

More Countries keen to join the TFTA



Delegates from the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite region participating in the Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials

There is renewed momentum and willingness by COMESA-EAC-SADC Member States that are yet to ratify instruments of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) to finalize internal consultations and join the eleven countries that have already signed the Agreement. Once 14 countries sign, the TFTA will be set into motion.

As Chair for the COMESA-EAC and SADC Tripartite Taskforce, COMESA has increased engagements with the remaining countries to ratify their instruments to join the TFTA.

"We are engaging and strategically approaching all the remaining member states who are yet to sign to do so as soon as possible so that by mid this year we can have the three or more remaining to bring the countries required to 14 for the Agreement to enter into force," said Dr Christopher Onyango, the Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA Secretariat.

He was speaking to the press on the sidelines of the

17th Meeting of the Tripartite Committee of Senior Officials for Trade, Customs, Finance, Economic Matters and Home/Internal Affairs in Nairobi, Kenya.

The two-day meeting which opened on Wednesday 25 January received reports from the 21st Tripartite Trade Negotiation Forum held at the same venue earlier in the week on progress attained towards operationalizing the TFTA.

Delegates from the Tripartite region gathered in the hybrid meeting to deliberate on the three pillars namely market integration, infrastructure integration and industrial integration which are all critical for a holistic regional integration to take place.

In a speech read on her behalf by Dr Onyango, Chairperson of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Taskforce and COMESA Secretary General Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe called for enhanced transparency in the ongoing tariff negotiations between various parties in order to carry along all Tripartite members in

the decision-making processes.

The meeting discussed the need to enhance resource mobilization towards implementation of the three pillars especially for the industrial or value chain sector which has not received support compared to the other two.

According to Dr Onyango, countries that have advanced in their internal negotiations and consultations include Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Malawi, Lesotho and Comoros.

Speaking at the same meeting, chairperson of the Tripartite and representing Egypt, the current Chair of COMESA, Mr Mohamed Abdallah said the Regional Economic Communities are building blocs of the African Union and therefore the TFTA will complement the African Continental Free Trade Area.



File Photo: Fish traders at the Luangwa Harbor in Zambia

ACTESA Develops a Regional Seed Information System

The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), has developed a Seed Information System which will be used to measure performance of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Implementation Plan (COMSHIP).

The COMESA Seed Information System (COMSIS) will give an opportunity to seed companies with varieties on the COMESA Variety Catalogue to know about business opportunities and market their products in the Member States. For sustainability, all companies using the platform will be required to contribute to the running of the COMSIS software.

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr. John Mukuka revealed in an interview in Lusaka that the COMSIS was developed with support from the European Union (EU) under the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP). The System was validated in August, 2022 by the COMESA Regional Seed Committee.

He disclosed that the COMESA region has a total seed market potential of two million metric tonnes of quality and improved seed; however, only 500,000 metric tonnes of quality and improved seed is currently being produced.

The region has long had the challenge of lack of timely availability of improved seeds and other planting materials at affordable prices both of which are critical for increased productivity for farmers.

"Improved crop varieties can be attained by farmers having state-of-the-art technologies. This can result in higher yields, disease and pest resistance, climate change adaptation, and improved nutrition," he stressed.

Over the last few decades, formal seed systems in the COMESA region have been gradually liberalized, resulting in increased participation of private seed enterprises. On the other hand, access to quality seed at affordable prices to smallholder farmers remains a challenge.

In view of the above, information from COMSIS will be relevant for governments, seed companies, farmers and other industry practitioners and supporters. COMSIS is designed to ensure that the information needs of these stakeholders are effectively understood and incorporated.

Countries Validate Green Pass Implementation Modalities for Fish Trade

Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have validated the implementation modalities of the Green Pass. The Green pass is an initiative meant to attest conformity to specific Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) requirements as the region promotes small scale cross border fish trade.

COMESA Secretariat is implementing the Green Pass Project under the EU funded Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI), with a pilot on fish originating from Luangwa District in Zambia and traded across several borders, including the DRC through the Kasumbalesa border post.

To date, the Secretariat has implemented different activities of the project which includes establishment, procurement and commissioning of a mini-lab facility at Luangwa Border post. The lab contains rapid test kits, weighing scales, a container office and IT equipment.

They have also conducted capacity building of SPS and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Regulatory Authorities for the DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe and fish traders on risk-based food safety and self-regulation.

In addition, stakeholders in the fish value chain have been trained on fish handling, processing, transportation and storage.

As a follow up, a validation workshop was organized in November 2022 in Ndola, Zambia whose

objective was to discuss the proposed Governance Structure of the Green Pass Scheme and agree on the appropriate formation. They also discussed the operational modalities of the scheme within existing national legislation and sustainability of the initiative to ensure continued implementation after the project ends.

During the workshop, SSCBTI Project Team Leader Mr Tasara Muzorori made a presentation on the Simplified Trade Regime Programme under which the Green Pass Initiative is being implemented. He gave a highlight of the main objectives of the STR which include enabling small scale traders to benefit from preferential tariffs of the free trade regime of COMESA, simplifying trade and customs processes and helping in bringing the informal trade into formal trade among others.

"The STR is a good programme and we commend Member States for embracing the Green Pass initiative which aims at facilitating and fast-tracking small-scale cross border trade across with minimum disruptions. Through this initiative, there is a reduction to overall trading costs for small scale traders, through simplification and consolidation of SPS/TBT measures and border verification procedures," Mr Muzorori added.

The Green Pass initiative is targeted at small scale fish traders with goods value at not more than USD 2000.



Tripartite Free Trade Area – Taking Stock of Progress



Delegates from the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Trade Negotiation Forum during their meeting in Nairobi, Kenya

Trade experts from seventeen countries under the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Agreement met in Nairobi, Kenya on 23rd and 24th January 2023 under the Tripartite Trade Negotiation Forum (TTNF) where they reviewed progress made on various thematic areas needed to make the TFTA operational and unlock enhanced trade and investment opportunities. This is intended to benefit the 29 COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Member States.

The 21st Meeting of the TTNF discussed matters from the previous conference which included the exchange of tariff offers, signature and ratification of the TFTA Agreement, the Tripartite Resource Mobilisation Strategy, establishment of the Simplified Trade Regime and the study on trade in services.

They also received reports from the Technical Working Groups on the Rules of Origin, Customs Cooperation, Documentation, Procedures and Transit Instruments, Competition Policy and the Technical Barriers to Trade, Sanitary and Phytosanitary matters and the Non-Tariff Barriers among other issues.

High on the agenda was the need for Member/ Partner States to re-commit themselves to the full operationalization of all the three pillars of the Tripartite namely; Market Integration, Infrastructure Development and Industrial

Development.

Speaking during the opening of the meeting, Principal Secretary in Kenya's State Department for Trade Mr Alfred K'Ombudo commended the eleven countries that have ratified the TFTA and urged the others to do the same.

Mr K'Ombudo expressed optimism that impressive results are expected from the meeting which shall be adopted by the Council of Ministers to avoid fatigue and TFTA anxiety from member/partner states who had ratified the agreement early.

"The immediate target is to secure the three remaining ratifications by the first quarter of this year," said Mr K'Ombudo through Mr Peter Njoroge the Director of International Trade.

The meeting was urged to narrow down on the divergences, implement outstanding obligations and commitments and undertake domestic regulatory reforms in order to conform with the requirements of the Agreement.

"This year, let us ensure that we achieve the necessary signature, ratifications, and exchange of tariff offers. Let us consolidate our efforts toward the implementation of trade facilitation instruments and create room for businesses to trade and the private sector to invest," said

Dr Christopher Onyango Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA Secretariat.

He used the opportunity to commend the African Development Bank (AfDB) for its financial support to the Tripartite programme.

At the same occasion, Chairperson of the Tripartite and representing Egypt the current Chair of COMESA, Mr Mohamed Abdallah called on the partner states that are yet to ratify the TFTA to do so and allow the region to start enjoying the benefits of the Agreement. Mr Mohamed is also the Head of Commercial Services at the Egyptian Embassy in Lusaka.

The meeting noted that so far significant progress has already been made in all three pillars.

Established in 2008, with a combined GDP of approximately US \$ 1.6 Trillion and a population of about 800 million, the Tripartite bloc is a formidable market, only second to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) market.

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Ms Kondwani Kaonga, Senior Consumer Welfare and Advocacy Officer at the COMESA Competition Commission presented the Report to the TTNF

Draft Tripartite Protocol on Competition Policy Moves to next Stage

The proposed Tripartite Protocol on Competition Policy has been reviewed by the Tripartite Committee of Senior Trade Officials and will be recommended to the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee meeting for consideration before being submitted to the Council of Ministers for adoption.

The Policy review happened during the 21st Tripartite Technical Negotiation Forum and the 17th Meeting of the Tripartite Committee of Senior Officials that took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 23rd to 26 January 2023.

The Agreement establishing the Tripartite Free Trade Area provides for Member/Partner States to cooperate on competition policy. Member/Partner States of COMESA-EAC-SADC concluded negotiations of the Protocol on Competition Policy in March 2022.


The Protocol on Competition Policy does

not provide for the creation of a Supra-national competition authority but is based on cooperation in the enforcement of competition and consumer protection matters by the Member/Partner States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). It also guides Member/Partner States and RECs on the competition and consumer protection provisions that they should have at National and REC level as well as to set up enforcement institutions.

Following the finalisation of the Protocol on Competition Policy, the Member/Partner States and the RECs shall develop Regulations and Guidelines to guide its implementation. Two meetings have since been held between September 2022 and January this year to discuss the Regulations and Guidelines.

COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Meetings in Pictures



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