

COMESA NEWS



Vol 4 | October - December 2022

AfDB Funds COMESA to Develop the **Pharmaceutical Industry** in the Region

- COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin Set for Piloting
- Regional Countries Review Bilateral Air Services Agreements
- Agricultural Productivity Improves in the Region, Despite Climate Change
- Experts Review Progress on Liberalization of Trade in Services in COMESA Region

Editorial

A watershed moment for the pharma industry



Every cloud has a silver lining and so it was with the Covid-19 pandemic that ravaged the world for two years plus. The negative effects were so overwhelming that what could be picked out as the positive effects pales in comparison. One thing that came out of the Covid-19 situation, especially for our region and Africa at large, was how vulnerable we are in dealing with, not just pandemics but the common illnesses as well. When the pandemic struck, focus shifted to our pharmaceutical sector and how it would respond to the crisis. It was found wanting. The high dependency on imports had exposed our region's soft underbelly when it came to supplies of essential medicines. Import supply chains were severely affected at a time of desperate need not just for the lifesaving Covid-19 vaccines but other essential medical supplies. It was apparent that States with well-developed pharmaceutical sector were obviously keen to serve their own first and deal with the rest later. Meanwhile the pandemic rampaged. Recognizing this challenge, the COMESA Secretariat Covid-19 Response Team, resolved to pursue one initiative with the African Development Bank that would address this critical need; the development of pharmaceutical products and creation of value chains. Spurred by the urgency of the moment the team moved with speed and engaged with the AfDB towards implementing this initiative. Fast forward to 2022, the Bank approved a \$6.63 million grant to COMESA. The funds will now be used to build the capacity of the pharmaceutical sector in our region to produce essential medicines locally and thereby fortify ourselves against risks such as those experienced during the Covid-19.

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COMESA INSTITUTIONS

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

Specialized Agencies

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

Judicial Arm

COMESA Court of Justice

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Delegates attending the validation workshop of regional energy frameworks

New Frameworks to Harmonize Tariffs and Standards for **Energy Products** in the Region

COMESA has developed regional policy frameworks that will assist Member States to improve the quality of solar products that are allowed into the region and achieve the ease the doing of business across borders due to predictable duty regimes.

This is intended to address the proliferation of low quality solar energy products which have eroded the confidence in the reliability of solar energy as a viable solution to electrification challenges in the COMESA region. Studies have also revealed that the high level of variances in customs duties across the region has been a hindrance to trade and adoption of off-grid renewable technologies.

The frameworks so far developed are the COMESA Model Solar Standards, the COMESA Model Common Customs Tariff Framework for Solar Products and COMESA Model Energy Policy. These were presented to experts in energy, customs and standards from Member

States for validation in a workshop conducted in Lusaka, Zambia, on 5 – 7 December 2022.

The model solar standards and customs tariffs are intended to promote common standards across the region to spur trade among the Member States. This will enable manufacturing of products in any country for sale anywhere without fear of standards incompatibility. The model standards have been vetted by the International Electrochemical Commission (IEC) and the African Electrotechnical Standardization Commission (AFSEC).

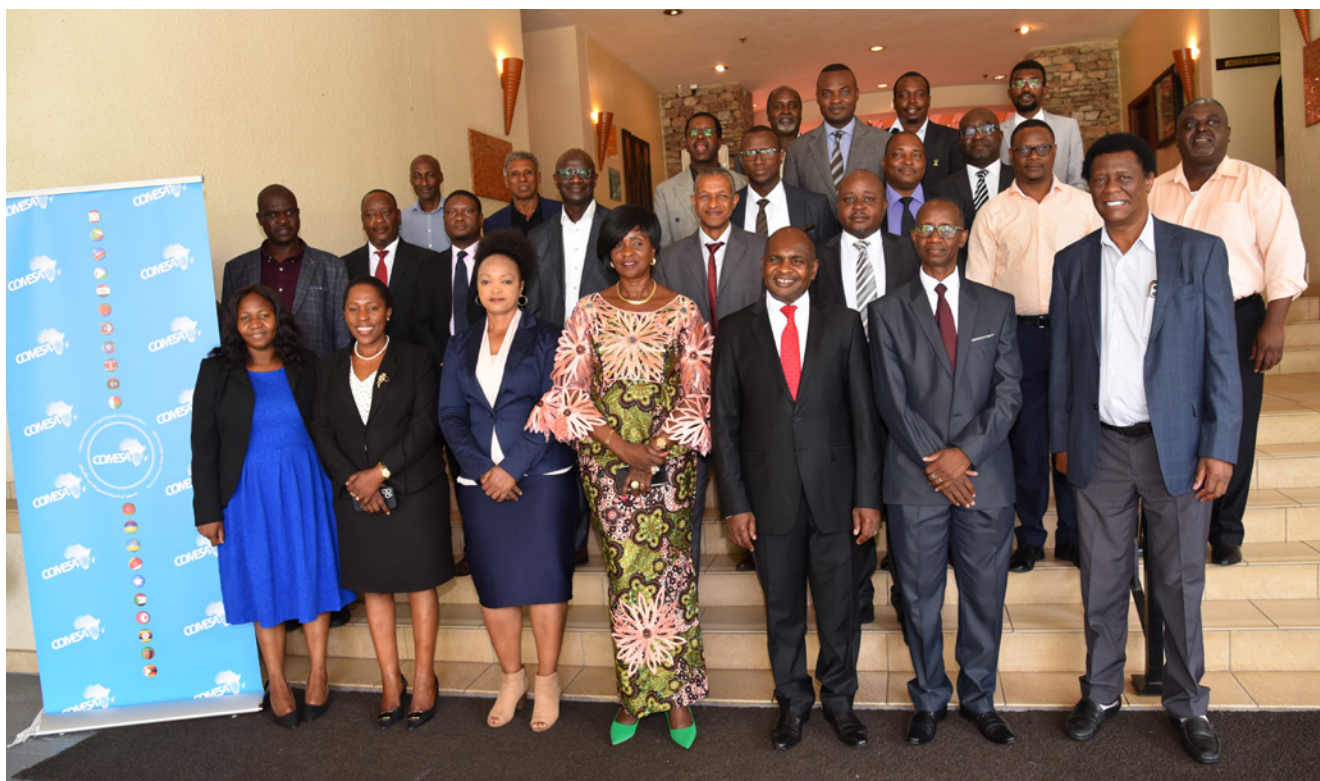
“.....
We stand ready to support our
Member States towards the
achievement of their goals and
aspirations,” Mr Mutabazi.

The COMESA Model Energy Policy is meant to provide a framework with key issues that should be included in energy policies at Member States' level. COMESA developed the Policy in 2008 and has become imperative to review it to cover emerging issues including climate change, e-mobility and renewable energy.

COMESA Director of Infrastructure Mr Jean-Baptiste Mutabazi observed that most COMESA Member States are lagging with regards to the development of energy infrastructure even though commendable progress has been made over the years.

The validation workshop was supported under the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF), which is a World Bank supported project for facilitating an enabling environment and providing credit financing for infrastructure investment in COMESA and the Trade

Continued to page 3



Delegates attending the regional stakeholders' workshop on implementation of the RCTG

Over \$1 billion Worth of Customs Bonds Executed in the North and Central Transport Corridors



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Nationally executed bonds have tied up a colossal sum of money belonging to importers, clearing and forwarding agents and transporters, which if released from the current system may be used for other productive purposes," Mr Alick Mutandiro

Mr Alick Mutandiro

Over 1,282 Regional Customs Transit Bonds, amounting to US\$1 billion were executed in the Northern and Central transport corridors in 2022 alone signifying a reduction in cost of transit and transport of goods by between 15 and 20 percent.

The two corridors link Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and DR Congo which are part of 13 countries that have joined the COMESA Regional Transit Guarantee (RCTG) Scheme. Other countries in the scheme are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

The RCTG, also known as Carnet, is a Customs transit regime designed

to facilitate the movement of goods under Customs Seals in the region. It provides a uniform basis for transit movement through the region, where only one guarantee is used to cover goods in transit throughout all transiting countries. Currently, it is fully operational in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

The COMESA RCTG is the first regional guarantee system in Africa, recognized by the World Customs Organization and has attracted membership from Non-COMESA States such as Tanzania and South Sudan.

Currently, 1,077 Clearing and Forwarding Agents and Sureties are participating in the scheme



with over 80% of them being small and medium-sized businesses. Fifty-one insurance companies are participating while the Premium collected as of 31 December 2021 amounted to US\$833,530.

With the success of the regime in the northern corridor, focus now is on the North – South Corridor countries that links, among others, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, DR Congo, and Zimbabwe. Subsequently, a meeting of stakeholders from the five countries was conducted in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe 13 – 15 December 2022 to address outstanding issues towards the implementation of the RCTG scheme in the corridor.

Among them is the participation of Zambia which has not joined the RCTG due to concerns raised by its clearing and forwarding agents, that include among others, potential loss of business. Owing to its location, Zambia is a key transit hub, and its participation in the scheme is critical to the successful implementation of the RCTG in the corridor.

Speaking when he opened the stakeholders' workshop, the Head of Transit Management, Customs and Excise at the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority Mr Alick Mutandiro observed that the current practice in the North-South Corridor countries of raising the customs transit bond in each country of transit is cumbersome, time consuming and costly. He said these costs can be reduced or minimized by implementing the RCTG.

"Nationally executed bonds have tied up a colossal sum of money belonging to importers, clearing and forwarding agents and transporters,

which if released from the current system may be used for other productive purposes," he said.

In her statement, Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Kapwepwe noted that the movement of transit goods from the ports using only one regional bond and one Declaration has significantly contributed to the reduction of transit and transport costs and increased efficiency.

"The reduction is estimated at about \$500 per container, \$20 in documentation and significant reduction in transit time," she added in her statement presented by the Chief Programme Director, Transit and Transport Facilitation, of the COMESA Yellow Card & RCTG, Mr. Berhane Giday.

She said the concerns raised by stakeholders in the North – South Corridor are genuine and should be addressed through compromise or mutual concession.

Participants at the meeting included customs administrations, chief executives of insurance companies, national revenue authorities, ministries in charge of regional trade, representatives of the clearing and forwarding associations and the AFREXIMBANK which joined the RCTG as a regional surety.

**“.....
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tied up a colossal sum of money
belonging to importers, clearing
and forwarding agents and
transporters,” Secretary General**

New Frameworks to Harmonize...

→ continued from page 1

and Development Bank.

RIFF is a \$425 million project co-implemented by TDB and COMESA. 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. TDBs share is a credit component of \$415 million.

Under the RIFF project, COMESA is providing technical assistance to Member States through the development of various policy and regulatory frameworks. This includes domesticating the frameworks, facilitating peer to peer learning, and organising capacity building initiatives.

"We stand ready to support our Member States towards the achievement of their goals and aspirations," said Mr Mutabazi. "I therefore urge Member States with needs that fall within the objectives of the RIFF project to notify the Secretariat of their needs."

Addressing the workshop, the Director of Energy in the Ministry of Energy in Zambia, Mr Arnold Simwaba, noted that with advancements in solar technology and the reduction in price, solar technology will form part of the energy mix for electricity generation and off-grid solar will also be viable alternative for electrification.

"In order to ensure that our people are protected from poor quality products we need to have standards that the region can use as a benchmark," he added.



File photo: COMESA Competition Commission booth at a regional trade fair. CCC staff Mr Ali Kamanga (R) welcomes a visitor to the booth.

Preserve the Jurisdiction of Regional Competition Commissions - Ministers

The preservation of the regional Competition Commission authorities is important even when the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Protocol on Competition is implemented. This was acknowledged during the 43rd meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers.

The Ministers appreciated the importance of implementing the AfCFTA Protocol, noting however, that the existence of the regional competition authorities including the COMESA Competition Commission would bring about jurisdiction challenges.

Hence, the Council decided that COMESA Member States should come up with a position paper on the implementation of the AfCFTA Competition Protocol to ensure that the jurisdiction of the COMESA Competition Commission (CCC) is preserved.

The CCC participated in the negotiations of the AfCFTA Protocol on Competition Policy which was recently adopted. However, the Protocol as adopted contains provisions which may undermine the operations of the Commission and erode the gains already made in enhancing competition and competition related activities within the Common Market.

Notwithstanding, CCC will continue to play an active role in the formulation of a competition protocol at the Africa Continental level that complements regional and national competition law enforcement.

The current focus of the CCC is the determination of conduct harmful to competition in the Common Market; strengthening enforcement of the COMESA Competition Regulations; advocacy and strategic collaboration; and

institutional strengthening.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Commission had experienced a surge in the number of mergers notified as compared to previous years. As of 31 August 2022, it had assessed 34 mergers and expected to surpass those attained in previous years.

In reviewing these mergers, the Commission receives statutory fees from the merging parties which are shared with affected Member States. This is in line with the Rules on COMESA Revenue Sharing of Merger Filing Fees to support the development of competition laws and authorities. Within the year 2022, the Commission has disbursed a total of USD 3,578,064 to Member States.



Delegates attending the 25th Meeting of COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General, conducted at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka. COMESA Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe (middle) addressed the meeting.

Need for Speed in Ratifying COMESA Legal Instruments

Justice Ministers and Attorneys General urged to assist their Member States

The need for speed in ratifying and implementing various legal instruments agreed upon in the past was a rallying call during the 25th Meeting of COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General, conducted in Lusaka, Zambia, on 3rd November 2022.

Keynote speakers at the meeting including the Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Kapwepwe appealed to the Ministers and the AGs to work closely with the COMESA Secretariat to assist their countries in domesticating the laws that the Council of Ministers has been passing over the years.

“There is a slowness within the Member States machinery that stultifies the process of domestication of COMESA legislation which unfortunately has caused a backlog,” said the Secretary General. “The slowed national processes of not domesticating COMESA legislation have had an adverse effect on integrating the COMESA region.”

.....

“There is a slowness within the Member States machinery that stultifies the process of domestication of COMESA legislation which unfortunately has caused a backlog,” Secretary General.

Among the key roles of the committee of Justice Ministers and the AGs is to pass laws that ensure the regional bloc operates as a rules-based organization, as this underpins the implementation of programmes to promote regional trade and investments.

Ms Kapwepwe told the meeting that the laws that their meetings recommend to the COMESA Council of Ministers plays a key role towards clearing the way for the full implementation of the following: COMESA Customs Union,

Digital Free Trade Area, the tripartite COMESA-EAC-SADC Free Trade Area and the African Continental Free Trade Area, all of which brings the region closer to an economically, socially and politically integrated continent.

She cited the delayed ratification of the Tripartite FTA, which was three States shy of the 14 ratification threshold that would enable it to enter into force. This is one of her key tasks as the current chairperson of the Tripartite Task Force; to ensure it is attained before the year ends. Hence her appeal to the Member States at the meeting that have not yet ratified the Tripartite Agreement to “expeditiously do so as not doing so is adversely affecting a regional good in delayed trade, investment and services drawdowns for the benefit of the region’s populace.”

Zambia’s acting Minister of Justice Hon. Jack Mwiimbu, who was the Chief Guest stated that as COMESA goes

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Ministers responsible for agriculture, natural resources and environment from COMESA

Member States have undertaken to support the development and implementation of the COMESA digital Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) initiative.

This undertaking covers similar efforts that aim to strengthen agri-food data and information system in the region. This will enable informed policy, investment, and trade decisions, and for emergency food and livelihood response in a rapidly changing environment.

COMESA's implementation of the RFBS initiative is designed to provide data, messaging and information that governments, the private sector and development organizations need to make informed investments, create and implement policies. It was developed in collaboration with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), supported by the UK Foreign Office, the Commonwealth and Development Office, the USAID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation

In a virtual meeting conducted on 24 November 2022, the Ministers pledged to promote and implement initiatives that contribute to reducing post-harvest losses, improve agriculture commodity aggregation and storage, and enhance competitive access to markets and trade in the region and internationally.

"We commit ourselves to enhancing access to production inputs, services and improved technologies including leveraging digital technologies to drive agriculture and livestock production and productivity," the Ministers stated in a joint declaration at the end of the meeting.

This was the eighth meeting of the Ministers and was chaired by the Egyptian Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation H.E. Elsayed Elkosayar.

Further, the Ministers undertook to promote and implement initiatives that



Ministers Undertake to Promote Initiatives on Food Security and Environmental Management

contribute to reducing post-harvest losses, improve agriculture commodity aggregation and storage, and enhance competitive access to markets and trade in the region and internationally.

They urged Member States and COMESA Secretariat to further develop and implement policies, regulations, programmes, and support quality infrastructure development to enhance plant and animal health, improve the quality and safety standards and competitiveness of agricultural commodities and food products in the region.

In her address to the Ministers, Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe said the organization will continue to deploy skills and efforts in designing policies and instruments to hasten agricultural growth, facilitate trade and investment among its Member States and with the rest of the world.

"Driving vibrant, equitable and sustainable agricultural and rural development in our region requires strategic and coordinated investments in social and economic

infrastructure," Ms Kapwepwe added "This is what will enable our rural communities to engage in dynamic and rewarding economic activities."

Other key initiatives to support Member States include policy and strategy development on climate change, review of Nationally Determined Contributions and upscaling Climate Smart Agriculture, development of a regional Blue Economy Strategy and the development of the COMESA Regional Guidelines for the Establishment, Operation/Management of Warehouse Receipt System for Agricultural Commodities.

The meeting was also addressed by representatives of cooperating partners of COMESA including Dr Appollos Nwafor, (AGRA) Mr Joseph Silavwe (European Union Delegation to Zambia and COMESA) and Mr Patrice Talla (Food and Agriculture Organization).

This meeting was preceded by the 8th joint technical meeting on agriculture, environment and natural resources on 22 -23 November 2022. The 9th joint meeting of the ministers will be hosted in Egypt.



Dr Willard Mweemba, the CCC Chief Executive

Competition Commission has Assessed 34 Possible Business Mergers in Five Member States

By August 2022, the COMESA Competition Commission (CCC) had assessed 34 mergers which involved sectors in banking and financial services, agriculture, transport and logistics and energy. This represented a surge compared to the same period in 2021 following business recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, some businesses were unable to sustain operations due to the pandemic resulting in strategic consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. The Member States most affected by the mergers were Kenya, Mauritius, Zambia, Uganda and Egypt. This is according to a report presented by the Commission to the 43rd COMESA Intergovernmental Committee meeting held in Lusaka on 29 November 2022. It was expected that by December 2022, the Commission would have assessed more transactions, surpassing the number of mergers assessed in previous years.

Established in 2004, the CCC is mandated to ensure that mergers and acquisitions taking place in the Common Market do not result in the creation or

strengthening of market power of the companies concerned, with the likelihood of abusing this power to the detriment of other market players and eroding the welfare of consumers.

To achieve this, the Commission assesses all notifiable regional mergers taking place in the Common Market and issues Decisions to either approve without conditions, approve with conditions or prohibit such mergers.

“For 2023, the Commission will continue promoting and encouraging competitions in the Common Market by preventing anti-competition cross border restraints which are an affront to the single market agenda,” Dr Willard Mweemba, the CCC Chief Executive said.

Meanwhile, the Commission has to date concluded Enforcement Cooperation Agreements or Memorandum of Understandings with national competition authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Seychelles, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Need for speed to ratify agreement...

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in the era of digital economy, it was important that proper legislation was put in place to ensure the smooth running of the business across the region. This, he noted, was the responsibility of the COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General.

“COMESA is the area and era of creating a digital economy and it is important that we come up with legislation that will spearhead this process. I urge you as you deliberate to ensure that there is speedy implementation of these legislation,” Mr. Mwiimbu said.

Among the key agenda items of the meeting was the consideration of the draft legal instruments for the COMESA Court of Justice, draft Charter Regulating the Council of Bureaux, a report from the COMESA Regional Investment Agency on its Board nominations and appointments, and a Progress Report of the COMESA Court of Justice.

Addressing the meeting, Judge President for the COMESA Court of Justice, Lady Justice Lombe Chibesakunda said there was need to amend the current COMESA Treaty to remove some identified gaps such as the need to stagger appointment of Judges.

The Court has since presented a paper to the Committee on Legal Affairs on the need to amend various articles of the Treaty to address some of the identified shortcomings.



Aviation experts and stakeholders meeting in Eswatini

Regional Countries Review Bilateral Air Services Agreements

Experts in Civil Aviation from seven Member States of the Eastern Africa- Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) convened in Eswatini on 16 - 18 November 2022, to review their Bilateral Air Services Agreements (BASA).

The review was intended to ensure conformity with the Yamoussoukro Decision which among others, calls for the removal of all restrictions on air traffic rights under the 3rd, 4th and 5th Freedoms, frequencies, fares and capacity.

While many air transport markets outside Africa have been liberalized to a significant extent, most intra-African air transport markets remain largely closed due to restrictive BASA's which affect air connectivity within Africa and has limited the potential economic growth and development. It is out of this that African States adopted the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) in 1999 and Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) in 2018 so as to liberalize air transport in Africa.

Eswatini is one of the 35 countries in Africa that have signed the solemn commitment to establish SAATM which constitutes 64% of the total membership of the African Union. It is also

one of the 20 AU Member States that have signed the memorandum of implementation for the operationalization of SAATM.

Speaking at the opening of the three -day workshop the Eswatini Minister of Public Works and Transport Hon. Chief Ndlaluhlaza Ndwandwe appreciated the choice of his country as the launchpad for the first validation workshop on BASA. He said it will go a long way in facilitating operationalization of the SAATM and strengthen intra-regional connectivity between the capital cities of African countries.

"Eswatini is currently in a robust process of signing and concluding BASA's with various States," said the Minister. "I urge the few Member States who are yet to sign the Solemn Commitment to do so to enable us move forward as one united continent."

COMESA Senior Transport Economist, Mr Bernard Dzawanda, who represented the Secretary General, observed that significant benefits will be realized in tourism if all challenges associated with air transport infrastructure and costs are addressed.

As a follow up, the five Regional Economic Communities under the Support to the Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme engaged a consultant to develop a Model Bilateral Air Services Agreement that conforms with the provisions of the Yamoussoukro Decision. The RECs are the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa the East African Community, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Indian Ocean Commission and the Southern Africa Development Community.

The workshop in Eswatini was the first of six that the SATSD programme will hold to review the draft Model BASA in the ES-SA-IO region. Participants were drawn from Eswatini, DR Congo, Malawi, Madagascar, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and SADC.

The SATSD programme is funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund.

The 43rd COMESA Council of Ministers Meeting Hosted in Zambia



Zambia Vice President (in blue dress), Ministers and heads of delegations attending the 43rd Council of Ministers Meeting in Lusaka

The 43rd COMESA Council of Ministers meeting was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia on 01 December 2022, with a call for the region to prioritize key areas that contribute to economic growth including trade and transit facilitation. Zambia Vice President, Her Honour Madam Mutale Nalumango who opened the meeting stressed the need for implementation of interventions that promote the establishment of a regionally integrated, diversified and competitive production capacity anchored on agriculture, industry and the services sector.

"Prioritization should be based on value addition, diversification, innovation and common regional standards, all with due considerations to the protection of the environment," she said.

The meeting was attended by Ministers responsible for coordination of COMESA activities at the national level in the 21 Member States. Key issues on the agenda were a report from the Intergovernmental Committee

(IC) covering progress reports on the implementation of COMESA programmes. The meeting of the IC, which is comprised of Permanent and Principal Secretaries preceded the Council meeting on 29 – 30 November 2022 at the same venue.

The Vice President said efforts should be implemented within the context of inclusiveness, participation and sustainability to ensure that all sections of the society including women, youth and the vulnerable are supported to have access and control over resources that have a clear visible impact on human development.

She commended the Development Partners who have over the years supported COMESA's regional integration agenda while calling for mutual accountability, sustainability and ultimately self-reliance.

In her statement to the Ministers, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe

gave a detailed account of the regional integration activities implemented by the organisation. Among these was the development of mitigatory measures against the COVID-19, adoption of tripartite guidelines on trade and transport facilitation for the movement of persons, goods and services which have contributed to the flow of trade.

She added that so far, the COMESA Yellow Card Scheme has expanded its reach to Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana and South Sudan while the digital platform for women in business (50MAWSP) has attracted 350,000 users.

"We have made significant strides on several priority areas which can serve as a springboard to propel us to greater heights. We remain focused on our mandate and resolve towards the achievement of our objectives," she said.

The meeting was chaired by Hon. Ahmed Samir, Minister of Trade and Industry of Egypt.



Council of Ministers meeting in session

Fresh Push to Attain Tripartite Ratification Threshold

COMESA Council of Ministers pledged to engage their counterparts in Member States that have not ratified the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA) to do so as a matter of priority to pave way for its implementation. This was one of the key decisions taken during the 43rd meeting of the Council conducted on 01 December 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia. This decision is intended to clear the remaining hurdle to enable the TFTA to enter into force.

The ministers noted that the delay in achieving the 14 States' ratification threshold had negatively impacted the Member/Partner States in harnessing the potential benefits from international support for the financing of development programmes. It was also constraining resource mobilization efforts by the COMESA Secretariat. So far, 11 States had ratified the TFTA, three short of the required threshold of 14 to enable the Agreement to enter into force.

The Council noted that Development Partners were keen to support

development of regional value chains and corridor approach in infrastructure development as opposed to individual country projects. Specifically, it was indicated that the AfDB and EU were keen to see the Tripartite Agreement come into force to guarantee continued financial support to all the three pillars.

The TFTA was launched in June 2015 and has been ratified by 11 Member/ Partner States of the three regional blocs; the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa – (COMESA), East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). It is anchored on three pillars: market integration, infrastructure development and industrial development.

The Council underscored the significance of operationalizing the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement whose developmental approach to integration through infrastructure and industrialization pillars is catalytic to increase intra African trade.

"The latter were critical in supporting intra-regional trade and investments through regional value chains and value-added productions as well as strengthening soft and physical connectivity in the region," said the ministerial report noting the need for the Council to scale up the engagement to attain the remaining three ratifications.

At the same time, the Council urged Member States that had not yet completed the process of joining the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) to fast track the process as a matter of priority. These included DR Congo, Eswatini, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.

The FTA was launched in 2000 and so far 16 countries have joined it and trading under its duty- free and quota-free regime, which has contributed significantly to intra-COMESA trade. The value of Intra-COMESA total exports increased by 28 percent from US\$ 10 billion in 2020 to US\$ 13 billion in 2021.



Delegates attending the AFAP Public Private Dialogue in Lusaka, Zambia

Call for Harmonized Regional Policy to Facilitate Fertilizer Agribusinesses

Sub-Saharan Africa, including the COMESA region has continued to record low usage of agriculture inputs such as fertilizer compared to the rest of the world. According to a statement issued at the opening of the Regional Public Private Dialogue on the Future of Fertilizer and Agro-Inputs in Africa held in Lusaka on 7 December 2022, Africa currently uses 22.5kg of fertilizer per hectare while Europe is at 157kg per hectare.

COMESA Senior Fisheries and Livestock Officer Dr Yoseph Mamo attributed the low usage to high costs of inputs, low supply and a lack of infrastructure to produce the commodity.

“Despite this low usage, there is a positive turn from 2020, as demand for nitrogen fertilizer has increased the fastest in Africa compared with other regions. This shows that there is a huge gap to be used as an opportunity to create jobs and businesses,” he said.

The Dialogue was organized by the African Fertilizer Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) in collaboration with COMESA's

specialized agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA). It was intended to help all parties to understand the major policy regulatory and business environment constraints affecting private sector operations and government priorities for the sector. Both parties agreed on joint actions and roadmap for the way forward with clear roles and responsibilities for each.

Dr Mamo emphasized the need for a harmonized regional policy that will help facilitate fertilizer agribusinesses, having a joint procurement system for agro-inputs for Member States and development of a viable regional industry through joint industrial parks.

AFAP Chief Executive Officer Mr Micheal Sudarkasa said AFAP has organized the Public Private Dialogues (PPDs) as consultations between governments and the private sector to identify and resolve policy and regulatory constraints to the commercial supply of fertilizer within the region.

The dialogue was therefore part of AFAP's response to multiple adverse events including COVID-19 that have impacted global supply chains, giving rise to fertilizer shortages, escalated fuel prices and inflationary food prices.

“The PPDs will meaningfully contribute to the crafting of an Action Plan during the upcoming African Union's June 2023 African Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit,” said Mr Sudarkasa.

Other speakers at the Dialogue were the ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr John Mukuka and Director at the Africa Secretariat Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP) Prof. Richard Mkandawire among others.

The Lusaka conference kicked off the Sub-Saharan Africa leg of the PPDs series. Similar conferences were expected to follow in Accra, Ghana for Western Africa, Kampala-Uganda for Eastern Africa and Cairo- Egypt for Northern Africa in 2023.



President Lazarus Chakwera (in the middle) President Hakainde Hichilema (4th left) COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe (3rd right) EU Ambassador Jacek Jankowski (2nd right) and other dignitaries at the launch.

New One Stop Border Post Commissioned on the Malawi/Zambia Border

The Mwami – Mchinji border crossing on the Zambia - Malawi border is the newest One Stop Border Post (OSBP) in the COMESA region. Presidents Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia and Lazarus Chakwera of Malawi launched the OSBP on Thursday 7 December 2022.

The project is part of a broader 48 million Euros Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) signed between the European Union and COMESA to deepen regional integration, improve inclusive regional economic growth and enhance the competitiveness of the COMESA region.

Five border crossings were identified under the programme. These are Mwami/Mchinji (Zambia /Malawi), Kasumbalesa (Zambia/D R Cong), Chirundu (Zambia/ Zimbabwe), Nakonde/Tunduma (Zambia/ Tanzania) and Moyale (Ethiopia /

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"I would like to ask our Home Affairs ministers from the two countries to meet quickly and remove these roadblocks while maintaining the security," President Hakainde Hichilema

Kenya). The focus was on strengthening Coordinated Border Management trade and transport facilitation, concentrating on upgrading transport corridors and border posts.

COMESA Secretariat signed sub-delegation agreements with Zambia and Malawi in November 2020 and January 2021 respectively, to implement the Border Upgrade Projects at Mwami (Euro 1.77 million) and Mchinji (Euro 3.54 million). Subsequently, the two embarked on project implementation including infrastructure upgrading, delivery of ICT equipment and office furniture.

At the launch, the two Heads of State called for increased trade flows to ensure that the benefits are realized in record time for the benefit of both countries and the people. President Chakwera said the facility will also assist both countries to increase revenue collection in other sectors such as tourism.

"This infrastructure should even cement our relationship more and derive the benefits which will enrich both our countries," he said.

President Hichilema called for removal of non-tariff barriers like roadblocks on both sides of the borders saying the OSBP may not yield the desired objectives if trucks are delayed after they cross the border.

"I would like to ask our Home Affairs ministers from the two countries to meet quickly and remove these roadblocks while maintaining the security," President Hichilema said.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe hailed the two governments for efficient implementation of their respective projects.

"As COMESA we look forward to a changed environment for travelers and commercial stakeholders using the Mwami/Mchinji OSBP. Let us make Mwami/Mchinji an example and build on the lessons that we gathered from the Chirundu OSBP," she said.

Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, appreciated the cooperation between Malawi and Zambia as a true representation of regional integration.

The African Development Bank Supports COMESA to Develop the Pharmaceutical Industry in the Region

Over \$6 million grant approved to develop the pharmaceutical sector

The Board of Directors of the African Development Fund (ADF), the concessional lending arm of the African Development Bank Group, on 2 November 2022 in Abidjan, approved a \$6.63 million grant to COMESA to develop the pharmaceutical sector in the sub-region.

The project will be implemented over three years (2023-2025) and is an institutional support to develop the region's pharmaceutical industry. In particular, it will build the capacity of pharmaceutical regulatory bodies, product quality control and management systems, and research and development institutions. The aim is to achieve the manufacture and marketing of safe, quality pharmaceutical products, for Covid-19 and other diseases.

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"Most countries within the region have weak and underdeveloped pharmaceutical industry. The region is heavily dependent on imports for most of its medical supplies." Leila Mokaddem

The project will also support the sub-regional body in implementing continental strategies on pharmaceutical manufacturing and in streamlining and harmonizing drug registration processes, as well as ensuring access to essential medical products and technologies. An information platform for pharmaceutical

manufacturers, importers and exporters will also be created.

The project will directly benefit public institutions responsible for the pharmaceutical industry's development, such as national drug regulatory authorities, quality control laboratories, regional pharmacy training providers, universities, and research centres.

"The aim is to empower them to support the pharmaceutical sector so that they can produce safe essential medicines locally for the needs of the population, especially women and children," said Leila Mokaddem, the AfDB's Director General for Southern Africa.

"Most countries within the region have weak and underdeveloped pharmaceutical industry. The region is heavily dependent on imports for most of its medical supplies. Furthermore, due to the low local pharmaceutical production, there is a high prevalence of counterfeit pharmaceutical products in circulation, which has serious consequences for the welfare of the region's people," she added.

While the project is intended to directly benefit the ADF eligible countries of COMESA, other Bank Group member countries will be allowed to participate in project activities and events, but at a cost. (Source: AfDB)

COMESA Court Builds its Capacity on the AfCFTA

As the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area gets underway, the implications on the courts of justice in the regional economic communities (RECs) and their role will be in focus.

COMESA Court of Justice (CCJ) has therefore taken the initiative to build the capacity of its 12 judges on the AfCFTA, its implications for African integration, dispute settlement and trade remedies. Hence, a three-day training was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia on 5 – 7 December 2022 facilitated by the Trade Law Centre (TRALAC) with support of the Swedish Government.

The session with the Judges covered: features of the AfCFTA as a trade and integration arrangement; co-existence with the regional economic communities; how AfCFTA related disputes will be settled; trade remedies and safeguards in the AfCFTA and the RECs and the likely implications for the REC Courts.

Currently, the AfCFTA has a comprehensive arrangement covering trade in goods and services as well as dispute settlement which was developed during Phase I of the negotiations. However, it has proven difficult to agree on tariff schedules and Rules of Origin.

The CCJ is one of the organs of the COMESA Treaty, whose mandate is to ensure that COMESA is a rule-based organization through adjudication of all disputes that are referred to the Court and through provision of Advisory Opinions.



A transit cargo truck operating under the RCTG scheme leaving Mombasa port in Kenya heading to Kigali, Rwanda

COMESA Yellow Card's Performance Maintains Impressive Performance

The COMESA Yellow Card Insurance Scheme has maintained excellent performance in providing regional insurance cover. Between July 2021 and June 2022, Gross Premium Income of US\$14.7 million was recorded, an increase of 11.7 percent from the previous year with 251,947 Yellow Cards issued.

The COMESA Yellow Card provides third party legal liability cover and compensation for medical expenses resulting from road traffic accidents caused by motorists visiting or transiting in countries under the scheme. It is operational in 13 countries including Tanzania a non-COMESA Country. Over 250 Insurance companies in the region are participating in the scheme.

In addition, the YC is being issued in other non-COMESA countries including South Africa and Mozambique and will soon be issued in Botswana and South Sudan to motorists travelling to the COMESA region under the business-to-business (B2B) arrangement.

According to a report presented to

the Council, a total of 1,138 claims were reported out of which 370 were paid showing an increase in claims activities. In 2022, over US\$1.81 million claims compensation, were paid to road accident victims caused by visiting/foreign motorist, an increase of 2.24% compared to US\$1.77 million paid in 2021.

The Council noted concerns raised by some Member States on incidences of detention of visiting/transiting drivers and motor vehicles involved in road traffic accident despite having a valid Yellow Card. Hence, the Council urged the governments in countries where such incidences are reported to address them.

On the implementation of the Regional Customs Transit Guarantee (RCTG CARNET), the Council urged Zambia to consider its implementation to facilitate the effectiveness of the system for other Member States whose trade routes run through Zambia.

The RCTG Scheme is fully operational in the Northern Corridor, namely: Burundi,

Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda but has experienced implementation delays in the North-South Corridor countries covering DR Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Hence the Council urged Zambia to address the issues raised by its Clearing and Forwarding Agents to enable implementation of the RCTG Carnet. It also urged the DR Congo, Malawi and Zimbabwe to commence its operations by early 2023 and Ethiopia and Djibouti to finalize preparations for the commencement within the same period as well.

The Council also endorsed the recommendation to harmonize the COMESA RCTG Carnet with similar instruments in East African Community, and Southern Africa Development Community into a Tripartite RCTG system and scale it up at the continental level under the AfCFTA.

A transit cargo truck operating under the RCTG scheme leaving Mombasa port in Kenya heading to Kigali, Rwanda



Delegates participating in the SATSD validation workshop in Nairobi, Kenya

Regional States Review Laws to Enable Implementation of Open Skies

Regional States have embarked on the review of their national laws, rules, regulations and policies to conform with the provisions of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) to ensure full operationalization of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM).

The review is supported under the programme on Support to the Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) which is under implementation in five regional economic communities. These are COMESA, the East African Community, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Southern Africa Development Community, and the Indian Ocean Commission. It is funded by the European Union.

Representatives from 15 countries participated in a validation workshop conducted in Kenya on 29 November to 01 December 2022 to review the legal instruments. It was attended by

stakeholders from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Eswatini, Lesotho, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The forum also provided an opportunity for the review of intra-Africa Bilateral Air Services Agreements aimed at removing restrictions on air traffic rights under the 3rd, 4th and 5th Freedoms, frequencies, fares, and capacity. This is expected to accelerate the operationalization of SAATM by fully implementing the provisions of the YD.

Among the key recommendations of the workshop was the need to simplify regulations governing Code Shares and Joint Ventures among African airlines to deepen the cooperative arrangements they can enter into. In addition, the delegates recommended for benchmarking with other regions such as the European Union and Association

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which have made great strides in the liberalization of air transport services and modelling the process to suit the unique African context.

They also recommended the establishment of competent competition agencies or strengthening of existing ones within the Member States. This will ensure they have capacity to handle competition issues in air transport through domestication of AU Regulations on Competition in Air Transport Services within Africa. Individual States are at liberty to determine the best organizational models to achieve this.



Participants at the FDI Statistics Workshop in Lusaka

Building Regional Capacity on FDI Statistics

Experts in Balance of Payments from the EAC-COMESA-SADC-IGAD and IOC region took part in a four-day workshop to enhance their capacity in the production of statistics under Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), a key driver of growth in economies.

The training was conducted by the Macroeconomic and Financial Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa (MEFMI) in collaboration with COMESA Secretariat through hybrid format.

Speaking at the opening of the training in Lusaka, Chief Statistician at COMESA Mr Themba Munalula said FDI highlights the compelling need for availability of statistics to assess the trends and developments of these flows. He added that with the right policy framework, direct investment provides a list of benefits for the host economy that include increases in tax revenues, creation of jobs, technological advancement, and promotion of international trade.

“However, the robustness of these statistics in the COMESA and MEFMI regions is limited by weaknesses in data

collection systems, compilation and dissemination practices in some of the countries,” said Mr Munalula.

Furthermore, the increasing globalization of production processes and technological advancement continue to pose complex methodological challenges for compilers, as it calls for innovation in existing data collection techniques, he added.

The meeting was informed that COVID-19 pandemic disruptions to survey data collection presented emerging challenges which required compilers to be proficient with alternative approaches to collect the data. This has contributed to the calls for continuous capacity building in the region to address existing and emerging challenges relating to compilation of these statistics.

The training covered interpretation of financial statements and extraction of data from financial statements for validation of FDI surveys among others. It was funded under the European Union, Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

COMESA M & E Online System set for Deployment

COMESA Secretariat is making steady progress to fully implement the Online Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) System. The development of the M&E System is being supported by USAID/ Regional Intergovernmental Organization (RIGO) System Strengthening Project which engaged a company, InfoTronics Business Systems.

In consultation with COMESA Divisions and Units, the system has been under development and is currently ready for testing. To support the testing and future implementation of the system, a team of staff from different Divisions and Units were selected to be M&E Champions who will support the final testing, roll out and implementation of the COMESA online M&E system.

The champions have since had their initial Change Management session, conducted on the 5th of December 2022 as part of a series of several change management and training sessions which will continue to be conducted during 2023.

Being a web-based application, the M&E system will support easy and timely generation and access to data and reports for timely decision-making. It will support planning and scheduling of activities. The system will use standardized M&E tools and templates which will lead to enhanced accuracy of information.

National Gender Sensitization Workshop Conducted for Mauritius

COMESA conducted a national gender sensitization workshop for Mauritius to strengthen the participants' knowledge of the different gender policies and guidelines the Secretariat has developed over the years. This is expected to increase COMESA's engagement with Member States in adopting a citizen-centred approach.

The forum was part of COMESA's initiative to understand the extent to which public, private and civil society sectors in Mauritius are implementing gender mainstreaming and women empowerment initiatives as well as regional and international gender instruments.

"Through our deliberations...we would like to raise awareness on various documents such as the COMESA Treaty, the Social Charter, the COMESA Gender Policy, the COMESA Gender Policy Implementation Plan and the COMESA Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines, Indicators and Check Lists," said Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde, the COMESA Director of Gender and Social Affairs while speaking at the workshop on 12 December 2022.

She emphasized the need for participants to be familiar with the normative framework of the region to ensure that national policies are aligned with the national, regional and continental frameworks such as the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

The workshop is among a series of similar events that the COMESA Secretariat has been undertaking in several Member States including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles,



Small Scale Traders Trained on Benefits of the EAC-COMESA-SADC Trade Agreement

Small Scale Traders from the EAC, COMESA and SADC Tripartite region have been sensitized on the potential benefits of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement.

This was during a two-day training workshop conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, 15-16 December 2022 targeting small-scale businesses as they are the cornerstone of cross border trade in the Tripartite region currently estimated at over 70% of intra-regional trade.

They were also sensitized on the status of negotiations in various areas such as customs cooperation and the compelling factors that make the arrangement relevant today. The tripartite is comprised of three regional economic communities (RECs); COMESA, the East African Community and the Southern Africa Development Community.

COMESA Director of Trade and Customs Dr Christopher Onyango said the training was intended to enhance their understanding about the Tripartite Free Trade Area and the opportunity it offers.

"We expect them to share tripartite-related information including, but not limited to business and investment opportunities and value chains development by small scale traders in the Tripartite region," he said.

With a membership of 29 countries, combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$1.6 trillion and a population of about 800million, the Tripartite RECs is a formidable market, only second to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) market.

The aim of the Tripartite is to reduce existing obstacles to trade in the three RECs that hinder the free movement of goods, services and people. It provides the platform through which the RECs can harmonize trade rules and regulations and effectively address challenges associated with multiple membership of states to the RECs. Among the challenges facing small scale traders include lack of business-related information about regional markets, ignorance about cross-border clearance procedures/requirements, lack of knowledge about existing tools/instruments by governments to assist them conduct their businesses and lack of credit or financial related constraints to expand businesses.

The training was organized by the Tripartite Capacity Building Project (TCBP-II) which is funded by the African Development Bank.



COMESA Hold 2022 Long-Term Financing Scoreboard Workshop

Continuous statistical capacity building is necessary for strengthening the statistical, policy and decision-making value chain, leading to better statistics for better policies, decisions and development outcomes.

The manifest statistical capacity deficiencies in Regional Member Countries (RMCs) make it imperative to scale up the implementation of Strategy for Harmonisation of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA-2) through Statistical capacity building phase 5 (SCB-5). This will spur the production of timely and reliable data to inform national development policies, the SDGs, the AU's Agenda 2063.

For this reason, the AfDB and COMESA Secretariat signed a two-year Protocol of agreement for COMESA to be the Executing Agency for the Statistical Capacity Building Program, Phase 5.

The SCB-5 program resonates with National Statistical Strategic Plans, Regional Strategic Plans and the Bank's Managing for Development Results (MfDR) agenda. The SCB V is supporting four components on economic statistics, social statistics, data dissemination and strategic planning.

Under the support to economic statistics, the SCB V is supporting the data collection for the long-term finance initiative. Supported by the SCB V the LTF Initiative accomplishes its objective by managing and maintaining an operational LTF Database and Scoreboard (<http://afr-ltf.com>).

To mark the conclusion of the 2022 data collection round under the theme, "Financing Africa-sustainable development in times of global headwinds" a three-day regional workshop on a long-term financing (LTF) scoreboard was held in Lusaka, 28 – 30 November 2022. It was attended by statistical data coordinators from Central Banks of Burundi, Kenya, Liberia, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mauritania, Egypt, Sudan, Liberia, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The workshop provided a platform for the coordinators to network, engage and participate in the dialogue with governments and financial sector stakeholders on the importance of long-term finance in a challenging global context and the outcomes being delivered by the initiative.

Zambia's Director, Bank supervision, Ms. Gladys Mposha opened the workshop on behalf of the Central Bank Governor, Denny Kalyalya. She said there was need for Africa to raise a staggering US\$30-50 billion in additional funds per year for climate change adaptation through among other instruments, the Green Bonds, an alternative to debt accruals as it seeks to invest in infrastructure.

Speaking at the same event, AfDB Zambia - Country Manager, Raubil Durowoju said the Bank has proposed two options to raise the needed fund including, floating of Green Bonds on security markets or inspire the cooperating partners to secure finance and close the continent's current annual US\$108 billion infrastructure financing deficit to close the gap.

Chief Statistician at the COMESA Secretariat, Temba Munalula said the Data Platform will ensure transparency in LTF intermediation and allows the benchmarking of the various sources and uses of LTF in Africa.



A section of delegates attending the trade in services committee meeting in Lusaka.

Experts Review Progress on Liberalization of Trade in Services in COMESA Region

Progress on the implementation of the COMESA liberalization programme on trade in services in the COMESA region was the focus of a three-day meeting of experts in Lusaka, Zambia 10 – 12 October 2022.

This was the 12th meeting of the Committee on Trade in Services (TiS) whose key mandate includes trade negotiations amongst Member States. During the meeting, the Committee reviewed the status of negotiations including what has been achieved and the challenges faced. Its goal is to conclude negotiations on the sectors that have been prioritized for liberalization. These are communication, finance, tourism, transport, business, construction and energy-related services.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General Dr Kipyego Cheluget, who opened the meeting noted that even though trade liberalization is a continuous process, the negotiations on COMESA trade in services liberalisation programme has been lagging.

“Trade in services accounts for more than 70 per cent of the global output and 51.1 per cent of labour force and thus playing a significant role in the COMESA

economies,” he said. “A slow pace of negotiations cannot deliver effectively the expected results and within the given timeframes.”

He proposed to the delegates to move the TiS agenda to the next level by removing restrictive practices that stand on the way of trade liberalization and find alternative solutions to harness the benefits of liberalized services in the region.

This, he said will guarantee preferential market access for regional businesspersons in goods and the negotiated services sectors, thus enabling regional businesses and suppliers to expand and strengthen existing value chains as “beyond-the-border” barriers in services are being dismantled.

The advancement of the negotiations on TiS is also expected to reflect the commitment of COMESA towards the creation of a transparent, stable, and predictable environment for trade in services in the region and in the global markets.

More significantly, Dr Cheluget noted, it will place the COMESA Free Trade Area regime among the few in the world that guarantee its membership preferential

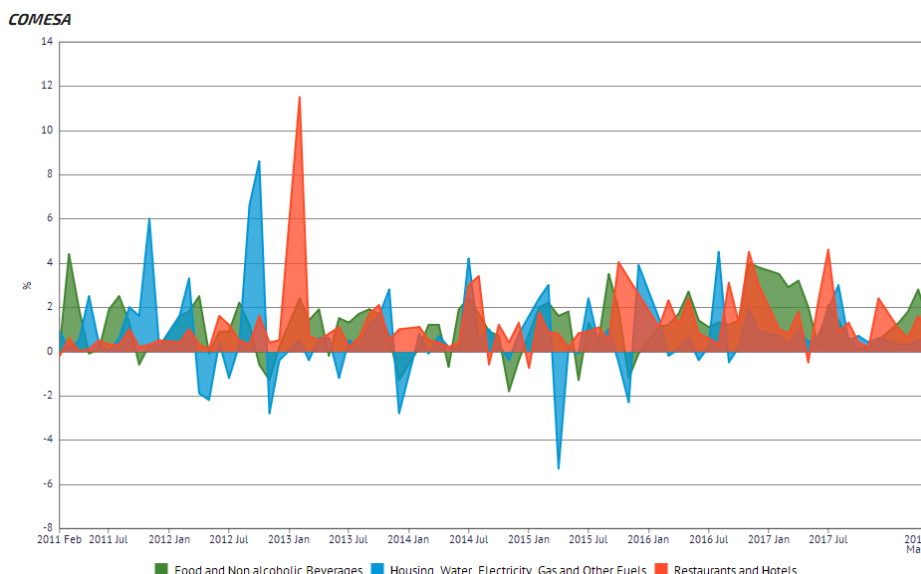
market access for both goods and services.

The first session of the meeting was dedicated to updates on initiatives by the Secretariat on the development of programmes to bolster transparency and efficiency in the implementation of the COMESA services trade framework and negotiations.

Notable among these is the establishment of the Online Platform for Trade in Services, which will be used by Member States to exchange offers and requests between them. The platform is being developed with support of the Afreximbank. It was presented to the delegates for review by Mr Emeka Onyia.

The other report shared during the meeting was on the outcomes of the World Bank/World Trade Organization and African Union Commission regulatory audits, which mapped all relevant legislation and regulations for AU Members, including many COMESA Member States.

The recommendations from the Committee meeting were presented to the COMESA Intergovernmental Committee and the Council of Ministers meeting held in November 2022.



AfDB, COMESA Initiative Towards Harmonized Consumer Price Indices in Africa

COMESA in collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB) conducted a five-day regional workshop in Naivasha, Kenya 10 - 14 October 2022, on harmonizing consumer price indices in Africa. The aim was to improve the measurement process of national and regional Harmonized Consumer Price Indexes (HCPIs).

This initiative followed an agreement signed in 2021 between COMESA and the AfDB in which the latter would be the Executing Agency for Statistical Capacity Building Program Phase V (SCB V) which targets 37 African Development Fund eligible countries.

Among the areas of intervention in the SCB V is the support to harmonization of consumer price indices in the target countries and support to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) for the compilation of regional HCPIs.

Through their respective Ministerial mandates, the RECs have continuously advocated for their Secretariats and Member countries to prioritize requirements of the agenda 2063, the global agenda 2030 for sustainable development and regional policies through the production and use of harmonized statistics including HCPIs.

This is in recognition of the fact that successful regional integration requires accurate, reliable, timely, harmonized and comparable data within and across RECs to support policy planning, monitoring and evaluation. Thus, the RECs constitute the cornerstones of the integration agenda and therefore need to build commensurate statistical capacity over time to facilitate the process towards full integration.

COMESA Chief Statistician, Mr. Themba Munalula informed delegates that all AfDB Regional Member Countries (RMCs) would undertake a rebasing of the price reference period of their HCPIs in the near future. Rebasing refers to changing the price reference period of the HCPI to a more recent period.

"In this workshop, the different steps of the rebasing process as well as general procedures to aggregate a consumer price index or to introduce a new set of expenditure weights will be discussed," he said. "The objective is to ensure that all RMCs are tooled with the same level of knowledge and applications, which is a key aspect of a successful maintenance of harmonized concepts, methods and procedures used in the compilation of national and regional HCPIs."

The long-term objective, he added, was to derive a continental HCPI using harmonized individual country national HCPIs. This requires a common methodological approach to ensure the international comparison of inflation, at least within RECs or at the continental level.

He stressed the importance of assisting RMCs and RECs to get a deep knowledge of the general rebasing of a national HCPI using the latest Household Budget Survey (HBS) data available for each of the participating RMCs.

He added: "It is also important to ensure that all RMCs have the same level of understanding of the full process of incorporating a new set of expenditure weights in the HCPI compilation, for the index to continue to reflect as much as possible the evolving patterns of consumer purchases."

This process includes the processing of data from the latest HBS data or from other data sources, the weight estimation process as well as the price-updating of expenditures between the expenditure reference period and the weight introduction month.



States Urged to Upscale Utilization of COMESA Free Trade Preferences

The intra-regional utilization rate of the FTA preferences by the Member States is estimated to average 48.4 percent relative to 77 percent on North-South trade. Thus, countries that are members of the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) need to upscale utilization of the preferences provided under the FTA regime.

The FTA preferences include the removal of all tariffs and non-tariff barriers enabling the free movement of goods and services produced within COMESA. Currently 16 countries are participating in the COMESA FTA including Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

This has affected the region's agility to handle external shocks, yet the FTA was created to build resilience through deepening trade integration among member countries.

Addressing the 7th Meeting of the COMESA Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee, on 4 October 2022, Assistant Secretary General Dr Kipyego Cheluget said it was critical that countries implement the FTA in a manner that promotes effective use of the tariff preferences under regional integration by

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It is estimated that imposing one additional NTB is equivalent to effecting at most a tariff of 5.8 percent.

firms and other importers.

"The high prevalence of persistent Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and high compliance costs of Non-Tariff Measures have created a prohibitive intra-trading environment in the region," he said.

It is estimated that imposing one additional NTB is equivalent to effecting at most a tariff of 5.8 percent. Between 2018 and 2020, Dr Cheluget said, it took an average of 1.5 years to resolve a reported NTB in COMESA region. Thus, introduction of additional Sanitary and Phytosanitary and Technical Barriers to Trade measures lead to more trade compliance costs. This makes it even harder for businesses to prosper.

"There is great potential which demonstrates the existence of scope to deepen our trade integration, create more space for business prosperity and fortify the resilience of our economies," said Dr Cheluget.

Noting that the regional economies had barely recovered from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when the Russian - Ukraine conflict started, he said these episodes of external shocks have demonstrated the region's vulnerability by disrupting critical supply and value chains.

"The consequences are apparent in the upward pressure on oil, fertilizers and food prices," he said.

The current COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP 2021-2025) aims at increasing intra-regional manufactured exports to at least 25 percent of total exports by 2026 which is now at about 10 percent.

Based on 2019 trade statistics, the region has potential to increase intra-trade by US\$100.1 billion if all extra-COMESA trade could be diverted to the region. According to a recent study by COMESA, if at least 50 percent of the current extra-COMESA trade is diverted to the region, intra-trade could expand by US\$50.5 billion.

The three-day virtual meeting was attended by trade experts from COMESA Member States.



COMESA, Statistics Norway Developing Food Consumption Data Processing Guidelines

In a quest to reach consensus on the content and the form of the guidelines for processing food security statistics from household consumption and expenditure surveys, COMESA and Statistics Norway conducted a seminar in October 2022 for experts drawn from regional economic communities, international organizations and national statistics offices.

Anchored on the theme: Making a Difference in Food Security and Nutrition, the seminar which took place in Rome, Italy, on 10 – 14 October helped refine a strategy for developing capacity for food security statistics in National Statistics Offices (NSOs) and discussed potential uses of data.

It sought to make significant progress on the development of the guidelines on processing food consumption data and to exchange experiences and ideas

for use of the food consumption data in COMESA, Pacific Community (SPC) and others.

Participants also discussed how to improve training and tools for sustainable capacity building; and raised these issues with the members of United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics (UN CEAG) and other interested parties. Discussions from the workshop resulted into a draft guideline for distribution to a wider audience.

The seminar was designed to run parallel with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) annual October Rome meetings whose objective was to develop and endorse policy recommendations and guidance on a wide range of food security and nutrition topics. They start from

scientific and evidence-based reports produced by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) and/or through work supported technically by FAO.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), WFP and representatives of the CFS Advisory Group, in which COMESA and Statistics Norway participated.

Experts from COMESA, Statistics Norway, participating NSOs, World Food Program (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), East African Community, Southern African Development Community and World Bank attended the meeting.



Participants during the National Stakeholders Consultation Workshop held 3rd – 7th October 2022 in Seychelles

Stakeholders in Seychelles Consult on Country's Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment

Over 20 senior officials drawn from selected government ministries in Seychelles participated in a five-day consultative workshop to disseminate the country's specific Structural Vulnerability/Resilience Assessment (SVRA) and identifying the necessary response strategies.

Conducted by the COMESA Secretariat through the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) Unit, the workshop was used to sensitize the participants on the SVRA methodology, expose them to the African Union Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment and Mitigation Strategy.

COMESA has been implementing an early warning system (COMWARN) that provides forecasts on the structural drivers that could lead countries towards higher or lower levels of peace and prosperity. The model, which is anchored on the COMESA Peace and Prosperity Index has the overall

goal of supporting Member States to build resilience.

At the workshop, participants also deliberated on the necessary response options towards addressing the identified vulnerabilities, strengthening the identified resilience factors and commencing the process of establishing a national response structure. Countries that are advanced in their efforts to commence the process of utilizing the COMWARN SVAs such as Zambia shared their experiences with Seychelles.

Head of the GPS Unit, Ms Elizabeth Mutunga led the COMESA team. She said the workshop enabled the various stakeholders to be well-versed on the COMWARN SVRA methodology and use it for their own work.

"We have continued to collaborate with the African Union's Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department in advancing the development and implementation of its SVRA methodology which has a comparative focus on economic dimensions of

conflict as guided by various decisions of policy makers that called on COMESA to disseminate the Structural Vulnerability/Resilience," said Ms Mutunga.

Outputs of the consultations included the development of a proposed national SVRA response structure.

During their meeting in 2021, COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs reiterated the importance of addressing the structural factors to peace and prosperity especially on the COVID-19 Pandemic. They encouraged Member States to prioritize efforts that build resilience including adopting the use of COMWARN SVAs.

The Ministers appreciated Kenya, Madagascar, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe for their efforts in commencing the process of utilizing the COMWARN SVAs. They also noted the requests from Mauritius and Seychelles for COMESA to hold national multistakeholder consultations on COMWARN SVAs.



50MAWSP Users Discuss Platform's Future, get Tips on AfCFTA

Close to 100 users and key stakeholders of the 50 Million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP) met on 5 October 2022 to discuss how best to forge a way forward to improve its various aspects, such as its reach, usage and business-to-business (B2B) features.

The three-hour 50MAWSP Stakeholders and Users Webinar brought together high-profile representatives from the implementing regional economic communities (RECs), platform users, national focal points, representatives from 50MAWSP host institutions, representatives from African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and representatives of women in business as well as youth.

The COMESA Assistant Secretary General-Programmes Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget opened the event. In his speech, he observed that doing business using digital tools was the way to go and encouraged users to provide feedback on improvements they would like to see for the platform to serve their needs better.

"More than ever before, we are convinced that any post-COVID recovery planning is incomplete without the integration of digital tools," he said.

"I am pleased to note therefore that in just over two years since we launched the www.womenconnect.org digital platform for women entrepreneurs, women in business, and in trade, we have been able to see a degree of transformation in relation to how the platform is used."

The Director for Social Sectors at the East African Community Dr. Irene Isaka challenged implementing RECs to use the lessons learned from the first phase of the 50MAWS Project to improve the platform. She urged the platform users, who attended the webinar to become 50MAWSP ambassadors and help in orienting other women who are not ICT savvy on how to use the platform.

On her part, the Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs at the ECOWAS Commission Prof. Fatou Sow Sarr observed that despite the achievements realized in the first phase of the initiative, a lot of work remained to be done on the platform.

During the event, participants were sensitized on the opportunities the AfCFTA has on offer for women in business and how 50MAWSP could harness these opportunities. Dr. Halima Noor Abdi represented the AfCFTA Secretariat.

The webinar also provided a forum for discussion among 50MAWSP users, stakeholders and implementers on ways to improve the platform to serve the needs of women entrepreneurs better. Some of the requests the platform users made were for integration of e-commerce to facilitate transactions on the platform, as well as addition of enhanced interactive tools such as live video streaming and matching of mentors with mentees.

The 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform is an economic empowerment initiative for women which is jointly implemented by three regional blocs, namely COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS. The platform seeks to address the business information needs of women entrepreneurs and provides information or resources on starting and growing a business, market access, access to finance, business management training and financial literacy, among others. It also boasts a social networking component which allows women to network with one another in real-time, showcase their goods and services and to learn from each other. Its first phase was supported with funds from the African Development Bank.



Regional Central Banks Supervisors attending training in Egypt

Regional Central Banks' Supervisors Trained on how to Deal with Challenges in Banking Supervision

The COMESA Monetary Institute in collaboration with the Central Bank of Egypt have trained bank supervisors from Central Banks of Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Libya, Tunisia and Zimbabwe on how to deal with challenges facing central banks in banking supervision.

The training was conducted in Cairo, Egypt on 25 – 29 September 2022 with 37 participants. The training was part of the CMI Work plan for 2022 aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the officials in identifying new trends in risk management and supervision on risk management frameworks and systems, and onsite supervision developments and challenges.

The delegates also firming their skills in

Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing of Terrorism fundamentals and challenges, and preparation and building of recovery plans, early intervention framework and dealing with weak banks and bank resolution. It also provided an opportunity for networking and experience- sharing on challenges facing bank supervision and how they dealt with them in their various jurisdictions.

Addressing the delegates, Dr. Naglaa Nozahie, Governor's Advisor for Africa Affairs, Central Bank of Egypt said there was need for the banking supervisors to achieve the right balance between micro- and macro-prudential objective of system-wide resilience in evaluating and promoting the safety and soundness of the financial institutions they supervise, as well as safeguarding

the stability of the financial system.

On his part, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, the CMI Director, stressed the need for the supervisors to adequately manage macro and micro risks to have early warning systems and early intervention strategies to avoid banking crises. This entails embracing technology to keep up with the digital transformation that the industry is experiencing.

Therefore, he noted, that supervisors have plenty of challenges which they should deal with in order to safeguard their banking sectors and financial stability hence the importance of such training.



COMESA's Participation in COP27 in Egypt

Member States meeting for technical preparatory meeting

The 27th Conference of Parties (COP27) on Climate Change took place in Egypt from on 6 - 18 November with COMESA Member States participating. To prepare for the event, representatives from 13 Member States met in Harare, Zimbabwe on 6 – 7 October 2022 for a preparatory workshop to develop a Regional Position Paper.

In the Paper, the delegates put together strategic regional priorities and critical thematic issues for submission to the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) for the COP27. The agreed priorities were included in the negotiating texts of the global discussions.

Zimbabwe's Minister of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Hon. Mangaliso Ndlovu, who addressed the delegates said the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change required the region to update its socio-economic policies and implement measures that direct financial flows towards low carbon and development of climate resilience.

"Our region is facing droughts which are negatively impacting the agriculture sector and tropical cyclones are causing

infrastructure damage, forcing migration and the loss of life in some areas," said Minister Ndlovu. "High sea level rise is threatening coastal infrastructures and our people are already facing threats on their well-being and income."

The preparatory meeting also provided a platform for COMESA Member States to brainstorm on the meeting, identify the most strategic issues for the region and work out regional priorities and positions especially in areas that are still outstanding and contentious. This meeting also helped to strengthen the capacity of Climate Change Negotiators in preparation for the negotiations.

Some of the critical outstanding issues arising from Bonn Intercessions include the long-term climate financing beyond \$100 billion per year until 2025 pledge, global goal on adaptation, status of loss and damage and its financing modalities, preparations and requirements for global stock take, status of continental and global efforts towards NetZero by 2050 targets.

They also discussed the latest scientific report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change with special focus

on implications for Africa and the COMESA region in relation to adaptation, mitigation and meeting the Nationally Determined Contributions and Paris Agreement goal of 1.5-degree Celsius. Discussions covered the progress made in complying with the provisions of the Paris Agreement and matters on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change COP27 agenda that have a bearing on COMESA Member States.

COMESA Climate Change Unit Programme Manager, Ms Edith Tibahwa reiterated the organisation's role in supporting solutions to transboundary issues related to a changing climate given its ability to pool existing knowledge and resources, leverage local and national policies, and giving a voice and robust bargaining position to African countries at international negotiations.

She commended the EU under the African Caribbean and Pacific's Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+) for supporting COMESA and other regional economic communities advance their climate change programme.



Manual inspection of goods by customs officers

COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin Set for Piloting

The COMESA electronic Certificate of Origin (eCo) is anticipated to be piloted in 2023. This is expected to go a long way in addressing the administrative inefficiencies in managing paper Certificates of Origin, which will soon be replaced by a digital one.

The eCo is part of the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area initiative which was launched 2018 to empower traders to conduct cross-border trade using ICT as a tool to minimize physical barriers. It aims to provide traders with the necessary digital tools and infrastructure they need for enhancement of intra-COMESA trade and global trade.

While addressing the 8th Meeting of the COMESA Heads of Customs, Thursday 20 October 2022, Assistant Secretary General in charge of COMESA Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget said that more than ever before, the need to adopt information technology tools especially by Customs administration was critical.

“During the post COVID19 era, Customs Administrations continue to employ ICT tools and automation to expedite

clearance of goods traded within the region,” he noted.

Automation initiatives being employed include; usage of non-Intrusive inspection systems in lieu of physical inspections; use of e-declaration processing and submission of electronic supporting documents; pre-arrival processing, increased use of electronic cargo tracking systems to manage transit movements among others.

“This greater use of automated solutions resonates with the current COMESA theme which is “Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration,” he stressed.

In addition to the eCo, the DFTA involves implementation of other key digital trade facilitation instruments such as COMESA online market, e-Portal for Mutual Recognition Agreements and the Electronic Green Pass Certificate.

With the support of the EU under the 11th European Development Fund, COMESA is implementing Trade Facilitation programme whose support covers the establishment of trade information

portals, development of a trade and transport corridor monitoring dashboard and the development of a regional Electronic Single Window. A Regional Customs Automation Support Centre, an interconnectivity platform and the COMESA online platform are being set up.

In the agenda of the COMESA Heads of Customs was the draft transposed COMESA Common Tariff Nomenclature (CTN) and the Common External Tariff (CET) to World Customs Organization Harmonized System (HS) 2022 version. CTN is the harmonized system for coding and describing the traded products, while the CET is the uniform tariff system in trade with non-COMESA third countries.

The meeting also considered reports from the technical working groups on customs capacity building, customs automation, Rules of Origin, outstanding activities related to Coordinated Border Management Guidelines and Authorized Economic Operator Standard Operating Procedures Manual and an update on the implementation of the 2021-2025 Customs and Trade Facilitation Work Programme.



Delegates attending the monetary policy implementation workshop in Kenya

The Importance of Exchange Rates in Determining a Country's Relative Price Competitiveness

The concept of equilibrium Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) has been of policy concern over time due to its implication on a country's relative price competitiveness. This led to a decision by the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks, in 2021, directing the COMESA Monetary Institute to conduct a workshop to validate studies undertaken by Member States' Central Banks.

Subsequently, CMI conducted a validation workshop on "Equilibrium Real Effective Exchange Rate and Monetary Policy Implementation" on 11 – 12 October 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop brought together delegates from the Central Banks of Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe as well as the COMESA Secretariat.

The CMI Director Dr. Lucas Njoroge, who opened the workshop described REER as a key variable in the conduct and implementation of monetary policy and reflects the stance of the economy in terms of economic growth and the establishment of external balance.

"It can also be a source of economic vulnerability where its persistent deviation from equilibrium reflects deterioration of the economic situation in a country," he said noting that price competitiveness, among others, determines a country's ability to increase productivity and come up with innovations required for improved economic performance.

He said that substantial misalignments are extremely costly, while undervaluation may lead to perceived greater relative price competitiveness of a country and can ultimately trigger retaliation and currency wars. On the contrary, undervaluation that follows sustained depreciation (or devaluation in fixed parities) increases the price of imports and discourages imports while promoting price competitiveness by lowering the price of exports, leading to improved trade balance. An overvaluation would have the opposite effects.

The key finding from most of the studies indicated that in the long-run, real effective exchange rate is in line with the economic fundamentals. However,

in the short run, several countries experienced REER misalignment, which has been declining over time, as would be expected given the floating exchange rate regimes pursued by most monetary authorities.

Further, tight monetary policy appears to be linked to increase REER misalignment, but is, by and large, due to vulnerability of the banking sector particularly during the early 1990s, a period in which studies found the greatest magnitude of REER misalignment. The main common policy recommendation across most of the studies is the need for prudent macroeconomic management and effective coordination between monetary and fiscal policies, as precondition to limit the deviations of the real exchange rate from its equilibrium level.

The CMI Director said the studies will significantly contribute to policy advice that will ensure macroeconomic stability in member countries, and hence achievement of macroeconomic convergence in COMESA region.



2022 COMESA Media Award Winners Unveiled

The winners of the COMESA Media Award - 2022 were unveiled at the 43rd Meeting of the Council of Ministers that took place, on 01 December 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia. They are Rakotomiarintsoa Claude (Madagascar), Hany Fouad (Egypt) Gerald Tenywa (Uganda) and Carolyn Tomno/ Brian Tuva (Kenya) who presented a joint entry.

A total of 65 entries from the print, electronic and online media were submitted by journalists from 10 COMESA Member States including D R Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Among the winning topics included; how innovation, technology and agriculture insurance was helping farmers in the COMESA region; COMESA support to the integration of agroecology in schools, how unsustainable charcoal production was accelerating deforestation in the region and how COMESA strategy on climate change could help address the problem.

The Council adopted the list of winners, paving the way for their awards. The awards include a monetary prize, a certificate, and recognition during the next COMESA Summit of the Heads of State and Government scheduled for 2022.

The COMESA Media awards are conducted annually to promote publicity of COMESA regional integration programmes and recognize journalists whose works contribute to the integration agenda. They are open to journalists from the 21 COMESA Member States.

COMESA at the 28th Uganda International Trade Fair

COMESA participated in the 28th Uganda International Trade Fair at the Lugogo Trade Fair grounds in Kampala. This is an outreach strategy for COMESA to directly engage with stakeholders. The Secretariat established an information resource desk, which attracted businesspeople, students, small and medium entrepreneurs, policy makers, among others. Close to 1000 exhibitors, comprising of local foreign exhibitors took part.

This activity was supported under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF 11), Institutional Capacity Building Programme (ICBP). The theme of the expo was "Business "Recovery by Harnessing economic recovery through local sourcing and deepening value chain integration" which is aligned with the COMESA theme: "Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration".

Participation at the regional trade expos enables the COMESA Secretariat to reach a wide cross section of stakeholders at one location and share information and knowledge on the

regional integration agenda the benefits that citizens in member States derive and the opportunities it presents.

During the Trade Fair COMESA expo staff which included the COMESA Business Council engaged stakeholders including the Uganda Free Zones Authority (UFZA), on possible areas of collaboration to implement the Local Sourcing for Partnership (LSP) under the Regional Enterprises Competitiveness and Access to Markets Program (RECAMP). The discussion focused on export processing zones and the feasibility of implementing the programme in Uganda.

Other areas of interest that featured prominently at the COMESA desk were on the opportunities available following Uganda's entry into the COMESA Free Trade Area in 2014, the application of Certificate of Origin for export under the COMESA Rules of Origin, non -tariff barriers and how to address them including reporting, monitoring and eliminating mechanism.

CAPACITY BUILDING



TRAINING



LEARNING



KNOWLEDGE



SKILL



COUCHING



SUPPORT



DEVELOPMENT

Capacity Building on Structural Vulnerability Assessment Targets Five Member States

COMESA and the African Union (AU) jointly held a fourth Training of Trainers' (ToT) Workshop on the Structural Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) methodology and Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability and Mitigation Strategy (CSVMS) processes from in Nairobi, Kenya on 11 – 13 October 2022.

The workshop was attended by Government Experts from Kenya, Madagascar, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe as well as representatives from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from the respective Member States. In addition, representatives from the African Union (AU) Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) department and staff from the COMESA Conflict Early Warning System (COMWARN) also attended.

The overall objective of the training was to build the capacity of Member States by developing a critical mass of trainers on the COMWARN Structural Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) methodology, the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability and Mitigation Strategy (CSVMS) processes.

Thereafter the trainees will train other stakeholders in their respective Member States to ensure sustainability of SVA/ CS-VRA/VMS through knowledge transfer. The ToT workshop also discussed the status of implementation of SVA/ CS-VRA/VMS in Kenya, Madagascar, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, including challenges and gaps and plans to enhance implementation. Knowledge transfer among the members would also ensure sustainability of COMWARN SVAs in the unlikely event that the Secretariat might not be in a position to continue supporting the SVAs.

So far, the five countries have committed to establish early response structures or platforms for the COMWARN SVAs. These would take different forms depending on the specificities of the respective countries.

The workshop was in fulfilment of the decision of the 17th Meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in November 2021 which called on the Secretariat to roll-out training programmes on the COMWARN Structural Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) model. This is expected to create a critical mass of experts in the region that are well-versed with the model, the model's analysis and its application.

What is COMSTAT?

COMSTAT (COMESASTATISTICS) is an on-line interactive database designed to serve as a central repository of all statistical data at the Secretariat and hence disseminates statistics of various domains that are critical for monitoring the performance of COMESA's regional integration program. The database which was launched in 2006, initially with only international merchandise trade statistics, has over the past years been enhanced and augmented with other statistical indicators and related statistical information pertaining to member states in the COMESA region. The COMSTAT data portal has gone through a number of revisions since inception with funding from Trade Mark Southern Africa (TMSA) (2011/2012) and the current version released in 2016 was developed with funding from the African Development Bank (AfDB).

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Media, communication and infrastructure experts at the media training and familiarization workshop in Seychelles

Enlisting the Media in Raising Public Awareness on Regional Infrastructure Programmes

In an initiative to strengthen air travel and ICT connectivity, five regional economic communities and the European Union have enlisted the regional media to raise public awareness on the implementation of two projects. These are: Support to the Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) and the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT Sector (EGEE-ICT).

Both programmes are funded under the 11th European Development Fund through Grant Contribution Agreements, each amounting €8 million. They cover regional economic communities (RECs) in the eastern and southern and the Indian Ocean namely; COMESA, East African Community (EAC), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). COMESA is the lead REC in the implementation.

SATSD is a four-year programme aimed at supporting the operationalization

of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM); strengthening the regulatory and institutional capacity of civil aviation institutions; and improving air navigation efficiency in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region.

The EGEE-ICT programme aims at enhancing the governance and enabling environment in the ICT sector in the EA-SA-IO region by supporting the effective review and/or development of various regional policy and regulatory framework in a harmonized manner thus contributing to enhanced competition and improving access to cost effective and secure ICT service. It is a four-year programme as well.

Subsequently, a regional media training and familiarization workshop on the two programmes was conducted in Seychelles, 26 – 28 October 2022. It was intended to bridge the knowledge gap in the media industry on aviation and ICT issues for effective reporting and coverage of these regional integration programmes at the national, regional, continental, and global arenas.

Participants at the workshop were drawn from Angola, Comoros, Djibouti, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Others were representatives of EAC, IGAD, IOC, SADC and officials from the Ministry in charge of Aviation and Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Seychelles.

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Having a single unified air transport market gives an added impetus to the continent's economic integration agenda in the Single African air transport market," Christian Faure

Enlisting the media in raising awareness...

Continued from page 31

Mr. Christian Faure, the Acting Director General, Regional Affairs Department in Seychelles opened the workshop, which was also addressed by COMESA Senior Transport Economist Mr. Bernard Dzawanda.

"Having a single unified air transport market gives an added impetus to the continent's economic integration agenda in the Single African air transport market," Faure said. "At the same time, we are looking at strengthening the inter-regional connectivity of our respective capitals."

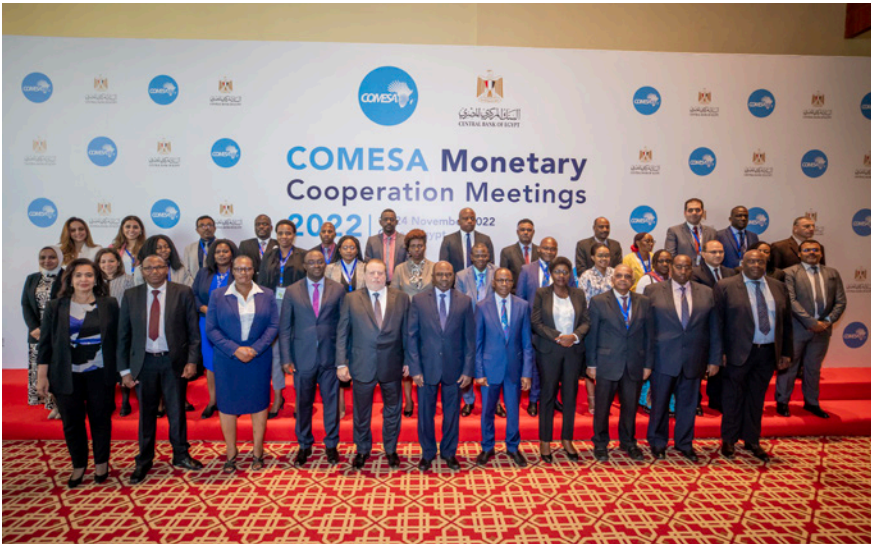
He added: "We are hopeful that this will lead to transformative e-applications and services in Africa; especially in the intra-Africa broadband infrastructure and cyber security in ICT."

Mr Dzawanda said an informed media plays a critical role in setting the national and regional agenda, thus ultimately influencing the perception of the general public what people think or talk about.

"To fulfil this critical role, media practitioners need to be knowledgeable of the regional issues to enable them to report accurately and factually," he added.

Participants were conducted on a facility visit for deeper understanding of two infrastructure facilities; the Seychelles airport and the termination point for an undersea fibre optic cable.

The SATSD and EGEE-ICT are key contributors to the AU flagship projects namely the Pan African e-Network, Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) and the Single African Air Transport Market.



Governors of Central Banks and other delegates

COMESA Governors of Central Banks Meet in Egypt

The annual meeting of Central Bank Governors from COMESA Member States took place in Egypt on 24 November 2022 with deliberations focusing on the activities of the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) and COMESA Clearing House (CCH). The two institutions are responsible for monetary and financial integration of COMESA member countries.

Governors from Burundi, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Malawi, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe attended the meeting. This was the 26th meeting of the COMESA Committee of Governors and was chaired by the Governor, Central Bank of Egypt, Mr. Hassan Abdalla.

In his statement, Mr. Abdalla underlined the responsibility of the Central Banks towards efforts to rescue economies from recession and ensuring recovery and sustainable growth, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, in a statement read on her behalf by Mr. Mahmood Mansoor, the Executive Secretary of the COMESA Clearing House, noted that greater monetary and financial stability will facilitate economic integration and provide sustained economic development.

The meeting agreed to host the Annual Governors Symposium in Zimbabwe in 2023 to discuss the future of money, Central Banks Digital Currency and other virtual assets and Central Banks in the era of climate change.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, was elected chair of the Committee of Governors for 2023



Delegates at the validation workshop on the implication of financial technology on financial stability, Nairobi, Kenya

Stringency in Financial Regulations Improves Fiscal Stability

Since the global financial crisis of 2007, most financial institutions' regulation and supervision mechanisms have become more stringent. This has significantly improved the resilience of supervised financial institutions and thus financial stability.

At the same time, technological advancements in digital financial services, called FinTech, have increasingly taken center stage in the financial services space. Hence, FinTech has introduced new financial services trends, increasing the number of users expecting fast and easily accessible services available on mobile phones and other electronic platforms.

Unlike the traditional banking system, Fintech has strong social and economic potential for providing access to financial services where it is low.

Based on this realization, the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks, meeting in December 2021, directed the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) to organize a validation workshop for studies earlier undertaken by Member States' Central Banks on the Implication of Financial Technology (FinTech for short) on Financial

Stability.

The studies aimed at better understanding the implications on financial stability of FinTech and to ultimately inform policy on expanding the reach, improving the quality, and reducing the cost of digital financial services for consumers in the COMESA region.

Subsequently, the CMI conducted a validation workshop on the studies, from 25 – 26 October 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya. It was attended by delegates from the Central Banks of Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

CMI Director, Dr Lucas Njoroge addressed the delegates. He noted that whilst FinTech has provided the space for expanding financial services, its advancement could be a source of financial eco-systems instability as it complicates policymaking with challenges for regulation particularly in emerging and developing economies.

"The key finding from most of the studies indicate that FinTechs increase the financial stability in the short run but

in the long run, they undermine financial stability due to FinTech's competing with banks to provide loans," Dr Njoroge observed.

In responding to increased competition, he said the banks are compelled to increase propensity to take risks as well as leveraging on FinTech's to provide relevant services and screen borrowers, which reduce credit risks. Further, FinTech's innovation has been leveraged by banks to increase efficiency, provide relevant services and vet borrowers, thereby maintaining profitability and stability.

The main policy recommendations from the studies is the need to pursue robust regulatory framework that continuously identifies emerging risks and vulnerabilities to FinTech adoption and growth. At the same time the framework will strengthen incentives for symbiotic development and prudent behaviour among the FinTechs.

Ultimately, there will be need to promote strong collaboration between incumbent financial services providers and FinTech firms to ensure a safe environment for innovation and stability of incumbent financial system.



Zambia Launches Time Release Study for Mwami and Nakonde Borders

On 3rd November 2022, Zambia's Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry (MCTI) launched the findings and recommendations of Time Release Studies that were conducted at the Nakonde One Stop Border Post (OSBP) and Mwami Border Posts. The study was facilitated by the Zambia Border Posts Upgrading Project.

The launch was conducted at the Mulungushi Conference Centre in Lusaka, with support of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) European Development

Fund (EDF) 11 Trade Facilitation Programme.

The TRS was included in the border upgrade plans for Mwami and Nakonde to provide a baseline against which changes in clearance times for imports, exports and transit cargo would be assessed. The current baseline established under these TRS studies and subsequent assessments to be conducted later in the lifespan of the project would also contribute to the wider COMESA Trade and Transport Corridor Performance Measurement System which COMESA is developing.

Zambia Revenue Authority, World Customs Organisation (WCO), Border Agencies representatives, COMESA Secretariat and the EU delegation to Zambia and COMESA.

Speaking at the event, Zambia Revenue Authority Representative, Mr Moses Shuko said the studies met the expectations of both the domestic and the international community in reliability of the results, considering that the experts followed the right methodology and the results were thoroughly validated by various stakeholders and customs authorities.

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The TRS was included in the border upgrade plans for Mwami and Nakonde to provide a baseline against which changes in clearance times for imports, exports and transit cargo would be assessed

Information on the Time Release Study (TRS) was collected by a technical working group from cross border regulatory agencies, truck drivers and small-scale traders at both Nakonde One Stop Border Post and Mwami Border Post.

The launch was hosted by the MCTI and attended by Government ministries of infrastructure, works, health and institutions in Zambia, including the

The WCO representative Mr Muller, said the TRS is accepted widely as an evidence based and objective methodology to assess clearance and release times.

"It is seen as the global standard to measure clearance and release times and identify bottlenecks, contributing to the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)," he said.

The EDF Programme Manager, COMESA Secretariat, Ms Mshuka Kamwela said part of the motivation to upgrade operational efficiencies at the targeted border posts was that several studies conducted in the region had concluded that border posts on major trade corridors in the COMESA region were characterized by inefficient border clearance procedures.

“These cause delays in the movement of both trucks and goods leading to increased costs of doing business in the region and consequently lack of competitiveness for regional producers,” she added.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry, Mr John Mulongoloti, noted that the Nakonde/Mwami TRS brought out encouraging results regarding the clearance times at these borders. According to the study, the minimum time taken for Nakonde border post to clear a truck was one hour 26 minutes.

On the other hand, the maximum time taken to clear a truck during the period of the study was 5 days 7 hours and 20 minutes. The average truck clearance period was found to be 1 day and 15 hours from the time of arrival to the time of departure from the Common Control Zone.

For the Mwami border post, the study found that the minimum time for clearance of a truck was 22 minutes with maximum delay time of 2 days 23 hours and 42 minutes. The average clearance time was 2 hours and 20 minutes.

“This is an achievement for Zambia although we still need to aspire for international standards which are much lower, for instance, an average of five hours and less and this is what we are working towards,” said the PS.

COMESA Committee on Administration and Budget Convenes Ahead of Policy Organs’ Meetings

The COMESA Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Matters conducted its 44th meeting, on 30 October – 2 November 2022 and considered the work programmes and budgets of the Secretariat and its institutions for 2023. This committee precedes the policy organs meeting namely the Intergovernmental Committee and the Council of Ministers’ meeting.

It was attended by senior government officials from the 21 Member States. Key issues on its agenda were to provide technical inputs on the reports dealing with the management of human and financial resources

and audit reports of the COMESA Secretariat and its institutions. These were tabled before the 43rd Council of Ministers’ meeting that took place on the 01 December 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia.

Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Kapwepwe addressed the delegates. She urged them to objectively and critically deliberate on these issues so that appropriate recommendations that would be beneficial to the effective operations of the Secretariat could be made to the Intergovernmental Committee and Council of Ministers for consideration.

Building Capacity of National Counter Terrorism Centers

Representatives from National Counter Terrorism Centers from nine COMESA countries participated in a four-day capacity building training to strengthen their knowledge and experience on counter-terrorism measures. The training was also intended to give Member States an opportunity to share lessons and best practices to deal with terrorism.

Kenya, Libya, Somalia, Tunisia, Ethiopia and Uganda attended the first session of the training on 17 – 21 October 2022 while Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe participated in the second one held on 24 – 28 October 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The COMESA Secretariat through the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) Unit with support from the African Union Commission African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) conducted the training.

Over the last decade, the COMESA region has continued to face security

challenges posed by the rise in terrorism. According to the Peace and Security experts, terrorist activities have been on the rise over the years going by the number of attacks, intensity and the number of countries affected in the region. Among the most affected were Egypt, Libya, Kenya, Somalia and Tunisia.

However, terrorism attacks and threats have reduced considerably especially in Egypt, Kenya and Tunisia through recent years, mostly due to concerted efforts by the respective countries.

The continued threats of terrorism and violent extremism in the COMESA region prompted the 17th Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to urge the COMESA Secretariat to provide technical support to its Member States as well as strengthen the linkages with the ACSRT Centre on Counter Terrorism. These will enhance the States’ capacity on counter terrorism and enhance their capacities to deal with traditional and emerging threats.



L-R: Amb. Saana Halinen, COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe and Amb. Johan Hallenborg

Finnish and Swedish Envoys Accredited to COMESA

Finnish and Swedish Ambassadors to Zambia were accredited as Special Representative of their respective countries to COMESA on 15 November 2022. The accreditation ceremony was held at COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka. Ambassadors Saana Halinen (Finland) and Johan Hallenborg presented their letters of credence to COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

Both countries support COMESA bilaterally and as members of the European Union, in various sectors including energy, gender, agriculture sectors and trade facilitation. Sweden has signed an agreement with COMESA through Swedish Statistics to improve the availability of regular up-to-date statistics of good quality in developing policies such as the Migration Policy Framework for Africa and the AU's Plan of Action 2018-2030. These are intended to address the effects of migration on women and men in Africa

Under this Agreement, COMESA is implementing the AU Migration Statistics Programme funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The

programme is helping to gradually address the challenges faced in the development of statistics such as low quality of current data; lack of data sharing; lack of coordination among statistical actors at national, regional and continental level and lack of gender disaggregated data, among others.

With Finland, COMESA has received support through the COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA). Finland supported the organization of the first African Nordic Business Conference in 2017, in Helsinki. Further cooperation is with the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) which signed an MoU with the Council of European Energy Regulators, which represents 37 energy regulatory authorities, including the Finnish Authority.

Receiving their letters of Credence, the Secretary General thanked the European Union to which both Finland and Sweden belong for the support to COMESA programmes.

"We are aware, that based on 'Team Europe approach', Finland and Sweden will work towards effective implementation of the EU's New

Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and the Global Europe," she said.

Ambassador Hallenborg said Sweden recognizes the important role of the regional organization and looks forward to enhanced dialogue and relationship with COMESA in the future.

"In particular, we want to promote a progressive and fair trade policy that increases women's economic empowerment as well as efforts to combat corruption and build confidence in the democratic institutions," he said.

In collaboration with COMESA, Sweden supports a continental project to collect and analyze statistics on migration with a long-term expert based at the COMESA Secretariat.

Ambassador Halinen said Finland strongly advocates for free trade and has supported economic integration in Africa to strengthen regional trade by making it more inclusive and sustainable. In Zambia, she said, Finland has assisted Zambian companies to access the huge market in D R Congo resulting in 24.5 million US dollar export deals.

The implementation of both the regional and the continental free trade area regimes will position the regional economic communities, COMESA, East African Community and Southern Africa Development Community into a formidable economic bloc to collectively exploit the envisaged benefits of Africa's integration.

Addressing the 38th Meeting of the COMESA Trade and Customs experts meeting on 7 – 9 November 2022, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA, Dr Kipyego Cheluget said although the ratification of the Tripartite Free Trade Area had not progressed as rapidly as originally envisaged, it remained a commendable effort at regional economic communities (RECs) consolidation upon which the AfCFTA could build upon.

“The existing RECs are the natural building blocks of the wider AfCFTA trading arrangement, and we need to double our efforts to complete the ratification process to make the COMESA, EAC and SADC Tripartite FTA operational,” he said.

In this regard, he proposed that the remaining processes under the TFTA should draw lessons from the AfCFTA, especially with regard to the strategies that were used to facilitate its rapid ratification and coming into force.

The TFTA was launched in 2015 and despite achieving numerous milestones, its implementation has been held back by lack of the sufficient number of ratifications by Member / Partner States. Currently, 11 States have ratified the agreement, three short of the required 14 threshold to enable it to enter into force. On the other hand, the AfCFTA achieved the required ratification threshold in less than two years after it was launched.

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The TFTA was launched in 2015 and despite achieving numerous milestones, its implementation has been held back by lack of the sufficient number of ratifications by Member / Partner States



Implementation of the AfCFTA and Tripartite FTA to Bolster Regional Economic Communities

The experts' meeting focused on the review of the implementation of regional programs and agreed on policy recommendations to enhance regional integration to be presented to the COMESA policy organs meetings, including the Council of Ministers meeting scheduled on 1st December 2022.

Among the key issues tabled to the meeting was the report on the COMESA trade in services which covered negotiations, strategies to fast track the negotiations and issues relating to tracking and monitoring the implementation of already agreed commitments.

“This Committee may wish to make additional recommendations that will ensure that trade in services negotiations are expedited as the implementation of liberalization commitments in services will enhance COMESA's regional integration agenda,” Dr Cheluget said.

The report of the Heads of Customs was presented with the pertinent issues being the slow progress registered in the implementation of instruments expected to support implementation of the COMESA Customs Union. An update was also provided on how post -Covid-19 Customs Administrations have deployed ICT tools and automation to expedite clearance of goods traded within the region.

The initiatives include automation and use of non-intrusive inspection systems in lieu of physical inspections, the use of e-declaration processing and submission of electronic supporting documents, pre-arrival processing, increased use of electronic cargo tracking systems to manage transit movements among others. All these form the basis for the current COMESA theme of “Building Resilience Through Strategic Digital Economic Integration.

Delegates from Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended the meeting.



Vice President of the World Scout Parliamentary Union and Senator in Kenya Ms. Tabitha Mutinda

Youth-Elders Engage in First-Ever Intergenerational Dialogue

Over 70 delegates met in Nairobi, Kenya on 21-22 November 2022 for a regional forum whose main objective was to create space for intergenerational dialogue and advance transformative strategies and perspectives on maximizing the development skills of the youth.

The forum was anchored on the theme; “Enhancing the meaningful participation of youth in peacebuilding and peace processes in the COMESA region”. It was intended to enhance exchange of meaningful knowledge and experiences with the older generation.

Hosted in a hybrid format, it brought together the eight members of the COMESA’s Committee of Elders, leaders of key institutions, key youth constituencies led by members of the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel (COMYAP), representatives from National Youth Councils in the COMESA region, youth-led organizations, and social justice actors, among others.

Speaking at the opening of the Forum, World Scout Parliamentary Union 1st Vice President and Senator in Kenya Hon. Tabitha Mutinda urged governments and leaders to give

youth the space to share their own perspectives about leadership, governance specifically the decision-making processes and to engage them in peace and security matters.

“Dear young people, it is also important for youth to understand your space and environment. Your youth is not forever so use it wisely while you are in that space,” Hon. Mutinda said.

Member of the COMESA Committee of Elders Amb. Ashraf Rashed emphasized that peace and security objectives could only be achieved by the meaningful engagement of the youth in conflict prevention, mediation and post conflict construction.

The forum was organized by COMESA, Save the Children International East and Southern Africa Region, Horn of Africa Youth Network in partnership with the Ministry for Youth Affairs Sports and Arts in Kenya.

Recommendations from the forum would be presented to the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs and eventually to the Authority of Heads of State.

Agricultural Productivity Improves in the Region Despite Climate Change Effects

The COMESA region has progressively increased agricultural productivity despite food insecurity being a major challenge. Climate-induced shocks such as unprecedented drought in the Horn of Africa, the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and other external shocks including the Ukraine-Russia conflict have worsened this situation.

To weather these shocks, the region has embarked on resilience building to ensure sustainable development and management of the environment and natural resources. In this regard, COMESA Secretariat has developed strategic frameworks, plans and guidelines aimed at enhancing sustainable development of agriculture, environment and natural resources for improved food security and livelihoods in the region.

A report on these resilience building initiatives was presented to a virtual joint meeting of COMESA Member States technical experts responsible for agriculture, natural resources and environment that took place on 22 November 2022.

Among COMESA’s key initiatives to support Member States include policy and strategy development on climate change, review of Nationally Determined Contributions and upscaling Climate Smart Agriculture.

Further, the Secretariat has developed a Blue Economy Strategy to promote development and transformation of an inclusive and sustainable sector. Other initiatives include the development of the COMESA Regional Guidelines for the Establishment, Operation/Management of Warehouse Receipt System for Agricultural Commodities. This initiative is expected to contribute to improved post-harvest management, commodity aggregation and enhance access to markets and trade in quality agricultural commodities within the region.

Recommendations from the experts meeting were presented to the Joint Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment on 24 November 2022.



Delegates at the technical working group meeting in Kigali, Rwanda

Experts Review Proposals of Strengthening Regional ICT Association

A technical working group under the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in Information and Communication Technology (EGEE-ICTs) programme met in Kigali, Rwanda for a two-day validation workshop to review a study on how they could provide assistance to the regional ICT sector associations.

The experts from COMESA, SADC, EAC, IGAD and IOC were joined by representatives from Regional ICT Associations (RICTAs) to review recommendations on the development of institutional strategies and business/membership models that would sustain their role of ensuring coordinated public and private sector policy and regulatory engagement and development.

Funded by the European Union Development Fund (EDF11), the EGEE-ICT aims at supporting the effective review and/or development of various regional policy and regulatory frameworks in a harmonized manner that will contribute to enhancing competition, improved access to cost effective and secure ICT services in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region.

To kick start the process, COMESA as the lead Regional Economic Community (REC) engaged Prof. Thomas Senaji

from Kenya to carry out the consultancy services of the programme. The specific objectives of the consultancy was to conduct an assessment and provide an analysis of the capacity, strengths and weaknesses across the ICT sector associations and identify the main capacity gaps and demands.

Speaking when he officially opened the workshop on 16 November 2022, Public Sector Digitization Analyst in Rwanda's Ministry of Transformation, ICT and Innovation Mr Angelos Munezero commended the collaboration of the RECs in building strong meaningful partnerships to create synergies which will positively impact the people.

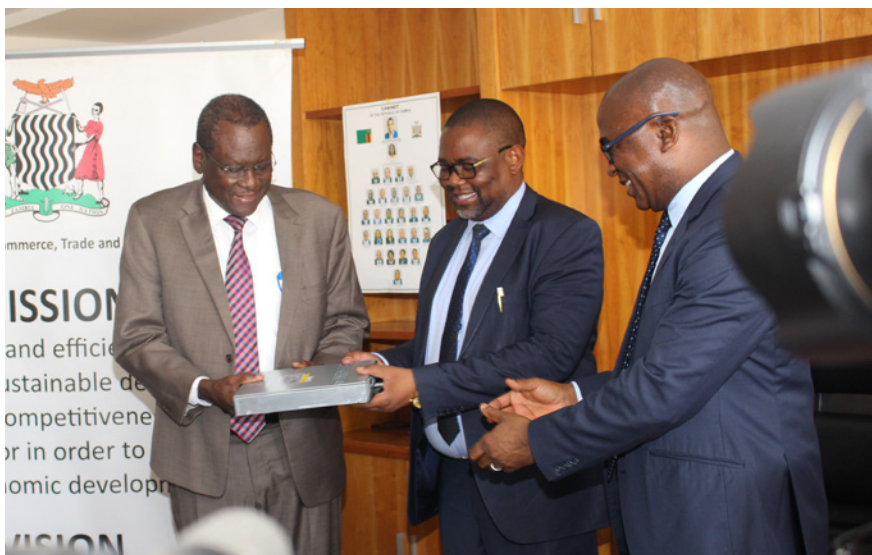
"Indeed, having COMESA, SADC, EAC, IGAD and IOC under the EGEE-ICT programme working together is a step in the right direction to achieve ICT regional integration," he said. Rwanda, he added acknowledged the EGEE-ICT programme, as a vital initiative that will ensure growth and development of ICT and telecommunications in the region.

The Government of Rwanda has invested in digital transformation to change people's lives. By the end of September 2022, mobile telephone subscription stood at 82.5 percent, internet subscription at 60.6 percent and about 80 percent of the most impactful

services are provided online through Irembo platform.

Addressing the delegates, Telecommunications Officer at COMESA Secretariat Mr Leonard Chitundu said RICTAs plays a vital role in the development of the ICT sector in the region. He said that together, they provide invaluable forums for sharing knowledge and experiences on regulatory practices, supporting the implementation of ICT policies and regulations, and sharing perspectives and experiences on institutional strategies and business models for ICT operators.

Hence, a consultant was engaged to conduct the assessment and thereafter develop strategies, action plans and business models and identify capacity building activities required to enhance the operations of the RICTAs. Hence, the consultant gathered data and information on the status of each of the five RICTAs in the region, namely Association of Regulators of Information and Communications for Eastern and Southern Africa (ARICEA); Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa (CRASA) East African Communications Organization (EACO) Southern Africa Postal Operators Association (SAPOA) and Southern Africa Telecommunications Association (SATA).



Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry John Mulongoti (centre) and Amb. Kipyego Cheluget (L) hand over ICT equipment to acting ZRA Commissioner General Moses Shuko

Zambia's Revenue Authority gets \$547,000 Worth of ICT Equipment from EU-COMESA Project

The Zambia Revenue Authority received ICT equipment worth USD 547,000 procured under the Zambia Border Posts Upgrade Project which is funded by the European Union under the 11th EDF through COMESA. This was on 18th November 2022. They included servers and storage systems to support the operations of the ASYCUDA World System and other ICT functions of the ZRA.

The equipment was handed over to ZRA Acting Commissioner General, Moses Shuko by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr John Mulongoti in a brief ceremony conducted in Lusaka, Zambia in the presence of the COMESA Assistant Secretary General (Programmes), Dr Kipyego Cheluget.

Zambia signed a sub delegation agreement with COMESA Secretariat on 23 November 2020 on the upgrading of the Zambia border posts of Chirundu, Mwami and Nakonde under which USD 6.8 million was provided for implementation of activities under the Trade Facilitation Project supported under the 11th EDF.

Dr Cheluget thanked the EU for the financial support provided to the

organization for the implementation of trade facilitation activities.

"The purchase and supply of servers to ZRA addresses the issue of enhanced automation of processes and also builds a foundation for further implementation of the Zambia Single Window System," he said.

Mr Mulongoti said the equipment is adaptable to diverse workloads and environments and it is anticipated to deliver high range performance with the right balance of expandability and scalability.

"The equipment is designed for supreme versatility and resilience, and this makes it ideal to work in multiple environments, such as the Revenue Authority," he said.

Mr Shuko said ZRA will henceforth be able to process more entries and ensure that the businesspeople do not spend longer hours at the border. He added that with the new additions to the ASYCUDA World, the servers shall play a vital role in ensuring that all border agencies are integrated with enhanced connectivity.

Tripartite Free Trade Area Awareness Drive

The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Task Force conducted sensitization and publicity programmes in three Member States in 2022 to create awareness on the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) ahead of its full implementation. By the last quarter of the year, the workshops had taken place in Comoros, Malawi and Tunisia. They were meant to sensitize the business community and other stakeholders on the trade opportunities and benefits under the TFTA and provide an update on the progress towards implementation of the Agreement.

Initially, eight workshops were planned to cover the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Lesotho, Malawi, Sudan, Comoros, Madagascar and Tanzania under the Tripartite Capacity Building Programme Phase II. Four of these countries had by then reached advanced stages with preparations for signing and ratification. High level consultation missions led by the Chief Executive Officers of the Regional Economic Communities were planned for Comoros, the DRC, Tanzania and Malawi.

In Malawi, the national TFTA sensitization workshop was held on 3rd November 2022, hosted by the country's Ministry of Trade and Industry. It was preceded by consultative

meetings with senior officials to establish Malawi's preparedness and process of ratification of the TFTA Agreement.

The Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Trade and Industry Ms. Christina Zakeyo, who addressed participants said the ministry was committed to assist the private sector get the necessary information and fully utilize the TFTA to boost intra-Africa trade. She urged the micro, small and medium enterprises to take keen interest in the TFTA and take advantage of the available markets once the agreement comes into effect.

"Let us use the opportunity to give a full picture of what has been finalized, what is outstanding and the current status of implementation and negotiations of the TFTA. Malawi can greatly benefit from the TFTA, so this information is needed," Ms Zakeyo said.

The two-day meeting was highly interactive with the experts sensitizing the businesspersons on the trade opportunities offered by the TFTA and how to tap them. This was done through various presentations, discussions and question and answer sessions with the stakeholders. These sessions spurred national interest in Malawi towards ratification of the TFTA with participants requesting for another sensitization workshop to be held in the business capital, Blantyre.

The team of experts was led by Mr Rashid Kibowa, Director of Trade at the East African Community (EAC). The other experts included the TCBP II Project Coordinator Mr Kennedy Otwor, Tripartite Transport and Transit Programme Coordinator SADC Secretariat, Mr Lovemore Bingandadi, Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) Expert at COMESA Secretariat, Ms Vonesai Hove, Mr Geoffrey Osoro and Mr Timothy Chisembwere of the EAC Secretariat.



Women Smallholder Farmers to Benefit from Beef Value Chain

More than 60 women smallholder farmers are expected to directly benefit from a beef value chain programme soon to be launched in Eswatini. The programme is being introduced by the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) Eswatini Chapter to enhance the competitiveness and participation of women entrepreneurs in the beef value chain.

The Chapter has since secured 10 hectares of land in the Manzini region and is in the process of purchasing cattle and introducing feedlot. COMFWB Eswatini will also facilitate training in livestock production, feed and fodder production and ration formulation.

COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash revealed this in a statement issued on 7 November 2022. The land which will be used for the incubation centre will also include projects around farming such as tomato manufacturing and a processing plant. The plant will be developed with support from the World Food Programme (WFP).

"This programme will go a long way to assist the target group, which are

women farmers who mainly lack secure land tenure," she said. "It is a fact that grazing pastures are increasingly disappearing due to the proliferation of homesteads on previously designated common fields."

In addition, supplementation of crop residues, fodder, and feed during the dry season is a considerable challenge. The Chapter anticipates that the new programme will bring with it several benefits including strengthening the capacity of the women in beef production in both field and feedlot, increase the number of women participating in the beef value chain, improve market linkages and increase the use of improved breeds of livestock. Besides, the capacity of women farmers in handling Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards will be enhanced.

The Chapter aims to integrate the beef and dairy cattle value chains and crop production, promote the use of manure technologies for smallholder crop production and the use of skin and hides for the leather industry. It will indirectly benefit 800 women to competitively participate in beef feedlot farming in all four regions of Eswatini.



A section of the delegates attending the ARICEA meeting in Rwanda

Regional ICT Regulators Meet in Kigali

Regional Cyber Security Center on the agenda

After a five-year pause, members of the Association of Regulators of Information and Communications for Eastern and Southern Africa (ARICEA) met in Kigali Rwanda, Friday 18 -19 November 2022.

Delegates from Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe attended the hybrid meeting to discuss key issues including the report of the last 29th Executive Committee meeting of 2018. Also in the agenda were progress reports on hosting the ARICEA Secretariat and Regional Cyber Security Center, recruitment of the ARICEA Executive Secretary and the status of finances.

ARICEA has over the years been operating at COMESA Secretariat, without an Executive Secretary to oversee its operations.

"This has slowed down its progress and it is important that an independent Secretariat is established, and the Executive Secretary employed to implement decisions of the previous

AGMs," Mr Leonard Chitundu, Telecommunications Officer at COMESA Secretariat said.

ARICEA is a consultative and collaborative forum for ICT regulators in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region that was formally established by COMESA Member States, through a constitution in January 2003. It provides a platform where ICT regulators and other key stakeholders of the ICT sector in the Eastern and Southern Africa region convene to discuss issues pertaining to regional integration in sector's development.

Through ARICEA, Member States exchange ideas, views and experiences on regulatory matters, promote sustainable development and application of efficient, adequate and cost-effective ICT networks and services in the ESA sub-region. The core members of ARICEA are autonomous regulators in ESA and government ministries responsible for ICT where regulators are yet to be established.

Data on Women and Girls in Focus at the Joint Africa Gender Statistics Conference



Themba Munalula

On 26 - 30 September 2022, COMESA and its partners convened a Joint Africa Gender Statistics Conference on the latest innovations and best practices in gender statistics to inform action plans for gender statistics in Africa. More than 150 civil society actors including policy analysis and gender statistics experts from 40 African countries attended the conference held in Nairobi, Kenya.

Themed 'Gender Statistics Imperatives for Africa', the Conference interrogated gender statistics through the lens of Agenda 2063—the African Union's blueprint for transforming Africa into a global powerhouse, the Sustainable Development Goals that support gender equality and women's empowerment, and global guidance on violence against women, among others.

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"Given the pivotal role of gender equality in socioeconomic and cultural development, ensuring that African countries produce high-quality, timely, and reliable gender data has far-reaching benefits," Rosa Bora



A section of participants at the COMESA Tunisia Businesswomen Days event

COMESA Courts Tunisian Businesswomen

COMESA Assistant Secretary General-Programmes Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget extended an invitation to Tunisia businesspeople particularly women and youth, to take advantage of the abundant trade and business opportunities in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa.

He was speaking during the COMESA Tunisia Businesswomen Days, a two-day event held on 29-30 September 2022 in Tunis. Minister of Trade for Tunisia Hon. Mrs. Fadhila Rebhi Ben Hamza officially opened the event, which was also attended by the Minister for Women, Family and Seniors Hon. Mrs. Amel Belhaj Moussa.

Hon. Rebhi, who represented Tunisia's Prime Minister Hon. Mrs. Najla Bouden, expressed the country's

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"Thanks to that important step Tunisia took, her businesspeople and enterprises can now export products, without paying import duties, to 15 other COMESA Member States which constitute the FTA," Amb Kipyego Cheluget.

readiness to grow its trade relations with the COMESA Member States and challenged the organisers to consider the possibility of convening the conference on a bi-annual basis. The objective of this, she said, would be to track the progress of Tunisia's involvement in the common market and provide a forum for exchange between the women entrepreneurs.

Amb. Dr. Cheluget lauded Tunisia for actively engaging in COMESA's integration agenda and observed that the Member State had moved with "admirable speed" in its quest to harness the opportunities to trade with the other COMESA Member States.

"In March 2020, barely two years after the country's admission to COMESA, Tunisia deposited legal instruments with the COMESA Secretariat confirming her accession to the COMESA Free Trade Area.

"Thanks to that important step Tunisia took, her businesspeople and enterprises can now export products, without paying import duties, to 15 other COMESA Member States which constitute the FTA," he said.

He added that fora such as the Tunisia Women in Business Days are a valuable avenue for providing training, disseminating information, building capacity and cultivating networks for local women to engage in economic activities both within and across borders.

He informed participants about the various customs and trade facilitation instruments COMESA has developed, including adoption of the Single Window System, Simplified Customs Documents, the Rules of Origin and an Online NTB Reporting and Monitoring System, among others.

The COMESA delegation which included Director for Gender and Social Affairs Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, Director for Trade Dr. Christopher Onyango, and Director for Industry and Agriculture Mrs. Providence Mavubi made presentations on various COMESA programmes including the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) and the 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform (50MAWSP).



Young leaders and COMESA staff attending peace and security training in Alebtong, Uganda

Strengthening the Capacity of National Youth Councils on Peace and Security

Over 70 young leaders from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda convened at Alebtong, a rural outpost, 386 Kilometers north of Kampala in Uganda for a four-day regional capacity building forum. That was on 27 – 30 September 2022.

It was organized by COMESA through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) working jointly with Save the Children and the Horn of Africa Initiative. Its objective was to strengthen the participation and capacity of national youth councils, youth-led and youth-focused organizations on the youth, peace and security agenda in Africa.

The training served to strengthen the role of youths in implementing the 'Silencing of the Guns in Africa Initiative' and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 2250) of 2015. This is in recognition that young people play an important role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.

The forum was also in response to an earlier Decision by the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs, who urged Member States to prioritise

building of resilience and adoption of the COMESA Early Warning System Structural Vulnerability Assessment (COMWARN SVA) model. Among other things, the model has identified youth unemployment as a structural factor to conflicts in most COMESA Member States.

At the forum, participants were taken through the African Union continental framework on youth, peace and security focusing on the five defined pillars; participation, prevention, protection, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration.

Head of the Governance, Peace and Security Unit at COMESA Secretariat, Ms Elizabeth Mutunga, who led a team of Early Warning Experts at the forum, said the interaction assisted participants to identify and strengthen innovative proposals undertaken by national youth councils in peacebuilding and peace processes at the national and regional level.

"The training will also help strengthen the capacity of the youth councils in engaging with Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Mechanisms and the private sector

in fostering the peace discourse," she said.

Going forward it is expected that youth engagement in peace and security will be strengthened especially the Silencing the Guns agenda and reinforce the capacity of the national youth councils. The partners also plan to establish a regional platform based in Alebtong for networking, information and sharing of lessons.

Since November 2021, COMESA in collaboration with partners has organized two High Level Inter-Ministerial Conferences in Nairobi, Kenya and Harare, Zimbabwe whose main objective was to deliberate on how to better support, promote and invest in young peace-builders in the region and their engagement with RECs.

A key recommendation from the engagements was on the need to establish a one-stop youth centre and strengthening the capacity of youth-led organizations and national youth councils to engage in national and regional peace-building discourse.

Data on Women and Girls in Focus...

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Delegates comprising policy analysts and gender statistics experts from line ministries, national statistical offices, and civil society exchanged knowledge on the latest innovations and best practices in gender statistics to inform action plans in AU Member States and the region.

The production of gender statistics in the region has been slow due to a combination of factors including a reluctance to change how statistics have traditionally been compiled and presented, lack of knowledge on how change can be effected and a constrained policy and financial environment.

Speaking at the forum, COMESA Chief Statistician, Mr. Themba Munalula said: "Gender equality has increasingly been recognized as being essential to the process of sustainable development and the formulation of effective national development policies and programmes."

Principal Statistician at the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) Roza Mamuye Bora underscored the role of gender statistics in her statement at the forum:

"Given the pivotal role of gender equality in socioeconomic and cultural development, ensuring that African countries produce high-quality, timely, and reliable gender data has far-reaching benefits," she said.

Specifically, gender statistics are instrumental in measuring progress towards achieving regional and global gender development goals. However, the production of gender statistics is relatively new, and information is not fully consolidated and always readily available, even at the global level.

In his statement, Dr. Maxime Houinato, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Director, noted that gender data and statistics are not just important for their own sake.

"The end goal is really to improve the lives of women and girls as envisioned by the SDGs and other regional and international plans," he said. He added that while nearly all countries in the region have endorsed the SDGs and incorporated them into national strategies and plans, lack of funding is often cited as the most critical impediment in the region.

Fatouma Sissoko, Gender Statistician at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) observed that such challenges have hindered progress of national statistical offices in designing the systems and operations needed to generate gender data for evidence-based policymaking and advocacy.

Notwithstanding, regional initiatives such as the Africa Programme on Gender Statistics (APGS), have contributed significantly to improvements in gender statistics at both the regional and national level.

Banking Supervisors and Financial Stability Analysts Trained on Macro-prudential Surveillance

Forty-five banking supervisors and financial stability analysts from 10 Central Banks from the region were trained on Basel III and Macro-Prudential Surveillance, which aims at strengthening the resilience of the banking system, improve market confidence in regulatory ratios and promote a level playing field.

The training took place in Nairobi, Kenya on 19 – 23 September 2022.

While addressing the delegates at the commencement of the training, the outgoing CMI's Director, Mr. Ibrahim Zeidy, noted that the implementation

of Basel III framework within the internationally agreed timeframe was aimed at strengthening the resilience of the banking system, improving market confidence in regulatory ratios and promoting a level playing field.

He further observed that COMESA member countries were making progress on implementing different facets of Basel III. In addition, they were aware that Basel III transition arrangements had provided for a period for observation and partial implementation of leverage, capital and liquidity ratios such that countries should have fully complied by January

1, 2019.

Therefore, he noted that the training would familiarize participants with Basel III standards and principles and equip them with tools and techniques for conducting supervision under the revised framework.

Participants to the workshop were drawn from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



CNFCE President Mrs. Leila Belkhiria Jaber and CBC Vice Chair Mr. James Chimwaza during the signing ceremony

COMESA Business Council, UTICA sign MoU

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) and the Tunisian Union of Industry and Commerce (UTICA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to foster cooperation. The President of the Tunisian National Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (CNFCE), Mrs. Leila Belkhiria Jaber and CBC Vice Chair Mr. James Chimwaza signed the MoU during the COMESA Tunisia Business Women Days in Tunis, 27 – 30 September 2022.

The purpose of the MoU is to establish the principles and basis for increased cooperation between the CBC and UTICA, with a view to improve business environment, promote trade and investment in COMESA, through joint programs, business partnerships and cooperation.

In a declaration codenamed the Tunis Declaration of Friday, September 30, 2022, which was read by CNFCE President, Mrs. Jaber, the private sector advocated an initiative to

launch a 'Made in COMESA' standard, emphasizing the need to promote a Trustmark linking local professionals in the Member States.

They also expressed their support for the launch in Tunisia of a "mega incubator and a business center for women entrepreneurs" for the COMESA Member States.

The COMESA Tunisia Businesswomen Day event was jointly organised by Tunisia's Ministry of Trade, COMESA, UTICA, COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) and CNFCE, with support from GIZ. Its objective was to connect women entrepreneurs from Tunisia and the rest of the COMESA region and to encourage them to take advantage of the opportunities on offer. More than 100 Tunisian women business leaders took part in the event.

COMESA Business Council has a New Boss



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) Board and Management appointed Mr. Teddy Yagambaram Soobramanien (pictured) as Chief Executive Officer with effect from 1st November 2022.

The appointment was announced by the President of the Council Mr. Marday Venkatasmy. With over 25 years of international experience in trade negotiations, policy implementation, business development, and organisational management Teddy brings a unique set of skills, perspectives, and leadership qualities to steer CBC into the future, said Mr Venkatasmy.

Mr. Soobramanien has held

several leading positions at the World Trade Organisation (WTO); the United Nations (UN); International Trade Centre (ITC); the Commonwealth; the UK Government; the African, Caribbean and Pacific States - European Union (ACP-EU) TradeCom Facility; the private sector; and the Mauritius Mission to the UN in Geneva. He has steered to success many of the programs he has been responsible for, including the Aid for Trade Hub and Spokes Programme.

Additionally, he is widely published on issues relating to small economies; the ACP; developing countries; and on international trade issues that are of interest to Africa. He has also implemented several private sector development projects for the TradeCom Facility.

“On behalf of the Board, and indeed on my own behalf, I wish to congratulate him on his new role and extend our deepest gratitude to Mr. Dickson Poloji for his leadership as Acting CEO since May this year, said the Council President. “We look forward to propelling CBC to the next level, with great zeal and focus.



New CMI Director Dr Lucas Njoroge (left) with staff bids farewell to Mr Ibrahim Zeidy (4th left)

COMESA Monetary Institute Boss Bows Out

The Director of the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) Mr Ibrahim Zeidy retired on 30 September 2022 after serving the institution since 2011 when it was established. Prior to that, he was the Senior Monetary Economist at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia before moving to Nairobi, Kenya to start the CMI.

The CMI is hosted by the Central Bank of Kenya in Nairobi at the Kenya School of Monetary Studies.

During his tenure, Mr Zeidy oversaw several milestones including improved macroeconomic convergence among COMESA Member States with available data showing that the region has achieved greater harmonization of macroeconomic policies. The COMESA region has also recorded an enhanced stability in the financial system with many countries having established a financial stability unit within the Central Banks.

The new Director is Dr Lucas Njoroge, the former Senior Economist at the institute. In a farewell statement, Dr Njoroge acknowledged his former boss's passion for research, which enabled the institute to publish over 40 country specific studies between 2011 and 2022.

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“Over 4, 000 economists from Central Banks in Member States have been trained as a way of building capacity and improving macroeconomic management and promoting financial stability in the bloc,” Dr Lucas Njoroge.

“Over 4, 000 economists from Central Banks in Member States have been trained as a way of building capacity and improving macroeconomic management and promoting financial stability in the bloc,” said Dr Njoroge.



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