

COMESA Research Forum: Call for Comprehensive Research on Pharmaceuticals



There is need to undertake comprehensive research on pharmaceuticals production and trade flows in the COMESA region to determine trade and competitiveness opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry. This was one of the recommendations from the four-day 9th COMESA Annual Research Forum that closed on Thursday 15 September in Egypt.

The forum which attracted eminent scholars, researchers, academics, regional and international experts from the public and private sector, stressed the need to strengthen mobilization of resources to promote science, technology and innovation activities. This was intended to build resilience in line with the theme of the forum: "Enhancing Business Competitiveness and Resilience to Boost Intra-COMESA Trade".

Eight research papers based on emerging topical issues in economics, trade and regional integration at continental and global level were presented for review. They included a study on the trade implications of the cross-border data transfer laws/policies in the COMESA region.

Conducted by Mr. Adam Willie from Zimbabwe titled 'Cross Border Data Exchange under the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA): Implications on Intra-Regional Trade', the study found that 43 percent of Member States do not have national data protection laws. This acts as a barrier to data flow. The study also established that the presence of data protection laws increases intra-COMESA trade.

"There is also heterogeneity in data protection laws in the region, a situation which hurts intra-COMESA trade," said Mr Willie. "Therefore, harmonization of cross border data flow regulations is critical in boosting intra-COMESA trade."

Another study presented was on the status of digitalization in the COMESA region which investigated the effect of digitalization on intra-COMESA trade over the 2011 to 2020 period. The study by Mr. Shingirirai Mashura from University of Seychelles found that digitalization has a positive effect on intra-COMESA. According to the researcher, a 10 percent increase in e-commerce internet

usage increases intra-COMESA exports by 0.63 percentage points while imports increase by 0.22 percentage points.

Another study by Mr. Douglas Chikabwi from Zimbabwe focused on the effects that sanitary and phytosanitary standards and technical barriers to trade (TBT) had on intra-COMESA agricultural exports. The study found that annually, the COMESA region is estimated to lose USD 74.4 million from trading of agriculture raw materials alone because of SPS and TBT policy measures.

A related study was presented by Mr. Stein Masunda of Zimbabwe on the effects of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) on Agricultural Trade Performance in COMESA. He found that on one hand, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures are export-enhancing whilst TBT measures negatively affect intra-COMESA agricultural export volumes.

Other research papers presented were on Logistics Performance and Intra-COMESA Exports, by James Ochieng from the Kenya

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Six Innovations Presented at COMESA Research Forum



Six innovations were showcased at the 9th COMESA Research Forum held in Cairo, Egypt from 12 – 15 September 2022. The innovations will be considered for the COMESA Innovation Awards, which are aimed at recognizing and celebrating individuals and institutions that use science, technology and innovation to advance the regional integration agenda.

Among them were cooking gas derived from plastic waste, a vacuum packaging machine for animal feeds and a health monitoring bracelet. Other innovations presented were on the optimization of aquaculture production performance as a food production system, provision of healthcare remotely by means of telecommunications technology (telehealth) and a solution to immuno-compromised health conditions.

Presenting his Mega Gas Alternative Energy innovation, Mr. Peter Mwangi Njeri of Kenya said his innovation was targeted at low-income families through clean and affordable cooking energy converted from plastic waste into fuel. "Our product is 50% cheaper compared to Liquefied Petroleum Gas, cleaner compared to fossil fuels such as charcoal and firewood. Our gas also has a higher calorific value compared to LPG gas in the market," he said.

He added that by converting plastic waste into clean cooking gas, the innovation mitigates environmental degradation by preventing plastic waste from getting into the natural environment. Currently his company is recycling about 70 tons of plastic waste every month and plans to scale up to 250 tons a month.

"This means that, unlike other solutions that repurpose plastics and only extend their lifecycle, we reuse plastics in a way that has the potential of eliminating them entirely," Mr Njeri said.

Mr. Douglas Mwangi of Kenya, the developer of the health bracelet told the forum that his device helps to connect the user to medical specialists and can call the nearest ambulances at only \$1 a month. Currently, 400 devices are in use in Kenya and connected to 54 ambulance providers with a scale-up target of linkage to 650 hospitals.

Presenting her Vacuum Silage Packaging Machine, Ms. Patience Mueni a 4th year environmental scientist student at Kenyatta University in Kenya, said the uniqueness of her concept is in the localization of mechanization

processes to package and preserve silage by small holder farmers. The machine is intended to eliminate the traditional poor packaging methods while ensuring quality packaging for longer fodder preservation periods.

The COMESA Research Forum provides an avenue for the innovators to network and commercialize their innovations. After the review, the successful innovators will be recognized and awarded during the next Summit of COMESA Heads of State and Government to support them in promoting their innovations/ products.

COMESA received eight innovation concepts following a call for innovations early this year. These were reviewed in collaboration with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD). Out of these, three innovation concepts met the prerequisite criteria and were selected for showcasing during the 9th Annual Research Forum. The other three innovations: on aquaculture and health were received from AUDA-NEPAD.



Central Banks Undergo Training to Strengthen Financial System

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Fifty-one economists from 12 Central Banks in the COMESA region have been trained in 'Analysis of Payments System, Banking Interconnectedness and Systemic Risk using Network Analysis Framework'. The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) organized the training to enhance the implementation of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan.

During the five days of training from 5-9 September, the participants were taken through the banking system interconnectedness, for example, looking at a relationship which is created among banks through financial transactions such as borrowing and lending from each other, linkages in their payment systems and exposure to a common economic sector among others.

Greater interconnectedness among banks means that stress from one bank tend to spread more rapidly and extensively across the financial system, leading to reduced provision of financial services such as lending to the real economy.

The virtual training exposed the participants to a step-by-step approach in the deployment of Network Framework to the assessment and analysis of banking and payments system interconnectedness and systemic risk using the COMESA money market data.

CMI Director Mr Ibrahim Zeidy said the training was motivated by the concern about possibilities of systemic crisis in the event of shocks to the financial system as a whole due to the interconnectedness of not only the banking sector, but with other non-banking financial institutions and sectors of the economy including the debt market, real estate and the financial markets infrastructure.



Secretary General in Djibouti's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare Mrs Anissa Hassan Badon

Gender Statistics Training for Djibouti

COMESA through the Gender and Social Affairs Division and the Statistics Unit held a five-day national capacity building workshop on gender statistics for regional integration for selected government ministries in Djibouti. The training focused on statisticians and gender focal point persons from the Ministries of Trade and Commerce, Infrastructure, Labour, Gender Equality, Education and the national statistics office who are involved in gender statistics and data users.

Speaking at the opening of the training, Secretary General in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare Mrs Anissa Hassan Badon highlighted the importance of the workshop which was conducted as Djibouti is undertaking its third national population census.

She noted the need to ensure that national policies align with the regional and continental instruments ensuring availability of gender disaggregated data through gender sensitive data collection tools and data analysis mechanisms.

In addition, the workshop was informed that the need for gender statistics has increased over the years owing to the demands of national policies and international conventions that promote gender equality and the importance of establishing a system that produces gender sensitive evidence sustainably.

Trade Statistician at COMESA Secretariat Mr Wilson Chizebuka stated the need for countries to have gender statistics available at the national level because this data plays a crucial role in gender mainstreaming in development and helps governments formulate policies for poverty reduction.

The data can also help governments prioritize certain policies and programs that could help reduce poverty and bring development among its people.

"You can count on the COMESA Secretariat for support and collaboration to ensure that the understanding and knowledge of gender statistics is strengthened among the key officers in Djibouti," Mr Chizebuka said.

Among other issues, the training workshop aimed to assist the country have a draft proposal on the minimum set of gender indicators available, complete the gender assessment questionnaire which will assist in identifying statistics and capacity gaps for Djibouti.

COMESA Secretariat is expected to undertake an end of term evaluation of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) 2018 – 2022 for Djibouti. The Gender Statistics Assessments done at the training are critical input and is seen as a way of engendering the next NSDS for the country.

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Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA); the Impact of Shocks on Intra-COMESA Trade: Case of Kenyan Exports to the Region, by Mr. Rodgers Wanyonyi from Moi University, Kenya; Industrial Clusters, Competitiveness and Intra-COMESA Trade by Kenneth Mahuni from University of Mauritius and The Paradox of Foreign Capital Inflows and State Fragility in COMESA by Dr. Abel E. Ezeoha of Nigeria.

The forum underlined the need for strengthening collaboration between the academia, researchers and policy makers and ensure relevance of research outputs to enhance uptake of policy recommendations. It called for widening of the scope of participation of various disciplines.

Speaking at the closing of the forum, the COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango called on researchers and academicians in the region to take advantage of the annual COMESA Research Forum to make their contribution to the regional integration agenda.

The forum was attended by close to 100 delegates from 19 Member States. Egyptian Assistant Minister for Economic Affairs Mr Ibrahim Seginy opened the forum and urged the use of research and engagement of various stakeholders – the academia, private sector and policy makers in government.

COMESA Research Forum:



Participants at the Annual Research Forum



COMESA Mourns Queen Elizabeth II



Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the Book of Condolences at the British High Commissioner's residence in Lusaka on 16 September 2022 following the death of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

"She will be remembered for her unshakable commitment and dedication to duty and service above self. I take this opportunity on behalf of COMESA and on my own behalf to offer sincere condolences to His Majesty King Charles III, the people of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. May Her Soul Rest in Peace," the message reads in part.



Amb. Kipyego Cheluget

Substandard Solar Equipment a Source of Low Usage

The availability of poor quality solar equipment and products which are out competing Quality Verified (QV) solar equipment and products is leading to lack of reliability and a general mistrust of these products by consumers in the COMESA region.

This has in turn reduced the rate at which both on grid and off grid solar technologies are being adopted, leading to a slowdown in the rate at which modern, reliable, and sustainable energy is being accessed in the region.

Speaking during a stakeholders' consultation workshop on the formulation of COMESA Model Solar Standards, Common Tariff Framework for Solar Products and review of the COMESA

Model Energy Policy in Kigali, Rwanda 19 – 23 September 2022, Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Amb. Kipyego Cheluget stated that most of the solar equipment does not last long to warrant the cost associated with the purchase of the same.

The workshop is being spearheaded by the World Bank-funded Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) project. RIFF is co-implemented by COMESA and the Trade and Development Bank (TDB).

Amb. Cheluget further said the Renewable Energy Off Grid Market Needs Assessment has confirmed the findings of the Open Capital Report of 2020 that stringent tariffs and duty regimes in the COMESA/TDB Member States are one of the barriers for promoting off grid solar.

He added that the tariffs and duties for off grid solar (OGS) products, ranging from 15%-35%, increase company costs and consumer prices, and tax policies are generally not uniformly enforced.

"To overcome the challenges of poor quality products, stringent tariffs and duty regimes are being developed, which with successful domestication by Member States will improve the quality of solar products allowed into the region and will also ease doing business across

borders due to a predictable duty regime," Amb. Cheluget added.

Speaking at the same event, Permanent Secretary in Rwanda's Ministry of Infrastructure Mr Fidele Abimana called on Member States to start manufacturing solar equipment locally in order to reduce the cost for the locals.

He said the COMESA region has enough skills and raw materials to manufacture complete solar equipment.

"Why can't we start manufacturing this equipment locally as a region. We have skilled manpower in the region to develop manufacturing plants so we can bring the cost of the solar equipment down and ensure that we maintain a standard that is acceptable by all," Mr Abimana added.

The RIFF Project is a USD 425 million project covering the COMESA and TDB regions. The project aims to promote economic transformation and regional integration in eastern and southern Africa by extending long-term development capital to catalyze private sector investment into infrastructure.

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COMESA Supports Gender Mainstreaming into the Implementation of Zimbabwe's NDC

At least 30 climate change focal persons from various government ministries and agencies have been trained on Gender Mainstreaming into Zimbabwe's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) implementation. The event was convened by the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry with support from COMESA Secretariat Climate Change Unit from 24-25 August 2022 in Bulawayo. This move marked the commencement of gender mainstreaming in line with the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Gender Action Plan and other climate-related policies and strategies.

The training of trainers enhanced use of the Gender and Climate Change Training Manual in the implementation of Zimbabwe's NDC. Director of Community Development in the Ministry

of Women Affairs, Mr Tariro Chipepera highlighted the importance of having selected government institutions and the private sector embarking on the training on gender mainstreaming into NDC implementation.

Speaking at the training, Ms Naome Chimbetete a gender expert with the Zimbabwe Gender Commission(ZGC), said the engagement came as a fulfilment of the findings on gender analysis which informed the need to consolidate the works of both gender experts and those in the climate change space.

"The workshop was a fulfilment of the key findings on the gender analysis that was conducted which was based on issues of capacity building where it was realized that there is lack of combined skills in gender and climate change."

She added that those in climate change had limited capacity, knowledge and appreciation on gender. Those from gender space had also limited capacity and knowledge with regards to climate change.

COMESA Climate Change Officer, Lwembe Mwale said the regional bloc was delighted to support Zimbabwe's gender mainstreaming into NDCs adding that the efforts will also go a long way in feeding into global efforts currently initiated by regional blocs such as SADC, UN agencies, development partners and climate financing institutions.

"It is our hope that the technical and action points that emerged from the engagement will translate into actual implementation on the ground to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind in the NDC process."

COMESA Diary

Date	Activity/Event	Venue/ Format
19-23 Sept 2022	Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility (RIFF) Consultative Meetings	Kigali Rwanda (Hybrid)
20 Sept 2022	9th Tripartite Sectorial Ministerial Committee and 5th Tripartite Council of Ministers Preparatory Meeting	Virtual
20 – 22 Sept 2022	Training workshop for youth leaders in Ethiopia	AddisAbaba, Ethiopia (physical)
26-27 Sept 2022	Meeting of the Committee of Human Resource Experts	Virtual
27-29 September 2022	Inter-generational Dialogue on youth citizen engagement in Burundi	Bujumbura, Burundi (Physical)
28 Sept 2022	The 1st Annual COMFWB Northern Sub Regional Summit	Tunis, Tunisia (Hybrid)
29 – 30 Sept 2022	COMESA Tunisia Women in Business Days	Tunis, Tunisia
5 October 2022	50MAWSP Stakeholders Webinar	Virtual
10-12 October 2022	The 12th Meeting of the Committee on Trade in Services	Lusaka, Zambia (Hybrid)
11-14 October 2022	Meeting of the Monetary and Exchange Rates Policies Sub-Committee and validation of research papers on monetary and exchange rate policy issues	Nairobi, Kenya
25-28 October 2022	Meeting of the Financial System Development and Stability Sub-Committee and validation of research papers on financial development	Nairobi, Kenya
15-17 November 2022	Meeting of the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks	Cairo, Egypt
20-24 November 2022	Meeting of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Bank	Cairo, Egypt



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