



New Study Identifies Impediments to Small Cross Border Trade

Inside

Barley to be Included on the COMESA Seed Variety Catalogue

Simplified Trade Regime Threshold Maintained

Business Model to Promote Digital Financial Inclusion Plan Developed

COMESA Conducts Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Fish Trade

EU Supports Construction of Market at Tunduma Border Post

Editorial

The STR can be an economic magic bullet



Trade experts regard the effective implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) as a magic bullet in jobs creation and increasing household incomes. It spurs growth and enhance production and productivity of the agricultural sectors through value addition. STR focuses on facilitating small scale cross border trade by making it formal to enable traders reap the full economic benefits. It supports a huge informal economy of millions of people across the COMESA region. Over the years, the implementation of the COMESA STR has been a priority undertaking, and indeed a lot of funds mobilized from development partners favour this initiative. Along the way, impediments to its implementation have been identified which required deeper study to address them. Two studies were conducted recently. The first was to determine how best to implement it given that some Member States implementing it belong to two regional blocs; COMESA and the East African Community and they have different approaches. The second study related to the sustainability of Trade Information Desks (TIDs) currently established at border points. These are supported through projects funded by development partners whose tenures are usually short, hence the critical need to explore how to sustain them going forward. The TIDs are the pivots upon which this trade regime is anchored and their existence underpins that of the STR. So the fresh focus on STR heralds a crucial turning point in its successful adoption and rollout.

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CONTENTS

- 1 Studies to Address Impediments to Small Cross Border Trade
- 2 Fresh Impetus Towards a Single African Air Transport Market
- 5 Small Scale Trade Set to Rise at the Kenya-Ethiopia Border
- 7 Use of Technology Key to Boost Intra-Africa Trade
- 10 Steps Towards Modernization of Regional Statistics
- 12 COMESA Calls on Member States to Utilise Online Payment Platform
- 14 Business Model to Promote Digital Financial Inclusion Plan Developed
- 15 Energy Experts Validate Market Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanism Guidelines
- 18 Zambian Media Enlisted in Projects' Communications
- 20 COMSHIP Launched in Tunisia to Widen Regional Seed Market
- 22 COMESA Countries Set for Elections in 2022
- 25 COMESA Conducts Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Fish Trade
- 28 COMESA Recognized for its Role in Eradicating Animal Diseases
- 30 Africa Making Positive Strides in Democracy

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Studies to Address Impediments to Small Cross Border Trade

COMESA has conducted two studies to address bottlenecks that impede small scale trade flows within the region. The first study aims at determining the best approach towards smooth implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR). The second relates to the sustainability of trade information desks currently established at border points.

The studies were inspired by the need to increase formal small-scale cross-border trade, to enhance revenue collection for governments at the borders, generate higher incomes for small-scale cross-border traders and increase security, among others.

The STR was developed by COMESA and implementation started in 2010 and has since then been adopted in other regions. Under the regime, small scale cross border traders have

ease of access across borders if their goods fall within the Common List of products agreed upon between neighbouring States.

While COMESA has adopted the bilateral (between Member States) form of Common Lists for the STR, the East African Community has adopted the regional approach. Given the overlapping membership to the regional blocs, it has become imperative to determine which of the two approaches works best.

Through two consultancies supported under the 11th European Development Fund: Cross Border Trade Initiative Project, a technical paper on bilateral vs regional Common List for the STR has been developed. This paper, together with the one on sustainability of the trade information desk officers (TIDOs) was presented to Member

States on 24 February 2022 for validation.

By formalising cross-border transactions, STR enables small scale cross border traders to benefit from the tariff preferences available under regional integration. It makes it easier to collect information and data and ultimately improve domestic and regional policy making on trade and trade-related activities in the region.

The implementation of the STR is usually accompanied by the deployment of the TIDOs. They serve as clearing agents for the traders; providing information on border procedures and assisting them to fill the forms needed to clear goods. Given that their remuneration and tools come from resources provided by cooperating partners, it is crucial

Continued to page 3



Fresh Impetus Towards a Single African Air Transport Market

As Regional Aviation Experts Meet to Harmonize Work Plans

Aviation experts from the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) conducted a three days' retreat in Kigali, Rwanda, on 10 March 2022. Its objective was to harmonize workplans, strengthen institutional arrangement and collaboration in the operationalization and implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) one of the AU Agenda 2063 Flagship Projects.

The retreat followed the signing of two Grant Project Agreements with African

Development Bank (AfDB) and AFCAC on Institutional Support for Implementation of the SAATM, and European Union (EU) with COMESA as a lead Regional Economic Community (REC) on the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean Region (EA-SA-IO).

Aviation Experts at the retreat came up with a harmonized advocacy and Communication Strategy on the application, domestication and harmonization of the Continental

Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) regulatory instruments at the RECs and the national level.

The retreat was officially opened on 8 March 2022, by the Deputy Director for Rwanda Civil Aviation Authority (RCAA), Ms. Winnie Ngamije, on behalf of the Director General and the President of AFCAC, Mr. Silas Udahemuka.

She underscored the need for cooperation between the organizations dealing with the liberalization of the air transport in Africa:



The SAATM Project Implementation Unit Coordinator at AFCAC, Mr. Jean Paul Matsougou, highlighted the need for synergy creation among the two institutions stressing:

“The two projects have similar objectives of implementation and operationalization of SAATM and thus the need to create synergy between AFCAC and COMESA for the full implementation of YD and operationalization of SAATM in the EA-SA-IO region in particular, and the African Continent in general so as to ensure realization of the AU Agenda 2063.”

In his remarks, the Senior Transport Economist at COMESA, Mr. Bernard Dzawanda, observed that the establishment of SAATM and the implementation of the YD provides opportunities for cooperation hence the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between COMESA and AFCAC.



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“The two projects have similar objectives of implementation and operationalization of SAATM and thus the need to create synergy between AFCAC and COMESA for the full implementation of YD and operationalization of SAATM in the EA-SA-IO region in particular, and the African Continent in general so as to ensure realization of the AU Agenda 2063.”

“Cooperation between AFCAC and the RECs is not optional; it is a must if aviation programmes on the continent are to succeed, we are therefore compelled to ensure that such cooperation is reinforced through harmonization of the work plans.” Ms. Ngamije stated.

He also highlighted other sectors of the economy that will benefit from the SAATM such as the tourism sector, industrial and trade sectors which rely heavily on Air transport. Growth of these sectors will positively contribute to GDP growth, with more citizens being able to afford air travel especially given the potential reduction in airfares.

Studies to Address Impediments...

Continued from page 1

that options for the sustainability of TIDOs after closure of the supporting programme were identified, hence the study.

The findings of the study on Common Lists for the STR will therefore provide insights as to which of the two approaches yields better results. The recommendations of the study on TIDOs sustainability will help identify options of how to keep the staff in post when the programme expires.

Delegates that attended the virtual validation workshop comprised of senior government officials from ministries, border agency officials, the private sector and representatives of the small-scale trading communities.

In his address, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget commended Member States that have already initiated bilateral discussions aimed at strengthening the STR regime, including review of common lists of products and applicable customs documentation.

“As we move forward let us all endeavor to make the STR work for our region rather than being seen as a source of discontent and barrier to cross-border trade,” he said.



Barley to be Included on the COMESA Seed Variety Catalogue

The COMESA Seed Committee has approved the inclusion of Barley, scientifically known as *Hordeum vulgare* L. as one of the staple food crops on the COMESA Variety Catalogue.

This development was made during a meeting on 27 January 2022. It was attended by technical experts in variety release, seed certification, phytosanitary/quarantine measures for seed import and export from Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, Eswatini and Zambia with the private seed sector represented by the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA), Nairobi, Kenya.

The meeting was facilitated by the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) a Specialised Agency of COMESA mandated to integrate small-holder farmers into national, regional, international markets through improved agricultural policy environment and facilitation to market access.

ACTESA Interim Chief Executive Officer Dr John Mukuka, who is the COMESA Seed Committee Secretary, revealed that barley has been added to 12 COMESA staple food crops. These include Irish potatoes, rice, maize, common bean, pearl millet, sorghum, groundnut, soybean, wheat, sunflower, cotton and cassava. These can be found on the COMESA Variety Catalogue in line with

the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations.

He added that barley is a cash crop and will directly benefit farmers who cultivate the crop and enhance small-scale farmers crop rotation system and give the brewing industry (among others) the opportunity to substitute imported barley with local production in the COMESA Region. This is key in ACTESA's mandate of providing solutions to COMESA region's agricultural challenges including market access related constraints, low productivity, technological and policy related constraints. Ultimately, this will contribute to integrating smallholder farmers into domestic, regional and international markets through an improved policy environment, expanded market facilities, services and capacity building.

Global production

According to the experts, the global production volume of barley amounted to 159.7 million metric tons in the 2020/2021 crop year. The five major global producers are Russia (18.0 million MT), Germany (10.7 million MT), France (10.3 million MT), Ukraine (9.4 million MT) and Australia (9.0 million MT). In the COMESA region, the major producers of barley are Ethiopia (2.6 million MT), Tunisia (328,000 MT), Egypt (120,000 MT), Eritrea (67,000 MT), Kenya (55,000 MT), Libya (54,900 MT) and Zambia

(10,000 MT). Ethiopia is the 16th highest producer of barley in the world.

About the Crop

Barley is a member of the grass family and may be cultivated in a wide variety of climates across many geographical areas. Most of the crop varieties prefer temperatures of around 12-15 °C during growing period and around 30 °C at maturity.

However, its crop cultivation is limited by lack of high-quality seed. Seed is an important input in crop production as it sets the limit crop production. The seed contains genetic information for performance which a farmer undertakes to exploit by employing appropriate agricultural cultivation practices. All other inputs for crop production such as fertilizer, irrigation, disease control, pest control are generally meant to facilitate the exploitation of genetic potential contained in the seed.

A variety registered on the COMESA Variety Catalogue may be traded in the whole of the COMESA region. The Catalogue is available on: <https://varietycatalogue.comesa.int/login>.

Varieties registered under this catalogue comply with requirements of a variety having been registered in two COMESA Member States.



Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango, (centre seated) with Kenya-Ethiopia trade experts at the Moyale border

Small Scale Trade Set to Rise at the Kenya- Ethiopia Border

Talks covered the implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime

Small scale trade along the Kenya- Ethiopia border is poised to thrive following bilateral negotiations between the two parties to agree on a Common List of products to be traded under the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR).

The negotiations took place on 1st March 2022 at the Moyale border post and addressed the implementation of the STR between the two countries. The STR was launched in 2010, to enable small-scale traders' benefit from COMESA's trade liberalization programme by simplifying and formalizing the trade.

The meeting was part of the implementation of a 15 million euros Cross-Border Trade Initiative, financed by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). Its objective is to facilitate small scale cross border trade among the targeted countries.

“The STR should not only be seen as a facilitator of cross-border trade of buying and selling goods, but it also addresses consumer tastes, preferences, protection and enhances consumer welfare and overall well-being of the people,” Dr Chris Onyango

The Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango, who led the COMESA team, said that simplification and formalization of cross-border trade will help the region empower women and youths, who make up 70% of the traders.

“By having a working STR, the marginalized groups will find it easier to conduct business, earn incomes and improve their livelihoods. Thus, the STR will help our governments achieve balanced economic development to empower women and the youth,” he said.

He added that the development of Common Lists of traded products, agreement of the STR threshold and application of other instruments such as the sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures are important for effective implementation of the trade regime.

The meeting marked a critical milestone in strengthening bilateral relations given that both countries have in the recent past built new infrastructure at each side of the border. Besides, they have signed and ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), thus opening the way for preferential treatment to be accorded to one another.

The Director encouraged the two countries to remove existing barriers to cross-border trade to expand opportunities to businesspeople.

“The STR should not only be seen as a facilitator of cross-border trade of buying and selling goods, but it also addresses consumer tastes, preferences, protection and enhances consumer welfare and overall well-being of the people,” he said.

Trade Experts Trained on Using TradeSift Technology

Close to 100 trade experts from COMESA Member States have been trained on trade policy analysis using TradeSift tool. The four-day online training from 28 February to 3 March 2022 was conducted by the University of Sussex.

The training empowered the participants to analyse policy issues and effectively participate in trade negotiations. It was part of a series of programmes financed by the European Union (EU) through the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and counterpart funding by COMESA through the TradeCom II Capacity Building programme.

The training was also part of the efforts by the organization to develop a cadre of researchers and experts who are conversant with modern skills being used to resolve different challenges facing regional integration in the region. These include proliferation of non-tariff barriers and low levels of domestication, compliance and enforcement of agreed trading instruments.

With TradeSift skills, the experts are expected to address poor or lack of appropriate policies and by extension inadequacy in human capacities and capabilities.

“As policy makers, researchers and analysts, I urge you to take this training seriously....the skills you are about to attain should be put into immediate use by supporting the trade policy making at national and regional levels,” said the Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget when he opened the workshop.

He told the participants that COMESA attaches great value on research and evidence-based policy making at both the national and regional levels. Hence, it will continue to facilitate capacity building in all forms as mandated by the Treaty and ensure that the region's economic integration process is anchored on a strong policy-oriented foundation.

Dr Peter Holmes, representing the University of Sussex, urged the delegates to actively participate in the training and the gain the much-needed knowledge and skills.

TradeCom II capacity building project also supports the COMESA Annual Research Forum presently in its 9th cycle and the Virtual Master's Degree programme in Regional Integration currently being offered by the University of Mauritius and Kenyatta University in Kenya.

Euros 6.8m Project to Upgrade Zambian Border Posts Launched



Zambia's Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Hon. Chipoka Mulenga

The Government of Zambia in partnership with the European Union (EU) and COMESA launched the 6.8 million Euros project to upgrade Zambian border posts on 24 February 2022 in Lusaka.

The project, Zambia Border Posts Upgrade Project (ZBPUP), whose implementation has been underway since the signing of the financing agreement in November 2020, aims at improving intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services. It focuses on interventions identified as key to improving the trade and trade facilitation profile of Zambia.

So far, considerable progress has been made in capacity building and sensitization at the three border posts namely Mwami (Zambia/ Malawi), Chirundu (Zambia /Zimbabwe) and Nakonde (Zambia/Tanzania).

“This project will assist to improve, import and export procedures, transit requirements, customs and reduce time spent at the border,” Zambia's Minister

Continued to page 8



Panelists display the AUC Report after the launch

Use of Technology Key to Boost Intra-Africa Trade

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

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

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

Digitalization of trade Instruments including e-CO (the Electronic Certificate of Origin), Online information exchange

platform, E-Trade, E-Logistics and E-Legislation are some of the key interventions that are expected to boost trade in the region.

These are some of the issues that featured during the African Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) Roundtable organized by the African Union Commission on the side-lines of the Expo Dubai 2020 held in the United Arab Emirates on 15 March 2022.

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe who was one of the panelists said COMESA programmes and interventions were geared to bring about trade and infrastructure development and promotion of small-scale cross border traders which is mainly conducted by women and youths.

“As one of AU’s eight building blocs, COMESA has focused on programmes that directly impact on the lives of people by making doing business easier and creating an environment to better the

lives of the ordinary people by having regulations that speak to each other such as championing the free movement of persons and visa relaxation”, she said.

COMESA Federation of Women in Business Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash also participated in the panel. The African Union Commission launched the 2021 African Integration Report at the event.

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From left to right: Mr Bruno Hanses, Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget, Ms Chawe Chuulu and Hon. Chipoka Mulenga

of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Hon. Chipoka Mulenga said during the launch ceremony. "The removal of incentives that contribute to corrupt practices will enhance revenue collection and improve business competitiveness in Zambia."

The upgrade on the three One Stop Border Posts (OSBP) will reduce clearance times and costs for passengers and goods processed. It will also aid in improving efficiency of the services offered by border agencies thereby increasing satisfaction among users of border facilities and revenue collection.

Besides, the project will help impact skills and capacity among border agencies and the private sector through a series of capacity building and sensitization activities on core trade facilitation issues. In addition, the ZBPUP will aid in reducing the number of reported Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) at the targeted three border posts.

Minister Mulenga appreciated the

continued support provided by the COMESA Secretariat and the EU to his Ministry in trade facilitation matters.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said strengthening of the physical and soft infrastructure in the region was key to fostering economic integration.

"The project will help impact skills and capacity among border agencies and the private sector through a series of capacity building and sensitization activities on core trade facilitation issues," Ms Kapwepwe said. She was represented by the Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget.

The two called for a sustained visibility and communications programme so that people are constantly aware of the improvements being made at the three borders.

This support for the upgrade project was provided under the overall Euro 48 million

agreement signed between COMESA Secretariat and the European Union aimed at increasing intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services.

The EU was represented at the launch by Mr Bruno Hanses who reiterated Europe's support to COMESA's regional integration agenda. He said the EU is ready to share its experience and lessons learnt from its own internal market with COMESA and its Member States.

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Small Scale traders at Kasumbalesa border between Zambia/DR Congo

Simplified Trade Regime Threshold Maintained

COMESA Secretariat has conducted a study to review the suitability of the current Simplified Trade Regime (STR) threshold which stands at US\$2,000 per consignment, per crossing. Specifically, the study was commissioned to review the current STR threshold value with a view to establishing a suitable level that is capable of effectively facilitating intra-regional trade in Member States already implementing the STR and those that will implement it in future.

Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango stated that the review will also benefit countries that are not yet participating in the STR but intend to do so. This is part of COMESA's strategies to boost cross-border trade. He added that apart from enabling small scale cross border traders to benefit from the tariff preferences available under regional integration, STR has the ingredients to stimulate domestic production and cross-border trade.

"I commend Member States who have

already initiated bilateral discussions aimed at strengthening the STR regime, including the threshold, reviewing common lists of products and applicable customs documentations, all this is meant to deepen intra-COMESA trade," Dr Onyango stated.

He was speaking during the meeting to validate the study conducted by a consultant on 19 January 2022. The meeting was attended by senior government officials from targeted Member States, border agency officials, representatives from the private sector and small-scale trading communities.

The study involved desk research and stakeholder consultations focusing on the products being traded at the borders, the average value of consignments declared by small scale cross border traders, assessing the suitability of the current STR threshold in facilitating regional trade and integration.

COMESA Secretariat together with

Member States have been implementing the STR since 2010. Funded under the 11th European Development Fund (11th EDF), the overall objective of the project is to increase formal small-scale trade flows in the COMESA and tripartite (EAC-COMESA-SADC) regions leading to higher government revenue collection at the targeted borders and increased security and incomes for small scale cross border traders.

Specifically, this project is expected to facilitate small-scale cross-border trade flows between targeted countries through effective policy and governance reforms, institutional capacity building and improve border infrastructure and lastly strengthen data collection and monitoring.

Over the years, implementation of the STR has not been without challenges which range from the value of the threshold which was initially at US\$500 worth of value of goods and being progressively raised to the current level of USD2000, and discussions on the common lists of products traded across neighbouring countries.

Therefore, the validation meeting of the study, enabled the delegates to deliberate and validate the results of the study with a view of improving implementation. Based on the views from the stakeholders, the study recommended that the STR threshold be maintained at the current level of USD 2000 which was adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2014.

"With recent revelations that there is potential to increase COMESA's intra export of goods alone by over USD\$100 billion, it is not therefore in doubt that an improved and effective STR regime will significantly contribute and bolster exports and intra-regional trade altogether," Dr Onyango said.



Participants attending the National Strategies for Development of Statistics (NSDS) workshop in Lusaka, Zambia

Steps Towards Modernization of Regional Statistics

Member States need to migrate from traditional national statistical systems to emerging data ecosystems to ensure reliable statistics which are key elements towards better measurement, monitoring, and management of results.

The call was made during the opening of a four-day regional workshop on National Strategies for Development of Statistics (NSDS) conducted in March this year, in Lusaka Zambia. It was organized under the auspices of the Statistical Capacity Building Program Phase 5.

Its objective was to improve provision and use of official statistics in Africa through the NSDS framework that uses the sectoral approach. It was also aimed at enabling participants to employ best practices in the design of NSDS through specific resource materials including the Guide to Mainstreaming Sectors into the National Statistical System (2007).

Participants were drawn from 37 African Development Fund Countries

representing National Statistics Offices, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and PARIS21. Others were from the African Union Commission (AUC), the UN Women, SADC, EAC, IGAD, AFRISTAT and Statistical Training Institutes.

During the workshop, participants were trained on the most recent international guidelines on the design of the NSDS/ RSDS, as well as on development of sector statistics plans. The workshop also built the participants' capacities on institutional aspects of the statistical systems and sought to ensure that Member States mainstream gender in all their programmes related to statistics.

Director for African Centre for Statistics at the Economic Commission for Africa Mr Oliver Chinganya emphasized the need for modernization of statistical systems if the profession is to remain relevant to the development of world economies.

"With the advent of technology, there is need to identify new partners in development with tools and solutions, such as the academia, private sector players, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations," he added.

Assistant Secretary General, Dr Dev Haman, officially opened the workshop. He called on all statistical bodies to embrace technologies that can be used to collect and process data quickly and accurately for decision makers in the Member States as well as globally.

Facilitation of the training was done by two international statistical consultants; Prof. Ben Kiregyera, one of the originators of the NSDS concept and the author of the first NSDS guidelines that were published by PARIS21 in 2005. The other was Mr. Neil Doumashkin, a specialist in "making good quality statistics available" and using this information to inform public policies and private sector decisions in South-East Asia, Africa, Europe and



ECOFISH steering Committee members at Hilton hotel in Lusaka during the 3rd Programme Steering Committee

Quest for Sustainable Fish Trade

COMESA in collaboration with six other regional organizations have renewed their partnership in implementing the sustainable development of fisheries commonly programme known as ECOFISH in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Region.

The organizations are the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community (EAC), South African Development Community (SADC), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA) and the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation (LVFO)

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

In view of this, COMESA Secretariat hosted the 3rd Steering Committee Meeting on 17 and 18 March 2022 in Lusaka during which the teams could track the progress and performance of the program and make

recommendations for implementation.

Apart from COMESA Secretariat, fish experts from IGAD, EAC, SADC, IOC, LTA and LVFO participated in the meeting which was held both physically and virtually.

Assistant Secretary General for Programs Dr Kipyego Cheluget officially opened the meeting and urged the team to make recommendations to help the fish and fish industry sector to grow and be sustainable.

Majority of fisheries value chain actors in the region are small-scale and live primarily in coastal and inland lake areas in the region. Despite the sector's potential to contribute to global poverty alleviation, many small-scale fisheries in the EA, SA and IO region are not in a good state. Communities that depend on fishing remain impoverished and vulnerable to climate change impacts.

According to Dr Cheluget, the development of the blue economy may also have detrimental consequences on small-scale fisheries that have to compete with other sectors for the use of coastal areas, inland lakes and rivers.

The ECOFISH program is designed to create awareness and tackle some of these challenges.

"We are therefore optimistic that the present Steering Committee meeting will guide ECOFISH program to have special attention to small-scale fisheries and create an understanding of the concept of sustainable development". Dr Cheluget said.

COMESA, EAC, IOC, IGAD, SADC, LTA and LVFO are also collaborating in harmonizing of Monitoring Control Surveillance which is expected to strengthen capacities in the sustainable development of the fisheries resources. Head of Cooperation at the EU to Mauritius and Seychelles, Mr Milko Van Gool reiterated the EU's support for both inland and marine sustainable fisheries in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region.

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



COMESA Calls on Member States to Utilise Online Payment Platform

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

The implementation of REPSS is considered a great milestone in the quest to achieve regional economic integration. Once fully operational, REPSS is expected to significantly contribute to the expansion of intra-COMESA trade by facilitating online payments of all intra-COMESA transactions.

This move is expected to foster a reduction in transaction and operational costs. It will bring about switching of relationships for trade transactions between commercial banks and foreign correspondents to commercial banks and central banks thus making intra-regional trade transactions cheaper.

"This system could also reduce the need for foreign exchange for intra-regional trade," said the COMESA Secretary

General Chileshe Kapwepwe. She was speaking during a symposium for the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks, organised by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) on 24th March 2022 to deliberate on the role of financial integration for the promotion of export competitiveness in the COMESA region.

REPSS is also expected to eliminate mistrust among traders as the central banks play a key role in the transactions. The system will also assist the region achieve regional financial integration because it will bring about macroeconomic stability, financial system soundness, introduction of compliance with various international standards and practices in the financial sector to ensure regional harmonization and reforming the legal system to enable cross border enforceability of contracts.

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

represented by Dr. Naglaa Nozahie, who is the Governor's Advisor on African Affairs at the Central Bank of Egypt.

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

Despite the enumerated benefits, he said, achieving regional financial integration is constrained by differences in national legal regulatory and oversight regimes among the member countries and inadequate harmonization of national financial integration operating schemes as well as rules and technical standards.

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

Kenya Lifts Major COVID-19 Restrictions



In early March this year, Kenya took the first major step towards easing restrictions imposed two years ago with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was by waiving the requirement for PCR test for fully vaccinated travelers to the country.

These include truck drivers who would henceforth be exempted from the PCR test if fully vaccinated, a move

that would facilitate movement of goods across the borders. All eligible unvaccinated travelers arriving at any port of entry to Kenya must however have a negative PCR test result conducted not more than 72 hours before departure. Unvaccinated travelers arriving in Kenya would be subjected to a rapid antigen test at their cost of \$30.

The relaxation followed decline of

reported COVID-19 cases in the country, which had been below 1% for over month and below 5% in the months prior. Also stopped were quarantines for both vaccinated and unvaccinated contacts. Mandatory wearing of masks in public places was relaxed as well.

Announcing the new measures, on 11 March 2022, Cabinet Secretary of Health, Mr Mutahi Kagwe, however encouraged the use of masks in all indoors functions and in public service vehicles, trains and aircrafts. He also announced the resumption of full capacity in meetings and gatherings if the participants were vaccinated.

“Positive asymptomatic cases need not isolate but shall observe five days and return to work without need for further testing,” he announced.

Besides easing travel to Kenya, the new measures were also expected to scale- up vaccinations in the country and thereby help the economy to return to the pre-COVID-19 normalcy.

Kenya is a leader in intra-COMESA trade and the new measures are expected to have a positive impact across the region.

New Malawi Permanent Representative to COMESA



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

New High Commissioner of Malawi to Zambia, Her Excellency Margaret Constance Kamoto presented her letters of accreditation as Permanent Representative to COMESA on 21 March 2021. Speaking at the short ceremony, Ms Kamoto acknowledged the financial, technical and material support rendered towards Malawi's by COMESA.

SG Kapwepwe congratulated the High Commissioner for joining the team of Permanent Representatives accredited to COMESA whom she described as

Continued to page 19



Members of the CBC board and guests at the 4th Dialogue on Digital Financial Inclusion

Business Model to Promote Digital Financial Inclusion Plan Developed

A business model on operation and implementation of a regional online payment platform for Micro and Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the COMESA region has been developed.

The model was created by the COMESA Business Council (CBC) as part of its digital financial inclusion plan for MSMEs. It is aimed at supporting the design, development and deployment of an integrated digital financial services infrastructure that is low-cost, interoperable, real time and fraud resistant. It is intended to serve MSMEs and the customers they transact with at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

The model was validated during the 4th Digital Financial Inclusion Public-Private Dialogue conducted by the CBC on 10th March 2022. Close to 200 delegates attended the dialogue physically in Lusaka, Zambia and virtually.

CBC had engaged a consultant to conduct the study on the business model design as well as the progress made so far in driving this regional agenda in the Member States.

According to the experts, MSMEs

contribute an estimated 50% to 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in COMESA and account for 50% to 60% of the employment opportunities in the region.

The key drivers of financial inclusion in the region have been mobile money and agent banking, now reaching millions of previously unbanked individuals, households and SMEs offering affordable, instant, reliable services on payments, savings, credit and insurance services among others.

COMESA's Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Dr Kipyego Cheluget appreciated the progress made towards broader financial inclusion in the region:

"However, there is still some key challenges namely low financial literacy in most COMESA member countries, high cost of services, regulation not keeping pace with innovation and weak consumer protection," he noted.

Kenya was recognized for having the largest and most successful mobile money sector in the region and has consistently led in the scale and innovation.

CBC Board President, Mr Marday Venkatasamy said financial inclusion is not only about facilitating access to formal financial systems but also about digital literacy skills.

"It is apparent therefore, that the private sector undisputedly has a pivotal role in driving the sustainable development agenda in the region," Mr Venkatasamy added.

Other keynote speakers at the event included Bank of Zambia Governor, Dr Denny Kalyalya who was represented by his deputy Dr Francis Chipimo.

At the same time, the CBC Digital Financial Inclusion Recognition Awards for the Industry were launched. The following companies were recognized for their commitment and contribution to the digital financial inclusion plan for MSMEs in the COMESA region: Vodacom, Techno Brain Group, Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA), Kenya Bankers of Association, KCB Bank, COMESA Clearing House, Coca-Cola East and Central Africa Franchise, Bayer, Bankers Association of Zambia, Bank of Zambia and Airtel Africa.



Energy Experts Validate Market Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanism Guidelines

Regional energy experts have approved a set of tools to promote renewable energy and efficiency. Among them is the grid capacity guideline report for integrating renewable energy, monitoring tool for the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Action Plan (REEESAP) for the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region.

The others are the inter-pool and inter-Regional Economic Community (REC) Memorandum of Understanding and market surveillance and compliance framework for East Africa Power Pool (EAPP) and Southern Africa Power Pool, (SAPP). The validation workshop was conducted on 3-4 March 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia.

Delegates at the meeting also agreed on the provision of technical support to four countries, namely Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Djibouti and South Sudan to establish national energy regulators. This will include aligning the Member States' national legislation/regulation with adopted harmonized regional regulatory framework.

Nine guidelines on renewable energy and energy efficiency and a monitoring tool to assess progress made by Member States towards achieving renewable

energy and energy efficiency targets have since been developed. These are expected to take the region to the next level of green and clean economy and an enhanced sustainable energy security and accessibility.

The meeting brought together five Regional Economic Communities: The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

Others were the Regional Association of Energy Regulators, Regional Power Pools, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Centers. The COMESA Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) coordinates the implementation of the programme.

The programme has three results areas namely; a regionally harmonized energy regulatory and policy framework that integrates gender perspectives; enhancement of regulatory capacity of the National Regulatory Authorities and Power Pools to proactively influence developments in the energy sector;

and lastly, enhancement of renewable energy and energy efficiency to attract investments in clean energy and build capacity in clean energy in the region as well as the domestication on a demand driven basis.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes at COMESA, Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget, noted that with the ongoing developments, the EA-SA-IO region will enhance electricity trading at regional level.

"Investment in energy infrastructure should be supported by policy initiatives that promote generation, maintenance, and efficient utilization of energy infrastructure capacity," he said. "The current regional economic growth trends require a corresponding growth in energy infrastructure and efficient utilization to cater for both current and future demand."

To address current challenges, he said, an aligned regulatory framework was necessary to stimulate investments in power production and transmission as well, noting that the EA-SA-IO region has expansive potential in solar, wind, geothermal, bioenergy among others.



Regional Central Banks' Staff Trained on Strengthening Financial Inclusion

The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) has developed a User's Guide on application of econometric software to cross sectional data using financial inclusion data and its implications on financial stability. The Guide was presented to delegates from Member States for validation during a virtual workshop conducted by the CMI from 21 – 25 February 2022.

The Guide aims at strengthening the skills of researchers in analysing cross-sectional data, to inform policy makers on enhancing financial inclusion regarding access and use of finance as well as its quality and impact. It presents practicing researchers with a simplified practical exposition of the Financial Access Household Survey Data set, and application of econometric software for analysis.

"Such analysis will help to better understand the financial access landscape regionally and internationally and improve the measurement of financial inclusion by COMESA member countries," said the Director of CMI, Mr

Ibrahim Zeidy when he addressed the participants.

Thirty delegates from 10 Central Banks from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Egypt, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sudan and Zambia, attended the workshop.

Besides the validation of the guide, the workshop also equipped the users with econometric tools for the analysis of survey datasets as well as insights on the development of survey instruments and how they can be replicated in other research areas.

Participants had practical experience of FinAccess Household Survey Data with emphasis on hands-on application using STATA econometric software.

Other outcomes included building the capacity of Central Bank staff and policy analysts on how to successfully roll out surveys and carry out analysis using modern statistical software for policy, enhancing the implementation of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan and knowledge-sharing.

Business Council and Federation of German Industries Forge Partnership

COMESA Business Council (CBC) and the Federation of German Industries (BDI) have signed a partnership agreement to implement programmes to strengthen CBC's business development services, enhance communication and strengthen membership engagement towards business advocacy.

The overall long-term objective is to facilitate the inclusive participation of COMESA's Private Sector in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The signing took place on 9 February 2022 marking the beginning of the partnership expected to run until 2024.

"...with this partnership, we are looking forward to strengthening our business development activities, increasing our membership, and enhancing the private sector's engagement in pushing forward the implementation of the AfCFTA," CBC Chief Executive Officer, Ms Sandra Uwera said.

BDI Head of Sub-Saharan Africa Mr Matthias Wachter said: "We are honoured to partner with CBC and look forward to working very closely over the next three years towards strengthening the institution's capacity to contribute to the enhancement of intra-regional trade, within the regional integration agenda."

The CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector in COMESA while the BDI is an umbrella organization of German industry and industry related services. It speaks on behalf of 36 sector associations and represents the interest of German Industries in and outside Germany.



Participants in the validation workshop in Nairobi

Blue Economy Statistical System Account Developed

The COMESA region is set to benefit from the development of the Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account. This is meant to help the region get appropriate data on marine fisheries and promote efficient use of fisheries resources.

Working with ECOFISH, a programme funded under the European Development Fund (EDF11) Cross Regional envelope, several Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have partnered to bring fisheries economic data closer to reality.

Among other issues, ECOFISH focuses on development of the Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account (BEFSA) which aims at measuring the blue economy's contribution to the national output. COMESA is the lead institution on this component and work has been ongoing on development of a framework.

To this effect, a regional workshop was convened in Nairobi, Kenya 22 – 23 February 2022 to validate the draft framework of the Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account for Eastern Africa-Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region.

Speaking at the opening of the event, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe stated that under-achievement of the blue economy in COMESA and internationally had spurred a lot of work around development of frameworks that include this sector in narratives of sustainable development.

"In COMESA as in the rest of Africa, information with regards to blue economy is scarce. For instance, to this day almost all fish captured is mostly subsistence and traditional artisanal and it remains without specific and socio-economic information to enable its sustainable management," she said in a statement presented by the Head of Statistics at COMESA Secretariat, Mr Themba Munalula.

For that reason, under the productive integration pillar of the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025, catalyzing inclusive sustainable transformation of the blue economy is one of the key objectives.

COMESA Member States on their part have recognised that regional integration

without a deliberate targeting of interventions on the blue economy will not yield an all-inclusive developmental result.

COMESA will lead the statistical system initiative for the region, in partnership with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA), Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO), East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as the Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC).



In COMESA as in the rest of Africa, information with regards to blue economy is scarce. For instance, to this day almost all fish captured is mostly subsistence and traditional artisanal and it remains without specific and socio-economic information to enable its sustainable management," Chileshe Kapwepwe



Journalists attending workshop with staff from the COMESA Secretariat led by Dr Kipyego Cheluget (2nd left seated) Dr Chris Onyango, Director of Trade (seated right) and Ms Mshuka Kamwela, EDF Programme Manager (left) and a representative of Ministry of Trade.

Zambian Media Enlisted in Projects' Communications

Media practitioners in Zambia have been enlisted to play a role in supporting public communication of the regional integration programmes being implemented jointly by the government, COMESA and the European Union.

About 40 journalists comprising of editors and reporters participated separately in a two-day sensitization programme conducted on 21 – 24 February 2022 in Lusaka. The event was organized by the Zambia Border Posts Upgrade Project (ZBPUP) funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) under the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry.

Speakers at the forum stressed the role of the media in advancing regional integration by reporting on the different programmes and activities on integration.

"As COMESA, we do always recognize and cherish the important role played by media houses and individual journalists to COMESA's integration agenda," Assistant Secretary General Dr Kipyego Cheluget said. "So important is the role of

media that we have established a unique programme, the COMESA Media Award held annually since 2009."

The award aims to promote and encourage reporting of the COMESA regional integration programmes and recognize journalists whose works contribute to the integration agenda.

He urged the media to track implementation of various trade agreements/protocols signed by Member States to ensure accountability by governments to the regional integration agenda.

"The media can also assist in engagement of legislators to facilitate enactment of relevant trade related laws and regulations to drive integration issues in the region," he noted.

"Focus more and give prominence to success stories like the benefits of integration and less on challenges that may create negative public perceptions on such important development initiatives."

During the training several presentations were made on different topics including on the ZBPUP – its targets, successes and challenges, the COMESA EDF 11 programme and its status of implementation, the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM), Opportunities and challenges of Zambia's participation in regional integration, the communication and visibility requirement under COMESA and the EU among many other topics.



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L-R: COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe, AUC Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat and EAC Secretary General Dr. Peter Mathuki display copies of the Protocol

COMESA, AU Sign Protocol to Consolidate Relations

COMESA has signed the Protocol on Relations between the African Union Commission (AUC) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) meant to consolidate relations. Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the Protocol in Addis Ababa Ethiopia on 4 February 2022 on the margins of the AU Assembly of Heads

of State and Governments. The Protocol aims to among other things, to formalise, consolidate and promote closer cooperation among the RECs and between them and the AU through coordination and harmonisation of their policies, measures, programmes and activities in all fields and sectors in line with the principle of subsidiarity and

complementarity.

Other regional economic communities that have already signed the Protocol include the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This Protocol entered into force on 10 November 2021 after being signed by the Chairperson of the Commission and three chief executives of three RECs.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission HE Moussa Faki Mahamat and East African Community (EAC) Secretary General Dr. Peter Mutuku Mathuki witnessed the signing of the Protocol.

Madam Kapwepwe was in Ethiopia to attend the 40th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and the 35th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments of the African Union. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government met physically for the first time in two years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Malawi Permanent Representative to COMESA Accredited...

Continued from page 13

conveyor belts between the regional trade bloc and Member States.

The two discussed areas of mutual interest including the need for ratification of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA). Eleven countries have so far ratified the TFTA and only three more ratifications are needed before the Agreement enters into force.

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

The TFTA is a strategy mooted by Africa's leading economic blocs- COMESA-EAC-SADC to strengthen their

cause for economic growth through joint planning, design, coordination, and implementation of policies and programmes amongst themselves. Malawi signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement on 10th June 2015.



Stakeholders in the seed industry during the launch of COMSHIP in Tunisia

COMSHIP Launched in Tunisia to Widen Regional Seed Market

Tunisia is the 19th COMESA Member State to launch the Regional Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP). The overall goal of COMSHIP is to implement the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations which are expected to enhance seed production, reliability, improve seed trade including increasing the competitiveness of the seed industry in the southern and east African region.

The launch was facilitated by the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), a specialized agency of COMESA mandated by Heads

of State and Governments to integrate smallholder farmers into domestic, regional and international markets through an improved policy environment, expanded market facilities, services and capacity building.

Speaking in Tunis during the launch in December 2021, Director of Agriculture and Industry at COMESA Secretariat Mrs. Providence Mavubi commended Tunisia for the commitment to regional integration programmes adding that other Member States would benefit from that country's expertise in agriculture and livestock farming.

publications on the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulation and it allowed local delegates to develop a national roadmap on the alignment of the Tunisian seed laws to the regional seed harmonisation regulations.

The participants agreed to conduct wider consultative meetings with the stakeholders such as farmer organisations, civil society, non-governmental organisations dealing with seed production and marketing, seed companies, agro-industry and institutions involved in research among others.

Tunisia is expected to adopt the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations by June 2022.

The COMSHIP is a framework that describes the implementation plans and modalities required to effectively implement, monitor and ensure compliance and execution within the COMESA Member States.

Tunisia joins Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Eswatini, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



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We commend the government of Tunisia's commitment to COMESA's agenda and we will continue to encourage exchange visits with other Member States in order for the region to learn from each other and develop the agriculture sector for the benefit of its people," Mrs. Prudence Mavubi.

"We commend the government of Tunisia's commitment to COMESA's agenda and we will continue to encourage exchange visits with other Member States in order for the region to learn from each other and develop the agriculture sector for the benefit of its people," Mrs. Mavubi said.

The event in Tunis also enabled the COMESA team to create awareness on COMSHIP and the Seed Trade Harmonisation regulations, highlight the status of COMSHIP at regional and national level, distribute the



Regional Infrastructure Financing Project set for Roll-out

The Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility (RIFF), an investment financing arm funded by the World Bank to support infrastructure development in the COMESA region rolled-out its activities for 2022 in February 2022 with a three-day orientation workshop in Siavonga south of Lusaka.

The event enabled the Project Implementation Unit of the RIFF to discuss the work plan and review the guidelines, processes and procedures that apply to the World Bank and COMESA Secretariat.

The objective of the interaction was to enable officers and partner divisions and units from COMESA Secretariat to have a common understanding of the RIFF implementation plan and the linkages. RIFF was launched in August 2020 and has three components which include a US\$325 million credit facility for project

and infrastructure finance. Long term finance will be provided to infrastructure projects that meet the development impact criteria, administered by the Trade and Development Bank (TDB).

The second Component is the COVID Infrastructure Sector Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Response with US\$75 million which will facilitate access to debt financing to renewable energy. It will support SMEs such as the Solar Home-Systems (SHS) operating in Southern and Eastern Africa to provide power to households. This is also administered by the TDB.

The last Component is Technical Assistance set at US\$25 million with sub-components such as Capacity Building. The TDB will benefit from this sub-component by receiving expertise to support the bank's strategic decision to scale up project and infrastructure

finance and strengthen its capacity on environmental & social safeguards.

The second sub-component is Capacity Building and Technical Assistance to COMESA Secretariat pegged at US\$ 10 million and will support the enabling environment for private infrastructure finance with a focus on building a regional off-grid energy market.

It will enable the COMESA Secretariat to support the harmonisation of policies and regulations for cross-border infrastructure, trade and investment, regional integration activities on the off-grid energy sector and market development activities in in Fragile Conflict and Violence (FCV) countries.

COMESA Countries Set for Elections in 2022



Voting in Zambia General Election, 2021

Four COMESA countries namely Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Libya are expected to hold presidential and general elections this year.

The first of these is Somalia which was expected to hold presidential elections in February 2022 using a relatively complex indirect system. The presidential election would be conducted after the completion of the legislative elections where clan elders would elect 275 members of parliament who will constitute the lower house. These legislators will in turn pick the president.

The next is the Libyan presidential election, scheduled for June 2022. According to the High National Electoral Commission (HNEC), 2.8 million voters registered to participate in the election. Holding the presidential election is part of the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement that will move the country from the transition phase and pave way for long-term political stability.

The Kenya General elections are scheduled for 9 August 2022 which

will include elections for the President and Members of Parliament as well as Senators, Governors and Women Representatives for the 47 Counties and Members of County Assemblies. The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has already published the calendar of activities in preparation for the elections. Presidential and legislative elections for Sudan are expected to be held in December 2022.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the four major elections are expected to be held normally with the full observance of the health guidelines.

According to the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) experts at COMESA Secretariat, it is important for COMESA countries to continuously hold elections in line with the existing legal and policy frameworks. This, in the long term, will strengthen democratic culture at both national and regional levels. Regular democratic elections contribute to the consolidation of democracy and enhance good governance.

Since the third wave of multiparty politics in the 1990s, most countries in COMESA have organized and held regular elections.

“Certainly, periodic elections in the region have given impetus to democratic governance and the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region,” GPS Head of Unit Ms Elizabeth Mutunga said.

COMESA has been supporting Member States in the electoral process and has so far observed 30 elections. Through the COMESA Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) Forum, COMESA has provided training to EMBs. The EMB forum was established as a platform for Member States to share experiences and benefit from peer support from each other. Through elections observation missions, COMESA provides practical recommendations that have, in the long term, informed key reforms in Member States and improved the quality of elections.



RAERESA Gets US\$1.5m for Harmonisation of Electricity Regulations and Improving Cross Border Power Trade

The Board of the African Development Bank (AfDB) has approved a grant of US\$1.5m to advance intra-regional harmonization of electricity regulations and drive cross-border power trading in the COMESA region. It will be implemented through COMESA's energy regulatory arm, the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA).

The two-year project seeks to provide tools for harmonizing regulatory frameworks to facilitate the smooth and timely completion, utilization and operation of regional energy infrastructure—a move that is expected to further enhance regional electricity trade, which is critical to COMESA noted RAERESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr Mohamedain El-Seif.

He added that the grants will fund technical assistance to promote the development and adoption of regional electricity regulatory principles, enhance capacity to monitor utility performance

across the region, conduct a cross-border analysis of electricity tariffs, and develop a centralized database management system in both blocs.

The project comprises four components including Elaboration and Adoption of Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) and Key Performance Indicators for COMESA. It will involve technical assistance to COMESA for the adoption of regulatory performance indicators from the Bank's flagship Electricity Regulatory Index for Africa (ERI), contextualization and adoption of same and application of the adopted indicators for monitoring uniform regulatory performance in the region by RAERESA.

Component 2 will involve technical assistance to COMESA for the adoption and application of uniform Key Performance Indicators for monitoring utility performance across the region and support the collection and reporting on these indicators.

The project will also assist the region to have a harmonized comparison of electricity tariffs and develop a Cost Reflectivity Assessment Framework Tool (CRAFT). This component will involve technical assistance to COMESA to undertake a comparative analysis of electricity tariffs and drivers of tariffs across the electricity value chain in the region and developing a cost reflectivity assessment tool to track progress made by countries in migrating their tariffs towards cost reflectivity levels.

The fourth component is the Development of Information and Database Management System (IDBMS). This will involve technical assistance to RAERESA to develop a centralized database management system that will provide a platform for collecting data from member countries, store and disseminate regulatory and other relevant energy information.



Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Projects Wraps-Up

The Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) launched five-years ago to deepen small-scale cross-border trade in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda with a special focus on women and young people closed in December 2021.

Financially backed by the World Bank, the GLTFP was launched in 2016 with USD\$26 million meant to help increase the capacity for commerce and reduce the costs faced by traders, especially small-scale and women traders, at targeted locations in the borderlands.

Initially set to cover 2016-2020, the project got a one year no cost extension which ended on 31 December 2021. During its lifespan, the GLTFP supported improvements to infrastructure and facilities at priority border posts in the named countries. These border posts were identified and proposed by the authorities based on traffic volumes, importance to supply chains of goods traded most across the

borders, relevance to conflict dynamics in the region and the poor state of infrastructure to support cross-border trade.

The border points also had security of small-scale traders improved, particularly through separate or demarcated lanes for safe passage of pedestrian traffic, lighting and cameras, and providing warehousing for traders to safely store their goods and minimize losses in their supply chains.

In addition, support had been provided to redesign access roads in the control zones and to provide parking facilities for vehicles as well as strengthening IT infrastructure and connectivity for customs and other agencies' management and processing systems (including cross-border connectivity).

To wrap up the project, the project's Regional Coordination Committee, trade experts from COMESA Secretariat and customs authorities held a four-day

meeting in in Goma, DRC in December 2021 to discuss strategic issues on implementation of the project.

The delegates were informed that the GLTFP has realized several important achievements including the launch of Joint Border Committees at all the 12 project borders and trained members in various aspects of border management.

The project also supported bilateral meetings to deal with outstanding issues that impact on the Simplified Trade Regime (STR).

The meeting also discussed the STR and the new trading model adopted by small-scale cross-border traders in which they are consolidating goods rather than trading as individuals. This approach was necessitated after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Participants in the regional dialogue on fish

COMESA Conducts Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Fish Trade

COMESA Secretariat through the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), is working on strategies to improve and strengthen participation of COMESA's SMEs involved in fisheries and fish product value chains in the regional and international markets. This will be done through sustained supplies, improved trade efficiencies, enhanced value chains and quality of products.

To actualize this, the Secretariat conducted a regional dialogue meeting in December 2021 on enhancing the participation of fisheries producers in sustainable regional and global value chains from the private sector small and medium scale group.

The regional dialogue was meant to strengthen the capacity of producers, producer organizations and other value chain actors to enhance competitiveness, value addition and market access, identify major challenges and agree on the way forward to support small and medium scale fish producers to improve their competitiveness and market access.

The delegates also agreed on the importance of establishing intra-regional fish supply chains and link small and

medium scale fish producers especially women, youth and the vulnerable groups of the society to regional and international markets.

Participants from the public and private sector made presentations and further discussed that women do participate in all parts of fish food systems but are most visible in post-harvest processing and trade of fish and are vital to the region's food and nutrition security. They indicated that the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying responses had resulted in substantial disruptions to demand, production, distribution and labour in fisheries, aquaculture and food systems. These disruptions have severely impacted women processors and traders.

RECAMP is funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and is focusing on enhancing the competitiveness and market access for three target value chains which include horticulture, agro processing and leather and leather products.

Speaking at the meeting, Kenya's Principal Secretary in the State Department for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Blue Economy Dr Francis Owino and the Director of Industry and

Agriculture at COMESA Mrs. Providence Mavubi underscored the importance of fisheries and aquaculture in ensuring a consistent supply of animal protein in the form of fish and fish products. They called for the stepping up of efforts to promote domestic and regional trade, by enhancing competitiveness of products, facilitation/smoothening of cross border trade as well as ensuring wider participation and empowerment of women in the fish trade sector across the region.

The workshop had participation of both the public and private sector from Burundi, Comoros, Kenya, Mauritius, Madagascar, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, and Uganda who included public officers and non-state actors. Further participation was enhanced by regional and continental bodies which included AU-IBAR, EAC, ECOFISH-IOC, and IGAD.

Under the EDF COMESA RECAMP, it is expected that other dialogues on the other two focus value chains; Leather and Leather Products and Horticulture will be held in 2022 to further support the competitiveness and improved business environment and access to markets in all the Member States.



Delegates attending the migration statistics report validation workshop at the COMESA Secretariat

Labour Migration Statistics' Report Developed

The first COMESA labour migration statistics report is set to be published after undergoing review by stakeholders. The report, which is yet to be validated, is aimed at facilitating trade and investment by harnessing the potential of effective migration management in the region.

It is a product of collaboration between COMESA, the Swedish Statistics through the African Union Labour Migration Statistics Programme and the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the Southern Africa Migration Management (SAMM) project. It was prepared following consultations with national and regional statistics' agencies.

The review of the findings of the report which will eventually be part of the COMESA regional migration database was done in March this year by delegates from the 21 COMESA Member States who met in Lusaka, Zambia. This marked a step closer to the realization of a regional database

on migration statistics and information sharing mechanism.

It is also in accordance with the decision of COMESA Ministers responsible for immigration, which was endorsed by the COMESA Council of Ministers and the COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Government.

The report will contribute towards addressing the challenges that face the implementation of the COMESA Visa Protocol and the entry into force of the protocol on free movement of persons, labour, services, right of establishment and right of residence in COMESA, enshrined in Article 164 of the COMESA Treaty.

At the validation workshop, the delegates also discussed the future of labour migration statistics in COMESA, by exploring the need for technical support to align national data with international statistical standards and support coordination and information dissemination within and between

Member States.

Addressing the delegates, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget, urged Member States to mainstream statistics into national and regional strategic development plans to contribute to effective decision and policy formulation in the governance systems.

"With proper labour migration statistics in the region, it will be possible to dispel myths that migrants come to take away jobs of nationals," he noted.

Speaking at the event, Dr Nikolaus Koutakis, Advisor on Labour Migration at Statistics, Sweden said:

"The support to improved statistical capacity is part of Swedish work globally, aimed at ensuring a world where everyone counts, and no one is left behind."



Zambia stakeholders meeting on the joint Zambia- Zimbabwe industrial park

Common Agro-Industrial Park for Zambia- Zimbabwe is on Course

The Governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe with support from COMESA Secretariat, the United Nations Economic for Africa (UNECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) are working on modalities to establish a Joint Agro-Industrial Park.

The proposed project is expected to increase the availability of industrial goods and services for the bilateral market and expand intra- regional trade in manufacturing. It will help develop industrialists that would acquire ownership and management of the industries, develop appropriate skills and knowledge in industries, strengthen collaboration and bolster networking among policy makers, regulators, industry and academia.

Towards this end, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the two countries in March 2021, which marked the launch of the first ever joint industrialization cooperation programme between the two.

On March 30, 2022, officials from the Zambian government and partners

met in Lusaka and Livingstone cities to sensitize stakeholders, comprising of the private sector, academia, research institutions, civil society, COMESA Secretariat, UNECA, AfDB and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) on the progress. A similar workshop was held in Zimbabwe in 2021.

The industrial park will be partially located on each side of the border. It will prioritise processing of value chains such as cotton, maize, wheat, rice, soya beans, sugar, livestock (leather and dairy) and horticulture. These sectors provide extensive linkages with the manufacturing sector particularly in the processed food sub-sector which is key in promoting industrial activities.

The project is aligned with the COMESA Industrial Strategy, which Member States have adopted to create a globally competitive environment-friendly, diversified industrial sector which is based on innovation and manufacturing as tools for transforming regional resources into sustainable wealth and prosperity for

all.

The meeting encouraged the formation of special economic zones (SEZs) as they have a potential to be used as platforms for regional and sub-regional markets and inputs supply.

Dr Kipyego Cheluget, COMESA's Assistant Secretary General for Programmes informed the meeting that COMESA has provided the framework of managing special economic zones and industrial parks to make them sustainable, inclusive and competitive.

"I commend the governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe for the political commitment to support the implementation of this programme," he said in a statement presented by the Director of Industry and Agriculture, Mrs Providence Mavubi.

The meeting was also addressed by the Zambia Director of Foreign Trade, Mrs Bessie Chelemu representing the Permanent Secretary, Mrs Chawe Chuulu and the UNECA Southern Africa Sub- Regional Office Director, Ms. Eunice Kamwendo.



Disinfecting a cattle pen

COMESA Recognized for its Role in Eradicating Animal Diseases

COMESA is recognized for its role in the control and eradication of diseases to improve animal production and productivity in Africa. Subsequently, a recognition award was presented to COMESA during the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) 70th Anniversary and 10th Anniversary of Rinderpest Eradication Director of Agriculture and Industry, Mrs Providence Mavubi received the award on behalf of the Secretary General of COMESA at the event conducted in Nairobi, Kenya on 18 March 2022.

Since its establishment in 1951 as the Inter-African Bureau of Epizootic Diseases (IBED), AU-IBAR has been pioneering the improvement of animal production and productivity and control and eradication of Transboundary Animal Diseases in partnership with COMESA and other regional economic communities.

Among recent partnerships with COMESA are the implementation of

the Reinforcing Veterinary Governance (VET-GOV) and strengthening institutional capacity to enhance governance of the Fisheries Sector in Africa (FishGov 1 & 2).

Receiving the award, Mrs Mavubi stressed the need to transform livestock agriculture from subsistence extensive system which has been suffering from recurrent drought due to climate change and human made calamities to more intensive and market targeted agriculture.

"In Africa we have land, human power and conducive agroecology, thus we need to open up and attract investment from where there has been a limitation," she said. "We also need to use the opportunities in our continent to trade more among ourselves using the provisions of RECs and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) opportunities."

Currently, AU Member States have increasingly focused their attention

to the agricultural transformation, by enhancing livestock and fisheries value chains and expanding agro-processing and opening up their economies to domestic and international investments.

The COMESA director called for strengthening of regional capacities especially on development and harmonization of sanitary measures and compliance to international standards. This is critical in the phase of increasing challenges of climate change and its effect on the incidence of emerging and re-emerging animal diseases of trans-boundary nature.

Among the key partners in the implementation of the continental livestock development programme are the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and World Health Organization.



Assistant Secretary General in charge of Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman with AGRA Vice President Apollos Nwafor with technical staff during a courtesy call

AGRA, COMESA to Collaborate in Promoting Agriculture Productivity

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and COMESA will renew their commitment to enhance the production of food to ensure food security and regional food balance. The aim of this commitment is to eradicate poverty by the year 2030.

This follows a visit by AGRA's deputy president in charge of policy and state capability Apollos Nwafor to COMESA Secretariat on 30 March 2022 and subsequent talks with the Assistant Secretary General - Administration and Finance in COMESA, Dr Dev Haman.

Mr Nwafor said AGRA is mobilizing at least \$500 million in the next five years to directly increase incomes and improve food security for nine million farm households. This will be drawn directly from its activities, its grantees and partners, to increase productivity and access to markets and finance. It is part of the new AGRA Strategic Framework 2030 to scale-up,

accelerate and create conditions for agricultural transformation.

"Four years into our five-year strategy, integration is at the heart of everything AGRA does, such as multiple systems working together to deliver fertilizer, seeds and knowledge to smallholder farmers," he added.

The rapidly rising demand for food, he noted, fueled by population and income growth, provides major opportunities for agri-food systems to accelerate employment creation, boost continental trade, strengthen resilience and transform African economies. He said the value of Africa's food market is projected to increase from US\$313 billion in 2010 to US\$1 trillion in 2030.

Dr Haman urged AGRA to extend their services to other countries which have potential for agricultural growth. He cited Madagascar and Zambia as some of those whose agricultural productivity

have huge potential if boosted.

"Zambia is only using 14% of land for farming and if they used even 40% of the land, they will be able to feed the entire region because they have good climate. But lack of investments in good and climate smart farming practices compromises their productivity," Dr Haman said.

He said COMESA was ready and capable of facilitating the production and distribution of agricultural products to markets through programmes that support these activities such as transport, and sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS).

Currently, AGRA is working with 15 countries in Africa and aims to work with 30 by 2030.

Africa Making Positive Strides in Democracy

COMESA Secretariat represented by officials from the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS Unit) participated in a four-day symposium organised by the African Union Commission (AUC) to exchange views on efforts to be used to address the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government on the continent.

The symposium held in Accra Ghana, was attended by representatives of Member States, members of the AU Peace and Security Council, representatives of the AU Organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) including the African Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Key on the agenda was the need to discuss and understand the resurgence of unconstitutional change of governments in Africa, the underlying structural drivers, the emerging threats and security implications.

After reviewing and deliberating the recent developments on the continent, the symposium acknowledged that significant efforts have been made in addressing the situation of unconstitutional changes of governments through different measures. It was noted that Member States had made a fair effort in promoting democracy and good governance including through holding free, fair and transparent elections and upheld term limits contained in the respective constitutions.

The symposium however acknowledged that there are emerging challenges that need concerted and collective efforts to address. It was pointed out that Africa still faces complex challenges particularly gaps in governance and security challenges such as terrorism and violent extremism, illicit circulation of arms and weapons, corruption, illicit financial flows, human trafficking, outbreaks of epidemics and pandemics, impact of climate change, youth unemployment and a slow process of

ratification of AU and RECs instruments.

These challenges continue to hamper continental and regional efforts to address socio-economic governance, peace and security issues including the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of governments.

According to the ACCRA Declaration issued at the end of the symposium on 17 March 2022, the delegates agreed that in responding to the challenges, it was critical to ensure political commitment and active engagement of all Member States and its citizens in finding solutions under the mantra 'African solutions to African problems'.

The symposium called for all necessary measures to be undertaken to strengthen AU/RECs common position on peace and security issues and addressing people's concerns to ensure that the root causes to unconstitutional change of governments are addressed and resolved amicably. In response to this, COMESA will enhance the implementation of its early warning system, which is designed to identify structural and root factors to various aspects of vulnerability, including vulnerability in democratic governance.

COMESA, which, in response to several policy organs decisions, prioritises partnerships with the AU and other RECs, will continue to make deliberate efforts to advance the common positions that are reached on matters of peace and security.

The Declaration also called on leaders to fully utilise the digital revolution and enhance effective communication between the State and its citizens, particularly the youth.

The Symposium called on leaders to continue creating a conducive environment for the effective participation of women and youth in the peace and development process at the national, regional and continental levels.

Businesswomen Brace for a Stake in AfCFTA Opportunities

Regional businesswomen are building their capacities to enable them to participate in trading opportunities that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) brings forth. Working with the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB), national chapters have come up with capacity building initiatives for their members.

On 22nd March 2022, the National Chamber of Tunisian Women in Business (CNFCE) organized a meeting with officials from the AfCFTA Secretariat and trade experts in Tunisia. Its objective was to discuss modalities to reinforce their capacities and structures towards negotiations and the implementation of the continental trade regime.

At the meeting, it was agreed that COMFWB Tunisia chapter will engage women in business in the trade processes of the AfCFTA and work on boosting other businesswomen who have been left behind from various sectors of the economy. The meeting urged trade policy makers in Tunisia to come up with functional procedures for trans-border trade between the country and the rest of Africa.

A focus group for Tunisia-Africa Trade was created during the meeting, comprising of women entrepreneurs, to ensure inclusion of women and micro small and medium enterprises in national initiatives relating to trade under the AfCFTA regime.

Tunisia became a member of COMESA in October and later joined the AfCFTA after depositing its ratification on 27 November 2020.

India, Canada Seek Partnerships

Envoys visit COMESA,
discuss areas of collaboration

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

India's High Commissioner to Zambia His Excellency Shri Ashok Kumar met the SG on 21 March 2022 at the Secretariat. He said his government was developing an action plan to enhance collaboration with COMESA in industrial development, drugs and Pharmaceuticals, ICTs, energy trade, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Science and technology and Agriculture. The action plan will also focus on capacity building in the 21 Member States.

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

Kumar



Nakonde border post

EU Supports Construction of Market at Tunduma Border Post

The European Union through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) working with COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Tanzania will construct a market at the Tunduma One Stop Border Post to enhance cross-border trade.

This infrastructure development is part of 15 million Euros Cross Border Trade Initiative Programme aimed at increasing formal small-scale cross-border trade flows in the COMESA/tripartite region, leading to higher revenue collection for governments at the borders as well as increased security and higher incomes for small-scale cross-border traders.

The programme also covers implementation of the design, policy and instruments aimed at facilitating small scale cross border trade, reducing corruption, bribery and harassment at the borders, building the capacity of institutions representing small cross border traders and better data collection and monitoring for small scale cross border trade.

Infrastructure Expert at COMESA Secretariat Engineer Moreblessing Loxton conducted a factfinding mission to Tunduma Border to inspect and assess the land identified for

the market, confirm the findings and recommendations from the feasibility study and develop an implementation plan.

During the mission, the team visited the site for the construction and recommended that the design layout of the market be revised to increase the number of trading spaces from 400 to 700 to accommodate the traders. In view of the global agenda on climate change, the team also proposed that the design of the border market should include the use of sustainable energy such as solar power, recycling of waste including ablution waste, kitchen waste and digestible agriculture among others.

Authorities from the Tunduma Town Council (Mr Philimon Magesa) and Tanzania Revenue Authority (Mr John Micah) both described the market as important and a welcome development to the community in Tunduma.

“There is high anticipation among the community and the construction of this market is expected to transform the livelihoods of the people of Tunduma as well as boost the country's economy,” Mr Magesa said.



Above: Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (L) and Indian High Commissioner to Zambia Shri Ashok Kumar



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

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

In her welcoming remarks, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe thanked India for extending her support to the COMESA region. She added that the Member States of COMESA need India to help develop smart infrastructure that will connect them to the seaports it has the technical know-how on most sectors

including energy, infrastructure and Telemedicine.

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

The two agreed that once the Memorandum of Cooperation is renewed, COMESA and India will conduct joint market research to

support the SMEs. She however urged the High Commissioner to engage the COMESA Business Council to develop business opportunities that will contribute to economic development of the COMESA region.

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

Meanwhile, Canada's High Commissioner to Zambia and Tanzania who is also special Representative to COMESA, Pamela O'Donnell visited the COMESA Secretariat on 15th March 2022, where she was received by Assistant Secretaries General for Administration and Finance and for Programmes Dr Dev Haman and Dr Kipyego Cheluget, respectively.

It was her first visit whose aim was to learn about COMESA programmes and levels of implementation in the various Member States. She expressed Canada's willingness to support the COMESA region in various sectors of development including agriculture and climate change mitigation, ICT, trade facilitation, renewable energy production and trade facilitation.

Dr. Haman, expressed COMESA's commitment to being a highly competitive region in the global landscape.

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



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