

## Region to Benefit from an €8m ICT Programme

*Programme launched to enhance governance and create an enabling environment in the ICT sector*



(middle) Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget with Mr Claudio Bacigalupi (right) cutting the ribbon to officially launch the programme

Five Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are set to benefit from a new eight million euros project: Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT), funded by the European Union. It was launched on Thursday 12 May 2022 at the opening of the 2nd Programme Steering Committee Meeting.

The four-year programme covers 29 African countries from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) as the lead, the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It will support the review and/or development of various regional policy and regulatory framework in a harmonized manner that will contribute to enhancing competition, improved access to cost effective and secure ICT services.

The implementation of the project begun in late 2021 following the signing of a Grant

contribution amounting to eight million Euros between the European Union and COMESA in December 2020. Its objective is to deepen regional integration and growth of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in the Eastern Africa-Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) regions.

The programme will coordinate regional public and private sector ICT policy development, enhance policy and regulatory environment for competitive markets and gender sensitive ICT markets and improve infrastructure connectivity and access to ICT.

According to the EGEE-ICT project document, the penetration of mobile telephones in the EA-SA-IO region has increased because of both private and public sector investments in infrastructure adding that internet penetration is also rapidly growing. The socio-economic benefits of accessing and using ICTs, in particular the internet, are rising as essential information and services, both in the public and private sectors, continue to move online.

Despite these positive developments, many people in the region are still not connected to ICT services, especially the internet, and the cost of access is prohibitive in most cases.

"ICT accessibility and affordability is the key for utilizing e-services and for reaching all groups of society in remote areas and other disadvantaged groups in order to transform the landscape for development," said Dr Kipyego Cheluget, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes.

Major challenges inhibiting the improved access to cost effective ICTs in the region include the existence of vertically integrated dominant operators providing both the infrastructure and services, limited resources or lack of expertise to implement harmonized policies, laws and institutions. Besides, uneven and fragmented implementation of policy and regulatory frameworks across the region impedes promotion of competitive markets

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Delegates at the Launch of the EGEE-ICT Programme in Lusaka

and the development and adoption of regional policies and regulations vary among Member States.

To resolve these bottlenecks, the EGEE-ICT will leverage on available opportunities to enhance the capacities of public and private sector institutions and the civil society to

develop, implement and monitor harmonized ICT policies and regulations. The programme will also develop model policy and regulatory frameworks that enhance cross-border interconnection, competition, trade facilitation, e-commerce as well as gender perspectives in regional ICT markets.

European Union Delegation to Zambia Team Leader for Infrastructure Mr Claudio Bacigalupi said the EGEE-ICT programme is fully aligned with the EU Global Gateway Strategy and it would contribute to the development of the ICT sector in Africa and deepen regional integration.

## COMESA Diary

Date	Event	Venue/Format	Responsible Office
17–18 May 2022	Meeting of Programme Technical Steering Committee (PTSC), Project on Enhancement of a Sustainable Regional Energy Market (ESREM) in Eastern Africa-Southern Africa-India Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region	Zambia	RAERESA
15-20 May 2022	Pre-elections Mission Assessment for Kenya	Kenya	GPS
19-20 May 2022	Sensitization workshop for Burundi Reporting Entities on Money Laundering and financing of Terrorists	Burundi	GPS
23–28 May 2022	Southern Africa Civil Society (CSO)/Private Sector/Think Tank Symposium	Malawi	GPS





# Opportunities, Resources Available in Promoting Renewable Energy

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Participants from Member States in the capacity building workshop

Over 40 Energy Experts from COMESA Member States attended a capacity building workshop on Off-Grid renewable energy from 10 – 12 May in Lusaka conducted by the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF), a World Bank financed project implemented jointly by COMESA and the Trade and Development Bank (TDB).

The workshop, which took place in Chisamba, Zambia, was intended to identify opportunities for collaboration with Member States, especially in the promotion of off-grid sub sectors in renewable energy infrastructure.

The RIFF project has a total funding of US\$ 425 million divided between a grant facility of \$10 million to COMESA and a credit facility of \$415 million to TDB. The TDB component is primarily concerned with provision of loans to viable infrastructure projects with private sector interest while the COMESA component is supporting the creation of a conducive environment for private sector investment in infrastructure.

Participants to the workshop were drawn

from Ministries of Energy and energy regulators from 16 COMESA Member States.

The project's component on infrastructure finance facility amounts to US\$ 325 million and is being administered by TDB. It will provide long-term finance to infrastructure sub-projects that meet the set development impact criteria.

The need for capacity building was informed by a study commissioned by COMESA to gain an understanding of the current status of renewable energy with specific focus on off grid energy.

Speaking during the opening of the workshop, COMESA Energy Economist, Mr Malama Chileshe said it was crucial to share the findings of the study to facilitate understanding of the gaps in promotion of

off grid renewable energy and come up with solutions.

"This capacity building workshop will therefore be used as a platform to disseminate the findings of the study to the Member States targeting policy makers and regulators in the energy sector," he said.

He added that the COMESA Secretariat has the resources to support Member States to develop policy and regulatory instruments that may be required to move the off grid renewable agenda forward.

The workshop is expected to identify common opportunities that allows member countries to work together with the RIFF project also identify unique challenges and opportunities to leverage upon.

**This capacity building workshop will therefore be used as a platform to disseminate the findings of the study to the Member States targeting policy makers and regulators in the energy sector," Mr Malama said**

# Eswatini Women Farmers to Supply School Feeding Programme



(L-R) Hon. Zintombi Thandi Motsa Xumalo, Ms. Nomcebo Hadebe, Ms. Ruth Negash and Mr. Deepark Shah at the MoU signing ceremony in Mbabane

The economic fortunes of women farmers in Eswatini are set for better times after three international organizations signed a memorandum of understanding to support them to increase their supply of local produce in a school feeding programme in Eswatini.

The MoU was signed in Mbabane on 4 May 2022 by the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB), Chief Executive Officer Ms. Ruth Negash, Center of Financial Inclusion (CFI) counterpart Ms. Nomcebo Hadebe and the World Food Programme (WFP) Eswatini Coordinator, Mr. Deepark Shah.

They undertook to collaborate in strengthening the capacity of women farmers' groups as local produce suppliers in the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme. This will be done through capacity building in business skills and finance, registration of women groups in cooperatives, adaptation of climate smart agriculture and precision farming technologies to increase agriculture productivity.

COMFWB will be responsible for organizing the farmers into cooperatives, while CFI

will deal with market linkages. The WFP will be responsible for training and identifying linkages for women farmers' cooperatives. The organizations will also support the provision of appropriate agricultural inputs and value chain development in horticulture.

Ms Negash said COMFWB will mobilize local farmers to have opportunities to produce quality products and market access, locally and abroad.

"We will work on mechanisms that ensure a reduction in the number of imported products which can be sourced locally as there is a lot of potential for local products to feed the local market," she said.

Mr Shah said the WFP intervention was in line with the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on ending hunger and poverty.

In her remarks, Ms. Hadebe said the CFI was focused on promoting women and youth farmers locally to increase their visibility in the market. It was targeting to raise the percentage of female farmers to 60 percent of the currently active farmers estimated at 18,500.

"We have to make sure that farmers understand how money is handled in the business sector and that they are able to separate it from personal accounts," she said. "Some farmers are not able to tell the difference between loans, aid and grants."

Speaking at the same forum, COMFWB Eswatini Chapter Chairperson, Thandi Motsa said there is need to engage government and relevant stakeholders to discuss and agree on the pricing of local produce.

"We need to engage parliament on the regulation of prices for local produce, because it forces farmers into black market and failure of their business," she said.

She added that one of the reasons why produce like maize was imported was because of low prices offered to farmers by the national entity responsible for purchase of strategic food reserves.





# Experts Call for Sustainable Regional Energy Market

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The regional energy market has immense potential in strengthening and deepening regional integration but for many COMESA countries, the generation capacity is not enough to cover the nations own needs and allow for cross-border trade.

According to the Chairperson of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) Mr. Daniel Bargarora, plans are underway to improve the transmission capacity across borders, but the same is not enough to secure unimpeded trade across the countries and regions.

Mr Bargarora, who is also the Executive Director of the Kenya Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA), said this in a speech presented at the 11th Annual General Meeting of RAERESA conducted virtually, Tuesday 10 May 2022. He was represented by his deputy Dr John Mutua.

He said better energy infrastructure facilitates relations between countries, stimulating integration of the productive sectors as it brings close together economic spaces, reduces and/or eliminates the physical barriers to trade and transport costs and expands the market size.

Recent studies have shown that many African countries suffer power shortages and regular interruptions to services. For example, African countries are estimated to lose 12.5% of production time compared to 7% for South Asia owing to power outages thus suppressing countries production.

To overcome these challenges, Dr Bargarora said an aligned regulatory framework was necessary to stimulate investments in power production and transmission.

"For reasons of sustainability, it is also necessary to stimulate production from renewable energy sources, for which the COMESA region has expansive potential, in terms of solar, wind, geothermal, bioenergy, among others," he said.

In his statement, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget observed that trade in energy was as critical and beneficial as trade in goods and other services.

"Energy trade allows all nations to benefit from their comparative and competitive advantages and from the advantages of the economies of scale and scope," he said. "The power

sector should be open for the private sector investment and ownership."

He stressed the need for development of a harmonized regulatory framework to enhance sustainability of regional energy market. This will provide the enabling environment for the needed investments, power trade and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency to thrive.

The AGM was attended by representatives of energy regulatory authorities from COMESA Member States which are members of the RAERESA, Associate Members and observers. Key items in the agenda were reports by the Portfolio Committees and consideration of application membership to the regional association.



Judges of the COMESA Court of Justice

## Call to Utilize COMESA Court Services

Zambia's Attorney General, Mr. Mulilo Kabesha has urged businesspeople in the region to utilize the COMESA Court of Justice for arbitration of disputes.

Addressing judges of the Court during their one-week annual retreat in Lusaka, Zambia, Mr. Kabesha observed that trade disputes are taken to other courts based in far flung areas, such as United Kingdom instead of using the COMESA Court which offers affordable services to aggrieved parties.

He called for robust sensitization campaigns about the Court's services in the region.

The retreat was conducted on 9 -13 May 2022 and is part of the implementation of the Court's Medium-Term Strategic Plan 2021- 2025 which is focused on achieving institutional strengthening and capacity building, among other things.

The AG also acknowledged the importance of training the judges on trade remedies, which was conducted during the retreat as part of capacity building.

"The expectation and confidence that Member States and other stakeholders have in the Court places a huge responsibility and

burden on the Court of Justice and its Judges," he noted. "This is because they are expected to competently discharge their duties and ensure that the rule of law, and fairness in the application of the COMESA Treaty, are upheld."

COMESA Regulations on Trade Remedies and Article 28 of the Treaty, provide that any dispute or appeal against findings and recommendations of the panel established by the Secretary General, is referred to the Court of Justice for arbitration.

In her remarks Judge President of the Court, Justice Lombe Chibesakunda said that although the permanent seat of the Court is in Khartoum, Sudan, it holds sessions in other Member States which ensures access to its services in the region.

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