legislation under the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area initiative, as well as promoting the diversification of markets for COMESA imports and exports.

The theme of the forum was "Rethinking Trade and Doing Business in the Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic". Participants from the academia, policy think tanks, government and private sector attended representing the following countries: Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Digital Yellow Card helpdesk launched

The COMESA Regional Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance (Yellow Card) Scheme has launched a Digital Yellow Card Helpdesk System designed to track all queries reported by users.

The Application which is accessible on <https://yellowcardsupport.comesa.int> will allow National Bureaux, Primary Insurance Companies and Motorists in member countries to channel all their queries and requests via Email, Phone or walk-ins. This is aimed at streamlining service delivery to COMESA Yellow Card clients and stakeholders in line with the Yellow Card Scheme Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022.

The Yellow Card Scheme is a Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance Scheme that aims at facilitating the smooth movement of motor vehicles, persons and goods in the region through the establishment of a common system for the settlement of claims arising from inter-state motorists.

The Scheme is currently operational in 13 countries; namely: Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

It has been expanded to SADC the region and is currently being implemented between Malawi and Mozambique and Zimbabwe and South Africa under the Business to Business (B2B) Arrangement.

Yellow Card operations have been digitalized, a move which has led to an unprecedented annual average growth rate of 15% for the Yellow Card production..

COMESA, Djibouti sign €2.5m agreement

The funds will be used to upgrade Galafi Border Post between Djibouti and Ethiopia

The COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Djibouti have signed an agreement that sub-delegates the implementation of coordinated border management activities at the Galafi border post, on the Djibouti- Ethiopia border. A total of EUR 2.5 million is allocated to this project under the European Union funded Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP).

The objective of the agreement is to enhance Djibouti's progressive participation in the regional and international integration agenda through progressive removal of trade barriers at the border. Djibouti will receive support in the development of improved and harmonized regulatory frameworks and procedures at its border crossing to Ethiopia. This is in line with international and regional standards and best practices.

Activities will focus on automation of border processes and inter-connectivity of border agencies, upgrade priority cross-border infrastructure and procure equipment aimed to improve cross-border trade and transport facilitation at the Galafi border post between Djibouti and Ethiopia. The project will support capacity building of national stakeholders and the technical assistance to the Djibouti National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) in border management and coordination.

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We welcome concrete actions like the support to the modernization of Galafi, a central border post between Ethiopia and Djibouti. It is part of a wider EU effort to promote regional integration improving the business climate, attracting the private sector, and stimulating trade." Mr. O'hara Aidan



This project is part of the EUR 48 million COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP), financed under the 11th European Development Fund, through a grant agreement of the EU with COMESA, signed in November 2018. The TFP has five key result areas, covering among others, deepening regional integration, improving inclusive regional economic growth and enhancing the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, and Mr. Ali Daoud Abdou, Secretary General from Ministry of Commerce of Djibouti, signed the sub-delegation agreement in Lusaka and Djibouti respectively in the month of August 2021.

Mr. Ali Daoud Abdou appreciated the support from COMESA and the EU which enabled his country to conduct border assessment studies, facilitate national consultation meetings with national stakeholders from the public and private sector in Djibouti.

"This support facilitated the development of action plans to support trade facilitation across the Galafi border post and along the Djibouti Corridor," he said and affirmed his government's commitment to support effective implementation of the Project.

Ms. Kapwepwe said COMESA will facilitate financial, logistical and administrative processes in line with the contractual obligations. She said the funds will also support capacity building for stakeholders on innovative and state of the art border operations and the implementation of a border information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments, among other deliverables.

Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA said:

"This agreement is a testimony of the continued commitment by COMESA towards its core values. Deepening regional integration, improving inclusive regional economic growth and enhancing competitiveness of the COMESA region transpire in today's milestone on the Djibouti corridor."

Mr. O'hara Aidan, the Ambassador to the European Union in Djibouti stated:

"We welcome concrete actions like the support to the modernization of Galafi, a central border post between Ethiopia and Djibouti. It is part of a wider EU effort to promote regional integration improving the business climate, attracting the private sector, and stimulating trade."



File: COMESA 50Million Speak Women Youth Summit

Youths elected to the COMESA advisory panel

Eleven youths from the region have been elected to the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel (COMYAP). The roles and responsibilities of the panel is to, among others, provide the COMESA Council of Ministers with direct and well-informed advice on matters relating to young people through recommendations contained in the COMYAP bi-annual reports.

Representatives of the COMESA National Youth Councils elected the 11 members during their two-day meeting held virtually on 8 - 9th September 2021. The meeting was attended by 18 COMESA countries; Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Zambia's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, Dr John Phiri officially opened the meeting.

The establishment and operationalization of the COMYAP is part of the implementation of the Joint COMESA/AU- African Governance Architecture (AGA) project on youth engagement in democratic governance and socio-economic development processes in Africa. This is a pilot project supported financially by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)

The election of the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel is part of the implementation of the COMESA Youth Engagement Strategy (COMYES) which was adopted by the First meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Youth held in June this year. The same meeting also adopted the Terms of Reference for the establishment of the COMYAP.

Dr Phiri commended COMESA and its partners especially the African Union's African Governance Architecture (AU-AGA) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) for support rendered in enhancing youth

engagement in the region.

He pledged Zambia's continued support to the COMESA agenda, specifically the youth programme. Based on the good results by the Joint COMESA/AU-AGA project, Dr Phiri urged COMESA and its partners to mobilise resources for an extended support to more youth in the region.

At the same forum, COMESA Assistant Secretary General-Programmes, Ambassador Dr Kigyego Cheluget and the Acting Head of AGA/APSA Secretariat, Ambassador Salah Sidding Hammad commended the milestone reached towards engaging the young people in the COMESA region and Africa at large.

Countries Implementing the Simplified Trade Regime Set to Rise



Small scale traders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ethiopia is set to start implementing the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) and other related trade facilitation instruments, which are critical in strengthening cross-border and COMESA intra-regional trade especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eight other regional States including Burundi, D R Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe are already implementing the STR.

To give momentum to this, an awareness creation workshop for key stakeholders who will implement the STR in Ethiopia was conducted on 28 - 29 June 2021 targeting central government, regional governments and border officials.

COMESA launched the STR in 2010 to simplify and streamline the documentation and procedures for the clearance of small cross border traders' consignments, while enabling them to benefit from the COMESA preferential tariffs trading environment.

"Previously the preferential trade regime benefitted the big and established traders who are able to obtain the Certificates of

Origin and to complete required customs documents with ease. This excluded small-scale traders," said the Director of Trade and Customs in COMESA, Dr Christopher Onyango who spoke through virtual platform.

He observed that awareness creation for Ethiopian stakeholders was important to not only provide information but to secure stakeholder buy-in leading to the implementation of the STR with its neighbouring COMESA Member States. Implementation of the STR is also expected to stimulate cross border trade among informal small-scale traders.

The implementation of the STR for Ethiopia is supported under the Cross-Border Trade Initiative – Facilitating Small Scale Trade Across borders, a programme financed by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). It is jointly executed by the COMESA Secretariat and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Trade Centre.

The programme's objective is to increase formal small-scale cross border trade

flows in the COMESA/Tripartite region leading to higher revenue collection by governments at the borders as well as increased security and higher incomes for small-scale cross border traders.

Speaking at the workshop in Adama town, the Director General, Trade Relation and Negotiation, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ethiopia, Mr. Mussie Mindaye said the substantial gains the STR brings forth, cannot be realized by simply opening border areas.

"Poorly designed systems undercut the benefits of STR," he noted.

Accordingly, he said, the awareness creation workshop will support his country's negotiation process through the involvement of the relevant stakeholders, given the high priority accorded to STR process from all sides of the Ethiopia/Djibouti Border.

"The urgency of this awareness creation initiative stems from our engagement to negotiate STR with Djibouti on one hand, and other countries, including Kenya, Sudan and Eritrea and to be concluded in the coming years concurrently," he added.

An operational assessment of the implementation of the STR across border posts in COMESA region shows that it not only helps reduce the costs of trading by small scale traders, but also the constraints they face in accessing relevant customs documentation. Such constraints have in the past encouraged bribery and use of illegal mechanisms while foregoing the benefits of preferential duties being accorded by COMESA.

The STR also supports the capture of much needed statistics about cross border trade.

Burundi, DR Congo set to rollout out Simplified Trade Regime



Delegates attending the Burundi-DR Congo Bilateral Meeting on Implementation of the COMESA STR

Experts meeting discussed technical issues and recommended policy measures to enable smooth implementation of the trade regime

Small Scale cross border trade between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo is set to flourish after the two countries begun the process towards implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR). This will be done under the soon to be launched Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Regional Integration Project, (GLTFIP) which covers the two States and COMESA Secretariat.

The project is aimed at facilitating trade and increasing the competitiveness of certain value chains for traders, especially small-scale traders and women traders, in targeted locations in the border areas of the Great Lakes Region, focusing on Burundi and DR Congo.

Among the planned activities include improving connectivity to markets across the borders through policy and procedural reforms, commercial infrastructure improvements and capacity building of both border agencies and traders

Under the GLTFIP, COMESA Secretariat will implement specific activities

related to trade facilitation, policy harmonization and collaboration between Burundi and DR Congo and use its convening power to support the participating countries to fully implement the STR.

As part of preparations for the STR rollout, COMESA Secretariat through the current Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP), convened a bilateral meeting between the two States from 15 to 18th September 2021 in Bujumbura, Burundi. The GLTFP is the forerunner to the GLTFIP and is lapsing at the end of this year paving way for the launch and implementation of the latter.

At the meeting, experts drawn from ministries of trade, trade facilitation institutions, customs and standard, and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) agencies, private sector and project implementation units discussed and made recommendations to policy makers that will allow the smooth implementation of the STR.

The STR was developed to assist small-scale cross border traders, to access the privileges of the COMESA Free Trade Area including import duty exemptions, while reducing the time spent at borders. The aim is to transform and mainstream small scale cross border trade into formal cross border trade.

Implementation of the STR is premised on three key tools or instruments that include the Simplified Customs Document, the Common List (of eligible products) and the threshold, together with the Charter on the minimum standards for the treatment of small-scale cross-border traders in the COMESA region.

It requires institutional as well as infrastructure reforms such as changes in the tax regime at the customs entry points as well as introduction of an integrated border management system, particularly immigration procedures, to support improved movement of goods, persons and services and setting up of Trade Information Desks at the borders.

The meeting identified key issues for promoting trade between the two countries and came up with recommendations and common positions on possible solutions. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be developed for consideration by policy makers.

Besides the meeting, delegates conducted a familiarization visit to the Great Lakes project borders to see the trading activities and the general environment. In attendance were representatives of the World Bank which is supporting both the GLTFP and GLTFIP.

Record attendance at the 8th COMESA research forum



File photo: COMESA Research forum in Kigali, Rwanda, 2017

Over 200 participants drawn from the academia, think tanks, government and the private sector from the region and globally participated in the eighth annual COMESA Research Forum which took place virtually on 13 - 16 September 2021.

The four-day forum received presentations on research papers focusing on regional mitigation strategies against the effects of COVID-19 on intra-COMESA trade and emerging issues. The policy implications from the papers will be presented to the COMESA policy organs meetings to contribute towards policy making decisions.

In addition, country specific research outputs from the forum are expected to directly inform domestic policy reform initiatives in the Member States.

The theme of this year's forum was "Rethinking Trade and Doing Business in the Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic". Hence, the Forum came up with recommendations that would help the region build resilience around productivity, productive capacities and sustained regional trade even amid the

worst of shocks.

Among them were strategic interventions to fast-track recovery process from COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, delegates urged COMESA to strengthen existing and developing new value chains both at the regional and global level. This is by unlocking transformative potential in manufacturing and industrial sectors in COMESA towards the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and keeping pace with changing production and consumption patterns both globally and regionally

"COMESA should leverage digital trade in generating adequate jobs, ensure transparent, simple, coherent and business friendly rules of origin, which are key to supporting intra-regional trade both in COMESA and across the African continent," according to the final report.

"Digitalization of trade instruments, including e-trade, e-logistics, and e-legislation under the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area initiative, as well as promoting the diversification of markets for COMESA imports and exports."

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe noted that the bloc's global trade was affected by subdued growth in most of the main trading partners which led to reduction in demand for COMESA's goods and services.

"It is worth noting that our governments, with support from development and specialized agencies, are making every effort to ensure availability of vaccines for our people. This remains the first critical step in protecting our people and creating conditions for opening economies and the launching recovery process".

Delivering the keynote address, Mr Paul Akiwumi, Director, Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes at UNCTAD said the COMESA research forum was a timely occasion to reflect on the key processes that can help contribute to this recovery and stimulate long-term growth and prosperity on the continent.

"COVID-19 has reinforced the need for African countries to be self-sufficient and to enhance close regional cooperation and use events such as the COMESA Annual Research Forum for targeted research and policy analysis, and action to strengthen economic integration and trade both within COMESA and within the other Regional Economic Communities (RECs)," he noted.

Member States emphasized the critical role of the research forum in shaping evidence-based policy making as well as enriching the body of knowledge on regional integration. They requested the Secretariat to ensure the forum, the COMESA Innovation Awards and the Master's degree in regional integration programme are sustained.

The forum was funded by COMESA, the Organization of African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and the European Union through the TradeCom II Capacity Building Programme.



L-R: Mr. Akinwale Goodluck, Deputy CEO, Africa Nenda; Amb. Kipyego Cheluget, Asst. Secretary General-Programmes, COMESA; Ms. Sandra Uwera, CEO, CBC; Hon. Christopher Mvunga, Governor, Bank of Zambia; Dr. Amāny Asfour, Chair, Africa Business Council

New policies to promote digital financial services

CBC and AFRICA NENDA Partner for the Validation of the Draft Model Policy and Rulebook for the Regional Digital Retail Payments Platform for MSMEs

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) in partnership with Africa Nenda convened a High-Level Public-Private Dialogue, on 27 July 2021, under the theme, 'Towards the COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy for Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)'.

The Dialogue brought together over 200 participants from the nine pilot-study countries of the CBC Digital Financial Inclusion Program, to validate and adopt the draft model policy and Rulebook for digital retail payments platform.

Stakeholder groups represented comprised Central Banks, Ministries of Finance, ICT Regulator, manufacturers,

Mobile Network Operators, commercial banks, FinTechs, Microfinance Institutions, and MSMEs.

Arising from the Dialogue, a raft of recommendations was made on the Draft Model Policy for The Digital Payments Platform for MSMEs in COMESA, and the Draft Guidelines/ Rulebook on the Operation of the Digital Payments' Platform. They included the adoption of the proposed policy measures in the draft policy framework and the Rulebook to guide operations of the digital payment subject to the proposed changes.

Others were to strengthen collaboration between public and private sector players, empower women and youth to benefit from the digital payment initiative for MSMEs in COMESA region, address the pricing of digital payment aspects related to taxation because it is a critical component in determining

access and usage of the digital financial services.

The meeting proposed measures for the reduction of the cost of devices, especially end user devices like smartphones. In this regard, there is need to work with suppliers in the region to ensure that devices are affordable especially at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

In addition, the inclusion of Chambers of Commerce as one of the key stakeholders in the capacity building program for MSMEs on digital financial literacy were recommended as well as the development of tailor made solutions like bundles for MSMEs to facilitate access to digital financial services.

On the way forward, the Dialogue proposed that the CBC embark on the assignment of business modelling on a

regional digital retail payment platform for MSMEs in the COMESA region. Thereafter, to undertake the digital skills capacity building project for MSMEs, to address some of the key challenges affecting digitisation of industries in COMESA-with a keen focus on payments and e-commerce. This will be done in collaboration with Africa Nenda.

Keynote speakers included the Chairperson of the CBC Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, who underscored the importance of digital financial inclusion.

“Due to the adverse effects that COVID-19 has had in all aspects of our lives, we recognise more than ever, the critical importance of digital financial inclusion to empowering and transforming the lives of all people,” he said.

Others were the Assistant Secretary General-Programmes at COMESA Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget, Governor of Bank of Zambia, Hon. Christopher Mvunga, Deputy CEO of Africa Nenda, Mr. Akinwale Goodluck, Chair of the Africa Business Council, Dr. Amany Asfour, Chairman of the Bankers Association of Zambia, and CEO of Standard Chartered Zambia Mr. Herman Kasekende, and CEO of the CBC Ms Sandra Uwera.

The meeting noted the importance of supporting women and other particularly vulnerable and marginalized market segments.



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Due to the adverse effects that COVID-19 has had in all aspects of our lives, we recognise more than ever, the critical importance of digital financial inclusion to empowering and transforming the lives of all people,” Mr. Marday Venkatasamy said.



Access to electricity in COMESA region is 60%

File/ Electricity in household/workplace

The percentage of the COMESA population with access to electricity is on average around 60%, but projections indicate that it will be around 80% by 2040. This will however depend on heavily investing in energy infrastructure in the next ten years.

According to an update presented at the 10th Annual General Meeting of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), the total installed capacity for electric power in the 21 COMESA countries is around 92,000 megawatts.

The low level and coverage of physical energy infrastructure is due to insufficient investment in the energy sector, inefficiency and unreliability of existing energy infrastructure services, increased demand for economic and population growth.

In a statement delivered at the AGM, the Egyptian Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy, Dr Mohamed Shaker, said that the current regional economic growth trends require a corresponding growth in energy infrastructure. Hence the need to address the supply

side constraints especially energy infrastructure, to ensure accelerated regional integration and growth.

“Increased investment in infrastructure should be supported by associated policy initiatives that promote generation, maintenance and efficient utilization of infrastructure capacity,” he said. His statement was delivered by Dr. Mohamed Omran, Executive Chairperson of the Egyptian Electric Utility and Consumer Protection Regulatory Agency (EgyptERA).

Speaking at the same meeting, Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes in COMESA, Dr Kipyego Cheluget said the high cost of operating energy infrastructure facilities and inability to prepare bankable projects are major impediment to the expansion of the manufacturing sector the region.

“It is however encouraging to note that most countries have realized that for any meaningful economic and human transformation to be realized, universal access to energy should be at the centre augmented by a strong political will and sustainable policy and legislative

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COMFWB hosts second regional trade fair

The COMESA Federation of National Associations of Women in Business (COMFWB) and the Zambia Federation of Associations of Women in Business partnered with the Government of Zambia hosted the second COMFWB regional trade fair and gala dinner in September 2021.

The 2nd Annual Regional Women in Business Trade Fair under the theme **“Promoting Regional Integration and Strong Resilient Economies Through Trade”** was held at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka, Zambia from 22 – 24 September 2021, while the Gala Night was held on the evening of September 24th.

The Trade Fair provided an opportunity for local, regional and international investors to engage and evaluate

promising investment opportunities. During the exhibition, various goods and services were showcased by exhibitors from the COMESA region and beyond.

The exhibition and workshops brought together local, regional and international Women in Business and policy makers from Zambia, the COMESA region and abroad. It provided a forum for sharing best practices through a series of workshops organized on different subject matters that hinge on enhancing regional trade.

The Exhibition was expected among many other things to ensure that players in the production value chain will be complementing and supporting one another which can result in a decline in poverty levels in the host country as most Zambian and regional women

entrepreneurs will be linked.

Speaking ahead of the event, the Chairperson of the COMFWB Board, Ms. Maureen Sumbwe said despite the critical role the women entrepreneurs play in the economy, their businesses have continued to face challenges.

“Many women have limited access to finance because of the burdensome conditions set by the financial sector on obtaining loans, such as high interest rates, and requirements for collateral; and inadequate start-up capital. It is no wonder we have come up with this initiative,” she noted.

In her remarks, the Chief Executive Officer of COMFWB Ms. Ruth Negash said besides the creation of new value chains, most participants would broaden their knowledge through interaction and creating sustainable linkages.

“The exhibition will provide an opportunity for women in business to showcase their products and services, promote a market-led approach to women entrepreneurs and business to business linkages,” she added.

“

Many women have limited access to finance because of the burdensome conditions set by the financial sector on obtaining loans, such as high interest rates, and requirements for collateral; and inadequate start-up capital. It is no wonder we have come up with this initiative,” Ms. Maureen Sumbwe

Building countries' capacity to report on climate change actions



The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in partnership with the COMESA Secretariat offered a two-day virtual training to technical officers from Member States on the preparation and submission process of new/updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

NDCs are national climate plans highlighting climate actions, including climate related targets, policies and measures governments aim to implement in response to climate change and as a contribution to global climate action. Central to the NDCs is the concept of national determination.

The training was conducted on 28-29 June 2021 and covered the Katowice guidance on NDCs, which are also at the heart of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The virtual training complemented a similar in-person workshop on the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) and NDCs for COMESA Member States whose dates will be announced

later. Almost all COMESA Member States have ratified the Paris Agreement of 2015 and five already submitted a new or updated NDC in 2020/2021.

COMESA Climate Change Unit Programme Manager, Ms. Edith Tibahwa said the virtual training was aimed at enhancing the technical capacities of Member States in their preparation of new/updated NDCs in line with further guidance relevant for the preparation and communication of NDCs.

"Specifically, the training aims at familiarizing participants with the process and requirements under the Paris Agreement relevant for the preparation and submission of new/updated NDCs in 2020," she said.

The training was part of UNFCCC's capacity building support to Parties and was available to those that voluntarily registered.

Access to Electricity..

continued from page 15

framework," he said.

He said COMESA has established specialized agencies including RAERESA and the Eastern Africa Power Pool (EAPP) to support the region towards energy sufficiency. It has also adopted the COMESA Model Energy Policy Framework which has introduced reforms in the energy sector to enhance energy security, accessibility, affordability and reliability in the region.

As a result, two countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Djibouti have recently established their electricity regulators thus joining Ethiopia, Burundi, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe in that group.

Chairperson of the Plenary of the RAERESA, Mr. Daniel Bargoria, who is also the Acting Director General of the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA), Kenya, said market governance and regulatory related challenges impacts the implementation of energy projects.

"There is a huge energy gap in the region accounted for by missing links and maintenance backlog thereby calling for narrowing of the gap if the region is to accelerate regional economic development for the benefit of the people," he said.

The meeting also called on RAERESA to continue engaging with the countries which are in the process of establishing their regulators to give impetus to the full establishment of effective energy regulators.



2nd from right: SG Chileshe Kapwepwe introducing part of her delegation to President Ramkalawan

Seychelles President calls for implementation of decisions

“

My government is committed to COMESA and expect our full support. As an organization, we need to move to making positive impact on the ground. We need programmes that our people will directly benefit from. Decisions made at the various meetings need to be implemented,” President Ramkalawan said.

The President of Seychelles His Excellency Wavel Ramkalawan affirmed his government’s commitment to COMESA and called for deepening of regional integration through increased intra-regional trade among the 21 Member States. He was speaking at State House in Victoria on Mahe island in Seychelles on 31st August 2021 when he met COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe who was on a four-day official visit to that country.

The President said COMESA region needs to move from mere discussions and signing of agreements to implementing decisions that will produce tangible progressive results which will have a positive impact on the lives of its citizens.

“My government is committed to COMESA and expect our full support. As an organization, we need to move to making positive impact on the ground.

We need programmes that our people will directly benefit from. Decisions made at the various meetings need to be implemented,” said President Ramkalawan.

He stressed the need for a more affordable air transport system with easy connectivity which could boost intra-COMESA trade as goods would move from one country to another without many delays and at a reasonable cost.

Secretary General Kapwepwe commended Seychelles for being an active member of COMESA. She said COMESA’s current strategy focuses on economic prosperity through regional integration and is meant to positively transform the lives of the people and bring about sustainable economic development.

Meanwhile, the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB)



National Chapter was launched in Seychelles in August 2021. The office is hosted at the Seychelles Investment Board (SIB) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Investment, Entrepreneurship and Industry. It is expected to promote programmes that integrate women into trade and development in the region.

The National Chapter was officially launched by President Wavel Ramkalawan in Victoria Mahe town.

"We salute the remarkable work being done by COMFWB and wish the Seychelles Chapter all the very best as they take on this journey to support government in achieving goals of promoting industrialisation and entrepreneurship specifically at Micro Small and Medium Enterprises,"

Speaking at the same event, COMFWB Chairperson Ms Maureen Sumbwe said women play a critical role in the economic development of Member

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We salute the remarkable work being done by COMFWB and wish the Seychelles Chapter all the very best as they take on this journey to support government in achieving goals of promoting industrialisation and entrepreneurship specifically at Micro Small and Medium Enterprises."

States through entrepreneurial activities, wealth and employment creation.

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe added that it would be impossible to implement effective programmes without the full participation of women. To this end, the Secretariat is

implementing activities which galvanise support for public policy reforms and private sector actions that promote women's entrepreneurship across the COMESA region.

Other keynote speakers at the vent included the Ministers of Investment, Entrepreneurship and Industry Hon. Mrs Devika Vidot, Minister of Youth, Sports and Family Hon. Mrs Marie Celine-Zialor, the Governor of the Central Bank of Seychelles Ms Caroline Abel and the Chief Executive Officer of the Civil Society Platform Seychelles among others.

The COMESA SG was accompanied by the Director of Information and Networking Ms Lanka Dorby, Director of Industry and Agriculture Mrs Providence Mavubi and Mrs Muzinge Chibomba from the Corporate Communications Unit.

COMESA hosts 1st RECAMP steering committee meeting

The inaugural Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting for the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) was held virtually on Tuesday 7 September 2021. The meeting enabled the review of the progress made towards implementation of the RECAMP activities that commenced in January 2020 as well as review some of the key challenges encountered so far.

The meeting enabled further stakeholders to come up with key recommendations and overall policy and strategic guidance, necessary for the smooth implementation and coordination of the programme.

The RECAMP is funded under the 11th European Development Fund to the tune of Euro 8.8 million. Through this support, it is expected to galvanize the deepening of regional economic integration in the COMESA region by increasing and strengthening private sector participation in regional and global value chains. The focus will be on three priority value chains namely, agro-processing, horticulture and leather and leather products.

These value chains are recognized as key and instrumental towards not only increasing regional integration but fulfilling the industrialization agenda as outlined in the COMESA Mid Term Strategic Plan (MTSP).

Other key tenets of RECAMP are to further improve competitiveness, market access and improvement of the business environment particularly for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who remain the cornerstone of COMESA's Industrialization aspirations.



Seychelles to benefit from the climate change fund

Seychelles is among four COMESA countries that will benefit from the US\$5.7million grant provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to enhance monitoring and reporting of climate actions. The other three are Zambia, Eritrea and Comoros.

The five-year project titled Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) will enable beneficiary countries to comply with the Paris Agreement's enhanced transparency framework under Article 13.

The framework specifies how Parties to the Agreement must report on progress in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, and support provided or received in capacity building, climate finance and technology.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe announced this on Monday 30 August when she met the Seychelles Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon. Sylvestre Radegonde in Victoria town on Mahe Island in Seychelles. The support is in response to a project proposal submitted by the country.

Kapwepwe said once the technical teams have finalized their work, these funds will be disbursed.



ESREM validates tariff guidelines for the EA-SA-IO region

The Enhanced Sustainable Regional Energy Market (ESREM) Project has validated several guidelines developed to assist stakeholders enhance investment in renewable energy, promote energy efficiency and improve access to electricity.

The validation was conducted on 24th and 25th August 2021 during a virtual workshop. The guidelines cover Renewable Energy Incentive Mechanisms, the Renewable Energy Credit Line Facility Guideline and the Lifeline Tariff Policy Guideline. Others discussed included the System Loss Reduction Guideline and the Initial Open Access Guideline.

Participants to the workshop included representatives of regional economic communities, power pools, centers of excellence for renewable energy and energy efficiency, ministries in charge of energy affairs, and national energy regulators in the Eastern Africa-Southern Africa-Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region.

Chief Executive Officer of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), Dr. Mohamedain Seif Elnasr officially

opened the workshop. He indicated that the focus was to enhance investment in renewable and energy efficiency which is relevant to the United Nation's Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Dr. Mohamedain stated that the EA-SA-IO Region has some notable examples of successful deployment of Renewable Energy (RE) and Energy Efficiency (EE) models with private sector participation that offer examples of financial and investment sustainability adding that such models of market creation combined with improvements in RE/EE technological development can give impetus to the further development of RE/EE markets.

"It has been established that EE has potential to offer a cheaper way of investment into additional capacity to meet the ever-increasing electricity demand and there are EE quick wins that have been identified and can be exploited cheaply and quickly," he added.

It has also been established that both RE and EE present opportunities of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the

energy sector hence contributing to low carbon development in the region and achievement of SDG 13 which requires taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

In addition, Dr. Mohamedain disclosed that both the RE and EE will contribute to SDG 12 that ensures sustainable consumption and production patterns due to a wide range of benefits from the applications. These relate to addressing poverty by easing burdens of women in their roles as agricultural champions and providers of food, energy and water at the household level.

He said that it's for this reason that the CPCS Transcom International Limited in association with Multiconsult Norge AS and Econoler has been engaged to facilitate the implementation of harmonized regulatory/technical frameworks and synthesized renewable energy and energy efficiency in the EA-SA-IO region.

CPCS has since developed the draft guidelines, which were presented to the workshop for stakeholders' consideration and guidance.



File/ small scale cross border traders

Handling of small-scale cross border traders among key topics at border staff training

COMESA has trained its Trade Information Desk Officers (TIDOs) that serve in selected borders in the region, on how to implement the Simplified Trade Regime and ensure the minimum standards for the treatment of small-scale cross border traders are upheld.

The training was conducted on 23 September 2021 as part of capacity building for TIDOs serving at the following border points: Chirundu (Zambia/Zimbabwe), Kasumbalesa (Zambia/DR Congo), Mwami/Mchinji (Zambia/Malawi) and Nakonde (Zambia/Tanzania).

The training was part of a €15 Million Cross-Border Trade Initiative, financed by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) to facilitate small scale trade across borders. The overarching goal of this project is to increase formal small scale cross border trade flows in the region leading to higher revenue collection by governments as well as increased security and higher incomes for small scale cross border traders.

The simplified trade regime (STR), which the TIDOs are expected to promote, was launched in 2010 at the request of the small-scale cross border traders. It was intended to streamline the documentation and procedures for the clearance of small consignments while enabling the traders to also benefit from the COMESA preferential tariffs.

This followed the realization that the gains that accrued from the launch of the COMESA Free Trade Area in 2000, was mainly benefitting the big and established companies that were able to obtain the Certificates of Origin as well as filling in the required customs documents. This was to the exclusion of small-scale traders who cross the borders with small consignments of goods that are meant for sale in their countries.

The trade information desks at the border were thereafter established to assist small scale traders with information on trade and basic border procedures in the context of the STR.

“One of the activities under Cross-Border Trade Initiative is to support the posting

and training of Trade Information Desk Officers at the targeted borders, equip the TIDOs to do their job properly and to carry a study on the sustainability of TIDOs,” said the Senior Research Fellow at the COMESA Secretariat, Mr. Benedict Musengele who represented the Director of Trade at the opening of the training which was conducted virtually.

“The TIDOs interact with the traders and other stakeholders at the borders, and it is essential that they display good behaviour, probity and courtesy in their interaction with both traders and border officials as well as researchers that frequent the borders gathering primary data.”

He added that that capacity building was also important for the TIDOs to keep abreast with policy and administrative changes that affect small scale traders to provide value added information.

The training was conducted by customs and immigration officers from Kasumbalesa, Chirundu and Nakonde borders.



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe flagging off the election observers with Mission Leader, Amb. Ashraf Rasheed (2nd Right) and Assistant Mission Leader Ms Hope Kivengere (now deceased 3rd Right)

COMESA deploys election observers in Zambia

COMESA deployed a 40-member election observer mission in Zambia for the August 12 General Elections. The observers drawn from 10 Member States were flagged off on Sunday, August 8, 2021, by the Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

The Mission included observers from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Zimbabwe and staff from COMESA Secretariat. Ambassador Ashraf Gamal Rashed of Egypt assisted by Madam Hope Kivengere (now deceased) of Uganda led the mission. The two are Members of the COMESA Committee of Elders.

Prior to deployment, the observers were conducted on a two-day training by the Secretariat and key stakeholders including the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the national police, political analysts, civil society and the media.



The training covered among others, the COMESA election observer principles and methodology, observer responsibilities, and on the Zambia electoral process.

In the days preceding the elections, the observers met various electoral stakeholders including political parties, and exchanged views with other election

observer missions.

The observation process was guided primarily by the constitution and legal framework of Zambia, in consistence with the relevant international and regional instruments including the COMESA Guidelines on Election Observation.



Zambia has demonstrated its democratic credentials

COMESA hails the new leader

COMESA congratulated the newly elected 7th President of Zambia, H.E Hakainde Hichilema and the people of Zambia for upholding democratic practices in the country's political transition. In a statement issued by the Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe, COMESA described the conduct of Presidential, Parliamentary and Civic elections as having underlined Zambia's outstanding democratic credentials.

"Through a democratic process, the people of Zambia have overwhelmingly demonstrated their faith and confidence in your ability to steer the country to greater economic prosperity and peace," the Secretary General stated in a congratulation message to the new president.

Madam Kapwepwe also paid tribute to the then outgoing President Edgar Chagwa Lungu for his service to the country over the last six years and for respecting the democratic will of the people.

COMESA was one of the international



COMESA mission observers in Kasama District in Northern Zambia

organizations that followed the electoral process and deployed a short-term observer mission to the General Election of 12th August 2021. Arising from its observers' feedback, COMESA commended the Electoral Commission of Zambia, the voters, and all political stakeholders for conducting the election in a credible, free, fair, and largely peaceful manner despite its highly competitive nature as well as the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organization deployed 42 observers

across the 10 provinces in Zambia who witnessed the pre-elections preparation, polling, and commencement of counting at the polling stations. Its preliminary report was issued two days later, on 14 August in a joint press conference with the African Union counterpart team.

In the report, the observer teams expressed confidence with the electoral process on transparency and the generally peaceful voting environment.



Gender disaggregated small scale cross border trade data for Zambia

COMESA, with financial support from the European Union has been implementing the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI) which aims at increasing small scale cross-border trade flows in the COMESA Tripartite region. This is being done by facilitating small-scale cross border trade between targeted countries through effective policy and governance reforms, institutional capacity building, improved border infrastructure and better gender disaggregated data collection and monitoring.

Launched in May 2018, the COMESA SSCBTI had by August 2021 conducted over 600,000 interviews through 52 enumerators deployed at the targeted borders at Mwami/Mchinji between Zambia and Malawi, Kasumbalesa between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chirundu between Zambia and Zimbabwe and Nakonde/Tunduma between Zambia and Tanzania.

Under Result Area 4 of the SSCBTI programme, the focus is on gender disaggregated statistical data and analysis that is systematically collected, compiled, harmonized and disseminated. Gender disaggregated data can reveal deprivations and inequalities that may not be fully reflected in aggregated data.

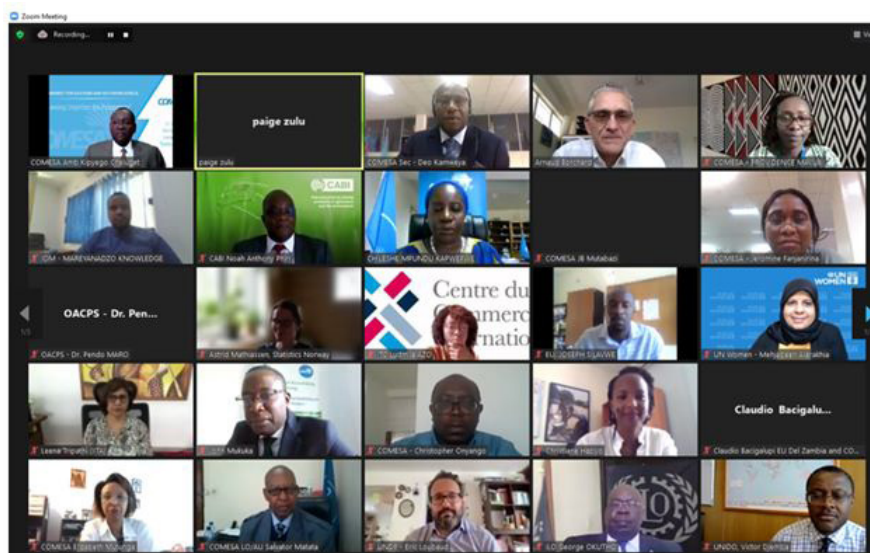
“The goal is to remove gender-related constraints that women face in participating in trade and understand the obstacles to cross border commerce that happens within the region,” according to a report by the COMESA Statistics Unit that coordinated the data collection.

For now, the SSCBTI is focusing on the five border posts along key corridors in the region with the purpose of piloting upgrades and trade facilitation measures that be replicated elsewhere in the COMESA region and beyond. The expectation is to increase evidence-based knowledge on the topic and inform better trade policy-making processes at both national and regional levels.

From the summary analysis for Zambia SSCBT data covering the period 2019/Q4 to 2020/Q3, 23 percent of small-scale cross border traders interviewed were females. On average, 66 percent of the traders used a bicycle as the means of transport while 20 percent were carrying goods on their heads. 90 percent of the female and 74 percent of the male traders were married/co-habiting or living together.

In terms of value for SSCBT covering the same period 2019/Q3 – 2020/Q4 for Zambia, Nakonde border recorded the highest value with over USD\$30million in imports while about USD\$15.7million was recorded in exports. Integration and harmonization with respective national trade statistics databases is anticipated for all the data collected from Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

The small-scale cross-border trade data for Zambia is available and can be accessed on the COMSTAT data portal (<http://comstat.comesa.int>) under the section for Small Scale Cross-Border Trade).



COMESA, Development Partner's forum

Initiative aimed at deepening mutual understanding on the sectors they collaborate

To ensure coherence in the implementation of regional integration programmes supported by development partners and enhance complementarity, COMESA Secretariat hosted the 3rd Joint Development Partners' Coordination Forum on 15 – 16th September 2021.

The forum sought to deepen engagement and commitment from the development partners and understand the sectors they focus on. It brought together multilateral, bilateral, UN and other international agencies that contribute financial and technical support to the COMESA programmes.

The forum was driven by the need to share COMESA's experiences and the challenges that are faced when implementing the regional integration agenda. Thus, it was intended to enhance the development partners' understanding of how COMESA works, how thematic policy issues are addressed and how the programmes could be better supported.

Over the last 10 years, the partners' support has formed the bulk of the

programmes' funding with the European Union in the fore, followed by the African Development Bank and the World Bank. For instance, in the implementation of the COMESA 2011 - 2015 Medium Term Strategic Plan, donor support constituted 75% of programmes' funding and 54% on average in the 2016 - 2020 period.

The support has been channeled through the COMESA Secretariat and its institutions in recognition that they provide a coordinated framework for supporting the regional objective.

This enables a harmonized and transparent aid delivery model by development partners, using existing structures regarding programming, implementation, and disbursements of resources and ensuring complementarity.

Speaking at the opening, Secretary General of COMESA, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe appreciated the continued support, both financial and technical assistance that development partners have provided even during the COVID-19 crisis.

"At a time when economic uncertainty

reigns in most parts of the world and many national budgets are affected by the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are grateful for your continued support and trust placed in COMESA, and in the work that we do," she said.

She added that post-COVID-19 crisis demands even stronger collective effort to tackle the challenges posed by a changed environment.

During the pandemic, COMESA developed and has been implementing the COVID-19 guidelines and an on-line platform for exchange of information on the availability of essential medical supplies and other goods.

It has also developed an industrial strategy which focuses on nine priority areas: agro-food, energy, textiles and clothing, leather and leather products, mineral enhancement, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and agro-chemicals, light engineering and blue economy.

In his remarks, the EU Head of cooperation in Zambia, Mr Arnaud Borchard called for enhanced creativity and innovation by the regional economic community, by coming up with programmes that are resilient in the current COVID-19 period.

"COMESA cannot afford to wait for the pandemic to clear but should instead develop ways and processes that will enhance regional integration despite existing challenges," he said.

Programme managers at the COMESA Secretariat took the participants through their respective programmes, covering trade, infrastructure, industry, agriculture, and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social affairs, peace and security, statistics and climate change.

At the closing, participants appreciated the forum for providing a mechanism for donors' feedback on the performance of COMESA programmes.

COMFWB lobbies First Ladies to advocate for empowerment of women in business

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business has urged regional First Ladies to advocate for legislation and policies that addresses practices that inhibit the full participation of women in the regional, continental and global business.

Speaking at the SADC First Ladies forum on 17th August 2021 conducted in Malawi, COMFWB Executive Director Ruth Negash cited negative cultural practices as a major drawback.

Coupled with the prevailing COVID pandemic, she said the First Ladies support to creation of opportunities for women empowerment in business will be a critical economic driver in the region and beyond.

COMFWB has consistently been advocating governments and the private sector to join hands and assist women owned businesses to effectively participate in the economies by building their capacities in various areas of doing business.

Key areas identified include enhancing women participation in the digital space by reducing the cost of internet services and access to digital and financial literacy.

“By doing so, women and the youth can be part of the new ways of doing business online and stay competitive in the regional and international markets,” Ms. Negash said.

Various statistics compiled by eminent Global Financial Institutions have shown that in Africa, the informal private sector, which is mainly made up of women and the Youth make up to 40% of regional economies and play a pivotal role in the livelihoods of communities.

“About 50% women entrepreneurs work in the wholesale/retail trade and their livelihoods have suffered greatly due to COVID-19 shutdowns in the region; as



Ruth Negash

many traditional face-to-face trade fairs, conferences and large-scale networking events have moved to virtual/digital platforms,” Negash said.

To help improve the lives of the women in the region, COMFWB, has partnered in with the African Electronic Trade Group, which is championing public-private-partnership in developing and implementing a continental e-commerce platform called SOKOKUU. This platform is an enabler for digital transformation boosting intra-African trade for women and youth in the context of the implementation of the AfCFTA and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

This digital service will create equal platform and open a new door for African women and youth businesses to conduct their businesses, link with each other forming innovative value chains; from the comfort of their homes and stay competitive.

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“About 50% women entrepreneurs work in the wholesale/retail trade and their livelihoods have suffered greatly due to COVID-19 shutdowns in the region; as many traditional face-to-face trade fairs, conferences and large-scale networking events have moved to virtual/digital platforms,” Negash said.

Regional annual inflation rate falls to 129.8% in June 2021

The year-on-year inflation rate for the COMESA region dropped from 131.1% in May 2021 to 129.8% in June mainly due to price changes in 12 key areas of expenditure namely clothing and footwear, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, household equipment, transport and communications and recreation and culture.

According to the Harmonised Consumer Price Index (HCPI) Monthly News compiled by the Statistics Unit at COMESA Secretariat, other areas that recorded price changes included education sector, restaurants and hotels, food and non-alcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, furnishings, miscellaneous goods and services.

The month-on-month inflation rate in the COMESA region as measured by HCPI-COMESA stood at 9.5% for the month of June 2021, down from 8.1% registered in May 2021. It was 10.0 % in June 2020.

Participating Member States that contributed to HCPI-COMESA registered the following rates of total inflation in June 2021 compared to June 2020. Burundi (-5.4%); Democratic Republic of Congo (+9.9%); Djibouti (+0.8%); Egypt (+1.3%); Eswatini (+6.4%); Ethiopia (+22.2%); Kenya (+6.1%); Madagascar (+8.2%); Malawi +9.3%; Mauritius (+5.3%); Rwanda (-0.4%); Seychelles (+6.6%); Sudan (+315.4%); Tunisia (+5.9%); Uganda (+2.0%); Zambia (+30.6%); and Zimbabwe (+105.9%).



Zambia Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry Hon. Chipoka Mulenga (speaking), COMESA ASG Dr Dev Haman, COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash and COMFWB Chairperson Ms Maureen Sumbwe.

Record number of women entrepreneurs attend the COMFWB trade fair

Over 200 local, regional and international businesswomen and investors participated in the 2nd COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) annual regional trade fair that took place on 22 – 24 September 2021 in Lusaka, Zambia.

The forum provided a platform for businesses to showcase innovative products and services available and the existing potential in the region. It also enabled knowledge and experience-sharing especially for women in business to discuss the challenges and opportunities in regional trade particularly for micro small and medium entrepreneurs. The expo was inspired by the need to address women's equal access to business leadership and entrepreneurship.

According to COMESA statistics obtained under the Women in Cross-Border Trade programme, 70 % to 80 % of individual cross boarder traders in COMESA are women. However, most of the border areas in the region lack basic infrastructure to cater for the needs of small-scale women traders.

Zambia's new Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry Hon. Chipoka Mulenga opened the trade fair. He said trade expos provide valuable knowledge on the potential large markets available, outside current comfort zones, and urged women in business to take keen interest and actively participate.

"It is impossible to implement effective programmes of economic transformation without the involvement of women entrepreneurs," Minister Mulenga said. "...we are delighted in gatherings such as this one because it provides a forum for exchange of ideas and experiences through which women development programmes can be implemented."

He said women entrepreneurs need to be encouraged and supported to participate in trade and become more competitive in a region that has embraced integration.

COMESA Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Kapwepwe underscored the importance of knowledge-sharing among women entrepreneurs as it enables



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It is impossible to implement effective programmes of economic transformation without the involvement of women entrepreneurs," Minister Mulenga said.

enterprises to innovate, explore new markets, manage businesses effectively and in general serve as a springboard for such businesses into the future.

In her statement presented by Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman, she outlined some of the initiatives that COMESA is implementing to enhance the participation of women entrepreneurs in regional and global markets. Among them, the promotion of e-commerce through better access to technology and online platforms such as the digital platform 'womenconnect' known as the 50 Million African Women Speak

Record number of women...

(50MAWSP) Project.

This project is designed to address the information needs of women in business in the region and is implemented jointly by COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). COMESA is also supporting competitiveness of the Private Sector through the European Union funded Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

COMFWB has benefitted from this project through technical assistance and

advisory services for SMEs in improving business management and coordination among them and other value chain players.

Other speakers included the COMFWB Chairperson Ms Maureen Sumbwe and COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash.

COMFWB formerly FEMCOM was established by the COMESA Heads of State and Governments in 1993 in recognition of the role women play in the economic and social transformation efforts of the region.

Sub-committee on Kenya sugar safeguard measures reviews progress

The Sub-committee on Kenya Sugar Safeguard Measures held its 2nd extra-ordinary meeting in August to review implementation of the Safeguard Measures which are intended to enable the country to restructure its domestic sugar sector to attain competitiveness and be a profitable sector that can compete regionally and beyond.

The meeting, on 17-18 August was a follow up to the 4th Kenya Sub-Committee Meeting held in April 2021 which noted the COMESA Council decisions that have continuously extended the safeguards to Kenya. The 41st Council of Ministers meeting granted a two year extension of the Kenya sugar safeguard beginning March 2021-February 2023 based on the provisions of Article 61(2) of the Treaty. The same Council requested the government of Kenya to provide a detailed roadmap on how to enhance the sugar sector competitiveness during the extended safeguard period and to give priority to COMESA originating sugar.

Speaking at the opening of the meeting, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Kipyego Cheluget urged the participants to use the opportunity to reflect on the remaining period of the safeguard and strategies in place and review if the current performance reflects the expected results.

He noted the progress to increase production of sugar by Kenya in line with the roadmap presented at the last Council meeting.

"I commend the efforts by the government of Kenya to take advantage of the granted extension to ensure Kenya reaches her targets in the production and desired competitiveness of the sugar industry," he said.

The extra-ordinary sub-committee meeting also looked at the modalities for reallocation of the unutilized Kenya sugar quotas by Member States. It reviewed the impacts of implementation of the Kenya Sugar safeguard that includes cost of production along with sugar production figures. It also received the status report on the utilization of the quotas and associated recommendations.

The recommendations from the Sub-Committee meeting will inform the COMESA Council of Ministers through the Trade and Customs Committee, on how best to ensure effective and efficient administration of Kenya Sugar Safeguard measures. Among the key issues to be included, is equitable distribution and allocation of quotas, streamlined system in issuance of import permits and enhanced transparency and predictable sugar trade environment across the COMESA region.

A new tool for monetary policy analysis and forecasting

CMI trains Member States on Bayesian Vector Auto Regressions

The COMESA Monetary Institute has trained staff of Central Banks from the COMESA region on "Practical application of Bayesian Vector Auto Regressions (BAVR) Approach to the analysis of Monetary Policy Transmission Mechanism".

The training took place from 2nd to 6th August 2021 with 29 delegates from seven Central Banks of COMESA Member States participating, namely Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius and Zimbabwe were represented.

The training familiarized participants with the tool- kit of Bayesian Vector Auto Regressions (VAR) approach to the analysis of monetary policy transmission mechanism. It focused on the interdependencies among key macroeconomic variables and the feedback effects thereof.

Participants were also trained on a step-by-step approach in the deployment of the Bayesian VAR approach to the analysis of monetary policy transmission mechanism using COMESA data on real and price variables.

The training was motivated by the developments in the analysis of monetary policy transmission mechanism, based on the Bayesian VAR approach, which is fast gaining traction in recent years for the following key reasons. It is more adept at dealing with different data sources or incorporating information from other studies; is precise at parameter estimates; has limited mathematical complexities; and it produces more efficient forecasts.

Director of the CMI Mr Ibrahim Zeidy said the training would enable the participants to share knowledge and experiences and enhance capacity to conduct analytical works in monetary policy analysis and forecasting.

"The BVAR is an important addition to the suit of analytical tools that COMESA member countries can use to unravel the channels through which monetary policy is most effective," he said.



(Main) Party Agents with duplicate voter registers for crosschecking voters authenticity.
 (insert) COMESA Head of Mission Amb. Ashraf Rashed (R) with Head of AU Mission HE Dr Ernest Bai Koroma and Head of ICGLR after the Preliminary Statement

Good practices from Zambia's general election

The COMESA Election Observer Mission to the 12 August 2021 Zambia General Elections noted several good practices that were implemented during the electoral process. Among them, was the establishment of conflict management infrastructure to deal with election-related conflict.

The establishment of the Election Support Centers at both national and provincial levels to coordinate logistical, administrative aspects and to monitor potential electoral risks or challenges was considered a best practice for providing local solutions to local problems across the regions.

In a Preliminary Statement issued by the Head of the Observer Mission Amb. Ashraf Rashed two days after the polling, COMESA Observers identified the use of duplicate registers by political party agents as an important initiative in ensuring enhanced transparency. They also cited the self-funding of election activities and electoral processes.

The Mission also acknowledged the large participation of women and youth in the electoral process with many serving as electoral staff and candidates.

"One out of the 16 presidential candidates was a woman while four of the candidates had a female running mate. In addition, 21% of the candidates contested for national assembly positions whilst 12.8% of the council chairperson/mayor contestants were women," the observers stated.

The use of technology including the biometric voter registration and biometric voter identification was among those listed as best practices.

The observer mission also made a number of recommendations to help improve future elections in the country. These included the need to cap the number of voters per polling station to avoid overcrowding and delays, the need to ensure that necessary and adequate

materials are provided to all polling stations, including inks, lighting, markers and envelopes. These arose from the observers' experiences at the polling stations.

They underscored the need for the Electoral Commission of Zambia to provide more space for polling stations in highly populated areas to avoid overcrowding and to hasten the election process. The Mission also called for equal opportunity in public media for all candidates and political parties to engage with the public.

The COMESA Mission comprised 40 observers drawn from 10 Member States namely Burundi, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe as well as staff from COMESA Secretariat. Prior to their deployment, COMESA observers received training on 7- 8 August 2021.

COMESA, Corporate Council of Africa forge partnership

MoU will strengthen US-Africa engagements and knowledge sharing

The COMESA Business Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Corporate Council of Africa (CCA) towards forging new pathways for stronger US-Africa engagements which will include developing a joint implementation plan to facilitate joint programmes for knowledge sharing.

The signing ceremony took place on 27 July 2021 on the margins of the 13th US-Africa Business Summit. CBC Chairperson Mr Marday Venkatasamy described the occasion as a major milestone in the US-Africa business collaboration and partnership.

“Through this MOU we strengthen the relationship to facilitate closer collaboration, joint advancement of the private sector business agenda, and provide a platform for consolidating the voice of the Private Sector,” said Mr Venkatasamy. The ceremony marked the beginning of the journey towards solidifying the relationship between the Councils for the period of two years, 2021 to 2023.

Expounding on the significance of the partnership, President and CEO of the CCA Ms. Florie Liser welcomed the new partnership:

“With the COMESA Business Council being one of CCA’s oldest and longest

standing partners, we welcome this MOU and look forward to collaborating to support greater U.S - COMESA trade and investment and stronger ties amongst our businesses.”

Apart from knowledge sharing, the parties are expected to develop a joint implementation plan for business to business and business to government facilitation, public and private sector dialogues, conferences and special events and trade missions.

The key focus areas will be on trade facilitation, trade-related infrastructure development, services sector development, small and medium-sized enterprise sustainability, agribusiness, regional value chains and value addition. Others are investment promotion and facilitation, women’s business leadership and capacity building/ technical assistance.

The U. S-Africa Business Summit is CCA’s flagship conference and is considered essential for those doing business on the continent as well as the U.S. and African leaders shaping U.S.- Africa economic engagement.

With over 100 speakers, the Summit hosted African Heads of State and Key Ministers, US Government Cabinet and Senior Officials, and more than 1,200 private sector executives and stakeholders from across the United States and Africa.

COMESA records increased annual inflation rate

The year on year, inflation rate in the COMESA region as measured by the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI-COMESA) increased to 144.7% for the month of July 2021, up from 129.8% registered in June 2021. A year earlier, the rate was 62.4%.

HCPI reports that the month-on-month inflation rate in the region was at 12.2% for July 2021, up from 9.5% registered in June 2021. This is an increase from the 5.4% recorded in July 2020.

HCPI-COMESA comprises of twelve divisions of expenditure which registered different average price changes during the month of July 2021 compared with July 2020. The divisions are food & non-alcoholic beverages (+112.9%); alcoholic beverages and tobacco (+71.2%); clothing and footwear (+179.5%); housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (+8.7%).

Other sectors include furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance (+140.5%); health (+31.1%); transport (+852.7%); communication (+177.8%); recreation and culture (+341.4%); education (-13.4%); restaurants and hotels (+121.5%); and miscellaneous goods and services (+148.6%).

Seventeen Member States contributed to the HCPI-COMESA and registered different rates of total inflation in July 2021 compared to July 2020. These are Burundi (-5.5%); Democratic Republic of Congo (+7.5%); Djibouti (+0.6%); Egypt (+5.8%); Eswatini (+6.5%); Ethiopia (+30.3%); Kenya (+6.5%); Madagascar (+8.3%); Malawi (+9.5%); Mauritius (+5.3%); Rwanda (-0.7%); Seychelles (+6.1%); Sudan (+345.7%); Tunisia (+6.9%); Uganda (+2.1%); Zambia (+30.4%); and Zimbabwe (+55.6%).

Innovation has maintained COMESA's performance trajectory



COMESA staff conducting a virtual meeting with external participants

Amidst the prevailing COVID-19 situation, the implementation of the COMESA regional integration programmes has picked pace, with a notable consistent budget absorption under Member States funding on operational expenditures.

According to a performance update by the COMESA Secretariat conducted in July, there has been an upward trajectory in programme activities in the second quarter of the year as restrictions on movement of people in the region eases. These have been made possible through the adoption and application of information, communication technologies, which have built the organization's resilience to implement its programmes.

"At the Secretariat, we continue to harness the power of ICT through teleworking to deliver on our mandate while safeguarding the health of our staff amid the current third wave of the COVID-19," the COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said during the administrative and budget committee meeting.

She attributed the regions' resilience to some of the measures put forward by the relevant authorities at national level and

through the enforcement of regulations developed by the Secretariat, aimed at facilitating safe cross border trade in goods and services.

COMESA has convened more than 10 meetings in the first half of the year, that brought together technical experts and ministers from various sectors including trade, industry, agriculture, energy, transport, ICT among others. The ministerial decisions inform the implementation of programmes at the regional and national level.

On the other hand, COMESA Cooperating partners have continued to honor their obligations and have extended most projects timeframes to allow the programmes to improve their budget absorptions. The Secretariat has also continued to innovate modalities of implementing programme to increase budget absorption during these extended project timeframes.

Major development partners such as the European Union have allowed the Secretariat to administer their funds using the internal systems and structures after having assessed and found them satisfactory.



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe addressing the AfCFTA, RECs meeting

AfCFTA, RECs coordination meeting in Accra

COMESA was part of the delegations that attended the 1st Coordination Meeting of the Heads of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The meeting took place from 20 September 2021 in Accra, Ghana. Its objective was to prepare actionable strategies towards enhancing the effective implementation of the AfCFTA, drawing on lessons from the implementation of REC's Free Trade Areas (FTAs). The implementation of the AfCFTA will influence future trade decisions that the RECs may be engaged in.

Among those in attendance were Secretaries General of the East African Community, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), representatives from the Economic Community of Central African States (EECAS) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU).

COMESA develops a virtual knowledge management portal

COMESA Secretariat through the Climate Change Programme has developed a virtual knowledge management portal. The portal is intended to promote national and regional sharing of information on diverse activities on climate action being undertaken in the region.

The portal was activated on 14 July 2021 during a webinar which brought together COMESA Member States and non-members. It was developed by the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), a longstanding COMESA partner and will be populated with content by users (Member States).

The portal is expected to increase understanding of critical issues around climate change, while providing a broad knowledge-hub to strengthen cooperation between technical organisations and Member States. It will respond to the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) pilot programmes coordinated by COMESA involving five Member States: Eswatini, Madagascar, Seychelles, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It is also part of an initiative to organize key information in one place and enable the region to access and share knowledge with ease.

Speaking at the event, COMESA Climate Change Programme Manager, Ms. Edith Tibahwa said majority of Member States are highly vulnerable to climate-induced risks. These include crop failure and livestock losses due to prolonged drought and more frequent and severe floods and destruction of infrastructure as recently experienced in Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Malawi, among others.

"COMESA has therefore continued to address some of these emerging challenges by supporting Member States to develop and implement sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, promote the adoption of climate smart innovations such as Climate Smart Agriculture," she said.

Regional dialogues and consensus building on major climate change issues have also been facilitated particularly in international negotiations and capacity building. This has assisted Member States in dealing with the challenges of climate change and reduced the vulnerability of populations.

COMESA CSA Programme provides support to countries in the ACP regions to manage the climate change challenges that hinder development. The programme is funded by the European Union Commission under the Intra Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries (Intra ACP) Global Climate Change Alliance plus (GCCA+) programme.

FANRPAN Chief Executive Officer and Head of Mission, Dr Tshilidzi Madzivhandila said the initiative will further strengthen the long existing partnership between two

organizations.

"Our partnership will surely address the critical knowledge and information needs required to successfully meet challenges brought about by the climate change in the COMESA region," he said.

He stressed the need for such innovative interventions amidst COVID19 Pandemic to enable technical cooperation at national, regional, and continental levels.

Participants were encouraged to regularly visit the portal as it will serve as a valuable source of timely information such as the events leading up to the 26th Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland.

The webinar was attended by stakeholders directly involved in exchanging climate change information and knowledge and was an opportunity for sharing experiences among the network members and non-Member States and promote cooperation among states. Others were representatives of research/scientific community, civil society, the private sector, and farmers' groups.

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COMESA has therefore continued to address some of these emerging challenges by supporting Member States to develop and implement sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, promote the adoption of climate smart innovations such as Climate Smart Agriculture," Ms. Edith Tibahwa said.



COMESA SG confers with AU deputy chairperson

Deputy Chairperson of the African Union, Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa was in Lusaka in August, where she met with COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe at the COMESA Secretariat. This was the first meeting since the two of them assumed their respective offices.

Their talks covered implementation of regional integration with highlights on the innovative digital programme on value and supply chains which has resulted in the development of e-payment, e-logistics, e-trade platforms to help facilitate trade in the region amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Nsanzabaganwa underlined the importance of regional economic communities in Africa embracing technology to improve productivity.

“Due to digitalization, we are encouraging young people to come on board as they are more tech savvy and therefore the need to harness more of their innovations to improve the online trading platforms.”

The two noted that COVID 19 pandemic had necessitated the increase in production of goods locally through the established value chains in the region due to shortages of essential commodities experienced during the COVID-pandemic.

“It’s Africa’s time to ensure that we stand on our own and produce enough for our own consumption without depending on other parts of the world. I know that we can do it especially if we stand as a united force because we have what it takes to be self-reliant,” Dr Nsanzabaganwa said.

This will result in high production of materials locally leading to industrialization in the region.

Dr Nsanzabaganwa was in Zambia to attend the inauguration of Zambia’s 7th President, Hakainde Hichilema.



“Due to digitalization, we are encouraging young people to come on board as they are more tech savvy and therefore the need to harness more of their innovations to improve the online trading platforms.”

Dr. Nsanzabaganwa

Ireland and COMESA revitalize collaboration



Mr. Pronch Murray

The Government of Ireland and COMESA Secretariat have begun engagements to identify potential areas of future cooperation to boost their mutual relations. On April 22, 2021, the Acting Head of Mission of the Irish Embassy in Zambia Mr. Pronch Murray and the Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe held a virtual meeting during which they discussed potential areas of partnership.

Ireland has supported the COMESA Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) particularly in the development of seed certification systems and has the potential of further upscaling. Other potential areas of collaboration are in mitigating the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on member States and the promotion of digital technology and innovation to facilitate intra-COMESA trade. Key in this priority would be the development of COMESA Digital Free Trade Area to promote trade through ICT platforms and tools to replace paperwork and need for physical contacts.

Another potential area of support is women's participation in regional trade particularly on improving their access to information and collection of gender disaggregated data. Mr. Murray observed that the Irish mission in Zambia is accredited to COMESA hence enabling more robust interactions on potential cooperation. He said the Irish embassy's 2022 - 2026 strategy, which is expected to be finalized before the end of this year, also provides an opportunity to chart the way forward for the embassy programmes in Zambia and COMESA for the next five years.

Secretary General Kapwepwe commended Ireland for its commitment to Africa citing its recent commemoration of 40 years of diplomatic existence in Zambia.

Other issues discussed included the COMESA peace, stability, and security programme. The Secretary General explained that COMESA has developed early warning systems to manage potential conflicts.

"This is a potential area of collaboration to support Member States in early warning and monitoring mechanisms, as opposed to waiting for conflict to escalate," she said.

She emphasized that peace and stability were essential for trade and that this was a strong pillar for COMESA which had been supported very strongly by the EU in the past. The two agreed to further engage on the highlighted issues and develop a programme to work on.



This is a potential area of collaboration to support Member States in early warning and monitoring mechanisms, as opposed to waiting for conflict to escalate," Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe.



United Kingdom (UK) Minister for Africa Mr James Duddridge (3rd right) with COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe (2nd right) at business event hosted by the British High Commissioner in Zambia on 24 August 2021. Mr Duddridge was in the country to attend the inauguration of the Zambian President, Hakainde Hichilema.

Farewell to departing staff

COMESA Secretariat bid farewell to three members of staff including the Director of Human Resources and Administration (DHRA) Mrs Martha Elimu (in picture) who served for nine years and Mr Yousseuf Ibrahim an IT Expert who has served COMESA for 12 years as Automated Data Processing Expert for the ADP ASYCUDA programme

Others were Mrs Ruth Limbambala who has worked for the organization for 38 years. She joined the then Preferential Trade Area from its inception in March 1983 and worked in the office of the Secretary General serving the first six Secretaries General from the time of the PTA to COMESA before moving to other divisions including the COMESA Court of Justice.

The event was conducted on 25 August 2021.





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