

COMESA NEWS

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COMESA-UNCTAD Study Calls for Simplification of Rules of Origin to **Boost Free Trade in Africa**

- COMESA Launches Digital Yellow Card Mobile App
- COMESA Court Suspends Grant of Subsidy
- Legal Instruments to Implement the Tripartite Free Trade Area adopted
- Coming Soon: Online Platform for Trade in Services



Editorial

One last hurdle for the tripartite to roll- out



In March this year, the Council of Ministers of COMESA, East African Community and Southern African Development Community adopted several legal instruments that underpin the implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area. You see, the Tripartite has had a sluggish pace since it was launched eight years ago, and so this was a significant development. It is expected to trigger the attainment of the remaining

three ratifications that would enable the TFTA to enter into force. The raft of instruments that the ministers cleared are all aimed at easing trade across the three regional economic communities. This milestone has been achieved mainly on the market integration pillar, which is one of the three pillars of the TFTA. The others are infrastructure and industrial development. Equally significant progress has been realized under the infrastructure pillars such as the development and operationalization of transport and trade facilitation instruments. Up to seven legal instruments covering vehicle load, traffic and cross-border transport have been concluded. The critical need for regional transport facilitation was illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby the Member States developed the tripartite guidelines for safe cross border movement of persons and personal goods. Likewise, under industrial development pillar, negotiations are underway to establish a Tripartite Industrial Development Coordination Unit in each REC. The development of Tripartite Agro-processing value chain and establishment of Trade Logistics Hubs is also envisaged. It is apparent that the ground is now set, and what remains is the final push to get three of the remaining ratifications. There is profound optimism now that 2023 will be the watershed moment given that even Heads of State have come forward to champion the implementation of this regional trade regime.

Mwangi G

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
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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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File photo: Local products on display at the COMESA regional trade fair, dubbed Source 21 in Nairobi, Kenya

COMESA-UNCTAD Study Calls for Simplification of Rules of Origin to **Boost Free Trade in Africa**

Complex and stringent rules of origin can prevent businesses from taking advantage of trade preferences, according to a new study by UNCTAD and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Secretariat.

Rules of Origin are the “passport” for goods, determining whether they can be exempted from taxes or taxed less under a preferential trade arrangement or free trade area (FTA). They can be complex to comply with – especially for products made using materials from different countries through global value chains – and can make it difficult for products to qualify for trade preferences.

This complexity can hinder African businesses from benefiting from preferential trade agreements that the continent’s governments have increasingly signed to increase intra-African trade or exports to partners like the European Union (EU).

Utilization rates measure the extent to which firms are using FTAs. The

study uses rates reported by COMESA countries to examine how effectively firms in those nations are using trade preferences offered by FTAs.

“Making utilization rates publicly available will help governments monitor the effectiveness of trade agreements,” says Paul Akiwumi, Director of UNCTAD’s division for Africa and least developed countries. “Understanding which trade agreements are working better for African firms will help the continent’s governments improve the outcome of trade negotiations and ensure better trade deals.”

The study compared the utilization rates of COMESA members under FTAs with other African countries and preferential agreements with Canada, the EU, Japan and the United States (collectively known as QUAD countries).

The study found that, for example, utilization rates of trade preferences with the EU are more than 30 percentage

points higher than those under COMESA, East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) trade arrangements.

According to the study, utilization rates in intra-African trade are low mainly because their rules of origin are generally more stringent than those applied under preferential trade agreements with the QUAD countries.

For example, Uganda is a major exporter of animal or vegetable oils and related products. In 2018, Uganda used about 92% of its trade preferences with the QUAD countries for the duty-free export of these products, compared to only 5.1% with COMESA member states.

This example highlights the need for COMESA member States to consider reforming their rules of origin to align them with international best practices. The same would be true for other African regional economic communities like EAC and SADC, the study says.

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Front row (L-R): Chief Agriculture Economist in Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture Mr Bernard Mumba, COMESA Assistant Secretary General Dr Dev Haman, AGRA Vice- President Dr Apollos Nwafor and COMESA Director of Industry and Agriculture Mrs Providence Mavubi

Regional Food Balance Sheet Rollout

Stakeholders' committee hold Inaugural meeting in Lusaka



.....
The Secretariat will play a lead role in the governance of the RFBS initiative, bring together senior decision makers, lead outreach efforts and garner buy-in from key public and private actors."

Senior Government officials from the Ministries of Agriculture in Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia and representatives of key regional private sector associations that make up the Committee of the Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) Initiative convened in Lusaka, Zambia 14 – 16 March 2023 to advance stakeholders' ownership and governance of the RFBS.

The main objective of the three-day meeting was to provide strategic direction and guidance to the RFBS effort which aims at strengthening agri-food data/ information system in the COMESA-EAC-SADC region.

The RFBS initiative also aims at accelerating the application of digital, remote sensing, and advanced analytical technologies to provide data and forecasts on production, trade, prices, stocks, and consumption for major food commodities in the Eastern and Southern Africa region.

This data will inform policy and business decisions on food security, agricultural trade as well as investment. For example, in showing food surplus and deficit areas, the RFBS provides a signal to private traders, millers, and other aggregators to inform when and where to source and where to ship food commodities.



The COMESA Secretariat will facilitate inclusive data sharing within and among the key actors as well as facilitate engagement on the necessary policy reforms based on RFBS outputs.

COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and a couple of technical and technology partners, is implementing the RFBS which was jointly launched in September 2022. So far, progress has been recorded in the implementation of this initiative with the support from the six pilot countries.

Speaking at the launch of the committee on 14 March 2023, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman said:

“The Secretariat will play a lead role in the governance of the RFBS initiative, bring together senior decision makers, lead outreach efforts and garner buy-in from key public and private actors.”

He added that there will be need for deliberate efforts to ensure that the data/information needs of the key stakeholders/end-users including women and youth in the region are adequately addressed.

The Chief Agriculture Economist in

Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture Mr Bernard Mumba said the RFBS is crucial for the region and governments, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Hence the need to be open and share relevant data to enable evidence-based policy, business, and investment decisions for inclusive socio-economic development.

Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) which is co-leading in the implementation of the RFBS commended COMESA for driving the process and taking up the leadership role to ensure that the Initiative is fully implemented.

Dr Apollos Nwafor, AGRA Vice-President for Policy and Capability, described the Initiative as ‘an African solution to an African problem’ which all countries should embrace as their own and ensure that it works.”

Partners attending the meeting included AGRA, the Eastern Africa Grains Council (EAGC), the Southern Africa Federation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU), the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF), the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD), the COMESA Business Council (CBC) and TETRA TECH.

COMESA-UNCTAD Study Calls..

→ continued from page 1

Low utilization rates show the unused potential of free trade in Africa, hampering the establishment of regional value chains and stifling commerce. They highlight the need for careful implementation of trade agreements and supportive policies to make sure trade and economic goals are met.

The study also revealed that while utilization rates are higher for the QUAD countries, significant pockets of underutilization exist. For example, out of \$7 million vanilla exports from Comoros in 2018, \$3 million was not utilized under trade preferences, hence duty savings of around \$250,000 were possibly missed.

The study recommended a detailed roadmap for COMESA trade policymakers and the private sector to address such underutilization. UNCTAD and COMESA are leading a series of actions to disseminate the findings of the study and hold consultations at firm level.

“If certain industries or regions are not able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the preferential trade agreement, it could lead to job losses and economic decline in those areas, which could have wider economic and political ramifications,” the study says.

The pioneering work by UNCTAD and COMESA on utilization rates can support the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by ensuring effective monitoring of the utilization of regional economic communities at an intra-African level and informing trade policy actions to ensure high utilization of the AfCFTA. (<https://unctad.org/news/simpler-rules-origin-needed-boost-free-trade-africa-study-shows>)

Coming Soon: Online Platform for Trade in Services

COMESA will soon launch an Online Platform for Trade in Services that will be used to facilitate speedy and efficient negotiations and provide digital communication, thanks to Afreximbank which has helped develop the platform.

On 29 – 31 March 2023, officials from the 21 COMESA Member States, who deal with trade in services matters attended a training in Lusaka, Zambia and online, on how to use the platform.

The training forum also presented an opportunity to validate two studies that have been conducted to assess the status of trade in business services and construction services in the region, to facilitate negotiations in those two sub-sectors. Also participating in the training were COMESA Secretariat staff that handle trade matters and information and communication technology.



File Photo: Fish traders at the Luangwa Harbor in Zambia

Countries Validate Green Pass Implementation Modalities for Fish Trade

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

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

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

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

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

As a follow up, a validation workshop was organized in November 2022 in Ndola, Zambia whose objective was to discuss the proposed governance structure of the Green Pass Scheme and agree on the appropriate formation. They also discussed the operational modalities of the scheme within existing national legislation and sustainability of the initiative to ensure continued implementation after the project ends.

During the workshop, SSCBTI Project Team Leader Mr Tasara Muzorori

highlight the main objectives of the STR which include enabling small scale traders to benefit from preferential tariffs of the free trade regime of COMESA, simplifying trade and customs processes and helping in bringing the informal trade into formal trade among others.

“The STR is a good programme, and we commend Member States for embracing the Green Pass initiative which aims at facilitating and fast-tracking small-scale cross border trade across with minimum disruptions,” Mr Muzorori added.

Through this initiative, there has been a reduction to overall trading costs for small scale traders, through simplification and consolidation of SPS/ TBT measures and border verification procedures.

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



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

Tripartite Free Trade Area – Taking Stock of Progress

Trade experts from 17 countries under the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Agreement met in Nairobi, Kenya on 23rd and 24th January 2023 under the Tripartite Trade Negotiation Forum (TTNF) where they reviewed progress made on various thematic areas needed to make the TFTA operational and unlock enhanced trade and investment opportunities. This is intended to benefit the 29 COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Member States.

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

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

Barriers among other issues.

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

Speaking during the opening of the meeting, Principal Secretary in Kenya's State Department for Trade Mr Alfred K'Ombudo commended the 11 countries that had ratified the TFTA and urged the others to do the same.

Mr K'Ombudo expressed optimism that positive results would emerge from the meeting for later adoption by the Council of Ministers. This will forestall fatigue and TFTA anxiety from Member/Partner States that ratified the agreement early.

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

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

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

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

COMESA Launches Digital Yellow Card Mobile App

The COMESA Regional Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance (Yellow Card) Scheme has launched a Digital Yellow Card Mobile Application. It is designed to provide access to real-time information to Yellow Card motorists, law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders.

The Application is accessible on Google Play Store and Apple iStore. It will enable law enforcement agencies to verify the validity of digital Yellow Cards. It will also enable motorists to report accidents when travelling in foreign countries, get notifications on the status of their Yellow Cards and call for support during traffic emergencies. This is in line with the Yellow Card Scheme Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 goal to transform service delivery and enhance customer satisfaction.

The Yellow Card was developed to facilitate the smooth movement of motor vehicles, persons and goods in the region through the establishment of a common system for the settlement of claims arising from inter-state motorists.

The Scheme is currently operational in 13 countries; namely: Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In addition, Yellow Card is also issued in non-COMESA countries including Mozambique, South Africa and will soon be issued in Botswana and South Sudan under the Business to Business (B2B) arrangement. This will facilitate the smooth movement of vehicles from other regions to the COMESA region.

Yellow Card operations have been digitalized since November 2018, a move which has led to an unprecedented annual average growth rate of 15 percent.



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

Draft Tripartite Protocol on Competition Policy Moves to next Stage

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

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

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

The Protocol on Competition Policy does

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

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

Taking Stock of The Tripartite FTA Progress Seven Years on

Ministers in charge of trade, customs, finance, economic matters and home/internal affairs from the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) met virtually on Tuesday, 28 March 2023 to review progress on the implementation of various activities under the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA).

This was the 9th meeting of the ministers who constitute the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee (TSMC) of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

Key issues on their agenda were to consider progress reports of the Tripartite Committee of Senior Officials covering the three key pillars of the TFTA namely; market integration, industrial development and infrastructural development.

The last meeting of the TSMC was in 2019. Since then, progress has been reported especially on the market integration pillar and in particular on the exchange of tariff offers and on Rules

of Origin.

Negotiations have been concluded on the list of Rules of Origin for 90% out of a total 5,387 tariff lines which are already contained in Annex IV of the Agreement and can be applied when the TFTA Agreement enters into force.

The Minister of Trade and Industry of Egypt, Hon. Ahmed Samir who chaired the meeting underscored the need to ensure the ratification of the TFTA was achieved. He said this will enable the agreement to enter into force and support the Member States to overcome the current challenges such as the impact of the COVID-19 and the global economic difficulties.

Malawi and Tanzania reported that their respective processes to ratify the agreement were underway and are expected to be completed soon.

Other key milestones of the TFTA reported at the meeting was the development of an Online Non-Tariff Barriers reporting, monitoring and resolution platform. Under this platform individual RECs can effectively and expeditiously report and have NTBs resolved.

The report of the sectoral ministerial meeting was presented to the 5th Tripartite Council of Ministers, on 29 March 2023.

The Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement was launched in 2015.

Council of Ministers Adopt Legal Instruments to Implement the Tripartite Free Trade Area

The Tripartite Council of Ministers of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have adopted legal instruments to implement the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) once it enters into force.

In its 5th meeting conducted virtually on 29 March 2023, the Ministers adopted instruments relating to trade and customs, namely the tripartite agreement on movement of businesspersons, annexes on elimination of import duties, trade remedies, rules of origin, dispute settlement mechanism and the TFTA protocol on competition policy.

Further the Council adopted the guidelines, manuals and working procedures developed on rules of origin and technical barriers to trade, which comprise of sanitary and phytosanitary matters and non-tariff barriers.

The other set of instruments adopted related to road transport. They include Vehicle Load Management Agreement, Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement, Vehicle Load Management Model Law, Cross Border Road Transport Model Law, Road Traffic Model Law, Road Traffic and Transport Transgression Model Law and Transportation of

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Key milestones of the TFTA includes the development of an Online Non-Tariff Barriers reporting, monitoring and resolution platform



Launching of the Tripartite FTA in Sharm el Sheikh Egypt, June 2015

Dangerous Goods by Road Model Law.

In adopting the road transport instruments, the Council applied the principle of variable geometry which allows Member States that are not ready to apply them to do so when ready. This will provide room for discussions to continue at a bilateral level while at the same time allowing those countries that are ready, to proceed with their implementation.

With the adoption of these trade and transport facilitation instruments, focus now is on the ratification of the TFTA, which is currently short of three Member/Partner States signatures to achieve the 14 threshold to enable it enter into force.

Currently, 22 Tripartite Member/Partner States have signed the Agreement out of which, 11, including, Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, Botswana, Namibia, Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe have ratified it.

Keynote speakers at the meeting included COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, who is also the current chair of the Tripartite Task Force. She emphasized the need for political

will and commitment to ensure the successful implementation of the TFTA.

She appreciated the Government of Kenya for championing the tripartite agenda through its special envoy, the Minister of Trade, Hon Moses Kuria, who had been to several regional Member/ Partner States specifically to lobby for their ratification.

"This commitment by Kenya has given us renewed hope that implementation and realization of the aspirations of the Tripartite will be soon," she said.

The African Development Bank, a key financier to the Tripartite programme, through its representative at the meeting Ms. Leila Mokaddem, welcomed the finalization of the instruments as they will pave way for the implementation of the TFTA.

"Time is of essence," she stressed. "Let us not lose this opportunity. Let us do what we can to accelerate the implementation of the TFTA. The ratification of the agreement by those countries that have not done so is key."

The European Union through its Head of Delegation to Zambia and COMESA, Mr.

Jacek Jankowski, informed the ministers that EU had contributed 18 million euros to address obstacles towards an integrated and liberalised road transport market in the eastern and southern African region.

"We are elated to note that through the support of the EU towards the Tripartite Transport and Trade Facilitation programme, seven transport facilitation instruments will be presented for adoption in this session," he said. He added that the EU was ready to share lessons from its own process of economic integration, and, to continue supporting infrastructural investment in Africa in its new Global Gateway Strategy.

The Council adopted the decision to establish a joint tripartite and development partners forum for mobilization of resources to ensure sustainability of the projects and activities.

The TFTA was launched in 2015 and brings together 29 countries to create a single market for the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite region.



COMESA, Zimbabwe Signs €920,544 to Construct Border Market at Chirundu

COMESA Secretariat, and the Government of Zimbabwe, signed a Euro 920,544.28 sub-delegation agreement to construct a cross-border market at Chirundu border post between Zambia and Zimbabwe in a virtual event on 24 March 2023.

The Secretary General of COMESA, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, Zimbabwe Mr. Moses Mhike signed the agreement.

The traders' market is located at Chirundu on the Zimbabwe side. It is funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), Small Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI) which supports the provision of gender sensitive basic infrastructure for use by small scale cross border traders.

According to an assessment carried out by a consulting firm, IMANI Development in May 2017 at five regional border posts, basic workspace infrastructure is a major requirement of small-scale traders, hence the availability of border market infrastructure would increase the connection between traders and

customers and lead to reduced losses especially in perishable stock.

The assessed borders were Kasumbalesa (DRC and Zambia), Chirundu (Zambia and Zimbabwe), Nakonde/Tunduma (Zambia and Tanzania), Mwami/Mchinji (Zambia and Malawi) and Moyale (Ethiopia and Kenya).

The infrastructure to be constructed will include trading space, secure storage and sanitary facilities and decent trading environment especially for women traders. The provision of this market infrastructure is expected to boost formal small-scale cross-border trade flows between Zambia and Zimbabwe. This will lead to higher revenue collection for governments, increased security and higher income for the small-scale cross-border traders.

In his statement, Mr. Mhike said the development of the Chirundu Traders' Market is part of the Government's thrust to develop decent workspace for micro, small and medium enterprises.

"The support from the European Union is highly appreciated and I would want to assure COMESA of our full cooperation

to ensure the completion of the market and its subsequent use by the small-scale traders," he added.

In her remarks, Ms. Kapwepwe noted:

"The modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities provides an opportunity for Zimbabwe and its key stakeholders to take ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities and final management of the Market as COMESA Secretariat provides the necessary technical guidance to ensure all the rules and procedures are adhered to."

Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA Mr. Jacek Jankowski, applauded this milestone:

"The construction of this infrastructure is an example of the EU's support to trade facilitation across major corridors and efficient border actions where they are no disruptions in trade movement of goods and services at borders within the COMESA region. A market at the border is the proximity needed for small-scale traders, especially women and youths to boost their activities. This infrastructure will go a long way in ensuring improved and efficient trade between the peoples of the two borders and beyond."

In his remarks, Mr Jobst von Kirchmann, Ambassador of the European Union to Zimbabwe stated:

"We are encouraged by the step taken by the Government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with COMESA, to foster regional integration, especially in the support to small-scale traders at Chirundu border. The European Union stays committed to support the formalization of trade in the COMESA region and in the promotion of sustainable value chain development within the region."

The parties to this agreement look forward to close collaboration of all stakeholders and ensure the swift implementation and completion of the project.



COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe (L) and Alexis Grosskopf sign the MoU in Cape Town

COMESA, Ocean Hub Africa Sign Pact to Promote the Blue Economy

COMESA and OceanHub Africa (OHA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate in the development of an ocean-based economy in the COMESA region in Cape Town, South Africa, on 23, February 2023. COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe and Mr. Alexis Grosskopf, Executive Director of OceanHub Africa signed the MoU during the Ocean Innovation Africa summit

The MoU will facilitate cooperation in Blue Economy and development of an enabling ecosystem for Blue Entrepreneurs in the COMESA region. The parties will also collaborate in promoting cooperation in knowledge development and sharing to unlock the potential of ocean-impact entrepreneurship in the COMESA region. Other areas of cooperation will be in the identification, capacity building and technical assistance of ocean-impact businesses across the COMESA region.

The cooperation between the Parties under this MoU will take place within the scope of their respective institutional instruments, mandates, policies,

procedures, resources and activities in the areas which constitute common or complementary interest to the parties.

Each party undertakes to invite the other as technical partner to all relevant conferences and meetings, organized under its auspices on issues of common interest, in conformity with its procedures and practices. Hence, representatives of COMESA will be invited to participate in the Annual Summit of OHA (Ocean Innovation Africa) and other relevant events. Likewise, representatives of OHA will be invited to participate in workshops and events pertaining to the Blue Economy organized by COMESA.

In her remarks, Ms Kapwepwe said COMESA has been supporting its Member States in the development of policies, strategies and planned to assess the impact of climate change and pollution on aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity and promote the mitigation measures to improve the health of marine and aquatic ecosystems.

"We are committed to assisting our Member States to realize sustainable ocean-based economic development and to emphasize the importance of balancing sustainable economic development and environmental protection, to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable societies in line with the AU agenda 2063, as well as the SDGs 2030 Agenda," she stressed.

Mr Alexis Grosskopf explained the importance of "unleashing the power of innovation and inclusive entrepreneurial support for the development and adoption of new ocean solutions for local, and ultimately global, impact" highlighting the potential of their collaboration with COMESA as "an amazing opportunity to catalyze and spread change-making in one of the largest international trade zones, particularly exposed to climate change".

The MoU shall remain in force for a period of three years upon which the parties will jointly review it to assess the need for extension.



Cyclone Devastation has Renewed our Resolve to Address Climate Change, COMESA SG

Given the increasing impact of climate change-related disasters in the COMESA region and particularly the effect of the recent Cyclone Freddy, which caused unprecedented levels of devastation, we have renewed our resolve to develop and implement programmes that address the effects of climate change, and which enhance the region's preparedness, said COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe.

This was in a solidarity message to the Heads of State of Madagascar and Malawi, two COMESA Member States that suffered severe destruction of lives, property and infrastructure from the effect of the tropical storm Freddy.

"I take this opportunity to reassure Your Excellency our total commitment to working with government stakeholders through targeted programmes to address structural causes and to help build climate resilience at both regional and national levels," Ms Kapwepwe stated. Further, she reiterated COMESA's support

to the implementation of the outcomes of COP 27 that was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in 2022 and called on all States to fulfil their obligations.

She further called upon COMESA Member States and the international community to stand with Madagascar and Malawi to ensure the quickest return to normalcy, noting that the region is yet to fully recover from the economic devastation from COVID-19 and the impact of the conflict in Europe.

Meanwhile, the COMESA Competition Commission (CCC) donated US\$ 10,000 to the Government of Malawi towards the relief effort in response to the effects of the Cyclone. CCC Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Willard Mwemba handed over the cheque to the Minister of Trade and Industry, Hon Simplex Chithyola Banda.

"We cannot talk of enhanced trade when one Member State of the regional bloc cannot participate in that trade because of the tragedy that has befallen them"

Dr Mwemba said. "We are, therefore, compelled from an official and formal point of view as COMESA to ensure that we do something to alleviate the suffering of our brothers."

Hon Banda appreciated the gesture extended by the COMESA institution. He appealed to more organizations and companies both domestic and international to assist the Government to support the survivors as well as in the post-recovery initiatives such as offering moratorium or re-financing of macro, small and medium enterprises.

He said the Ministry will embark on an assessment of MSMEs and analyze the data to inform about measures to be taken to assist those SMEs affected
(Additional source: Ministry of Trade and Industry, Malawi)



Guests and delegates at the steering committee meeting of the Support to the Air Transport Sector Development Programme (SATSD)

Aviation Experts Meet to Review Air Transport Programme Implementation

The steering committee of the Programme on Support to the Air Transport Sector Development Programme (SATSD) met in Lusaka, Zambia from 30 – 31 March 2023 to review its implementation and approval of the 2023 work programme.

SATSD was established in 2020 with a Grant Agreement of eight million euros between COMESA and EU to operationalize the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), strengthen the regulatory and institutional capacity of civil aviation institutions in the eastern African, Southern African and Indian Ocean.

The three-year programme is funded under the 11th European Development Fund and covers COMESA, East African Community, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Indian Ocean Commission, and the Southern African Development Community.

This year's focus will be preparatory

activities to conduct SAATM awareness among the Member States that have not yet signed the Solemn Commitment to fully implement the 1999 Yamoussoukro Declaration (YD). Signing allows all participating countries to lift market access restrictions for airlines, remove restriction on ownership, grant each other extended air traffic rights and liberalize flight frequency and capacity limits.

SAATM also seeks to harmonise safety and security regulations in aviation, based on International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) requirements.

The Lusaka meeting was the second for the steering committee and was opened by COMESA Assistant Secretary General Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman who appreciated the EU support to the programme.

Head of Cooperation of the EU delegation to Zambia and COMESA, Mr Claudio Bacigalupi noted that the aviation sector

has the potential to make Africa a better place, improve connectivity within and outside the region and contribute to economic, social progress and improve the lives of its people.

"If we want to succeed in developing the sector, an urgent need to address the financial and institutional capacity challenges that are hampering its development, and to bring the policy and regulatory framework in line with international standards," he said.

Other participants at the meeting were drawn from the African Union Commission, African Civil Aviation Commission Constitution, Civil Aviation Safety and Security Oversight Agency International Civil Aviation Organization - Eastern and Southern African, African Airlines Association, Satellite Navigation in Africa JPO and Aviation Sector Support Programme II.



Close to 90% of Non-Tariff Barriers in the Tripartite Region Resolved

Overall, 716 out of 796 (88.9%) of NTBs registered in the online reporting system implemented by the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs), COMESA, East African Community and the Southern Africa Development Community had been resolved by the end of 2022. Only 80 NTBs remained.

The main NTBs include restrictive licensing, permitting, and other requirements applied at the borders. Barriers behind the border, such as unwarranted technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures are equally prevalent.

The tripartite NTBs Online and SMS Reporting, Monitoring and Eliminating system www.tradebarriers.org has been operational since 2010 and has remained an effective tool in the resolution of cross-border trade challenges. It was established to support market integration by implementing a harmonized NTBs elimination programme in COMESA, EAC and SADC tripartite region.

The online system is designed to receive online and Short Message/Messaging Service (SMS) complaints from public

users. It comprises three sub systems for each REC (COMESA, EAC, SADC). Anyone with access to the internet can submit a complaint into the system.

Reports on NTBs made on the system are dealt with by National Monitoring Committees (NMCs) and National Focal Points (NFPs), whose contribution to the resolution and elimination of NTBs in the Tripartite region has been effective.

Subsequently, COMESA Secretariat has consistently been calling upon Partner/ Member States, which have not yet established the NMCs and designated National Focal Points to do so as a matter of priority.

"NTBs evolve over time, hence become a single most hindrance to intra-regional trade and an easy option to deter or restrict trade. They therefore require persistent vigilance and commitment by all stakeholders, especially members of the national monitoring committees," Director of Trade and Customs Dr Christopher Onyango said when he addressed the second meeting of the Tripartite NMCs and NTBs Focal Points on 20 February 2023.

As the tariff walls come down in the global and regional trading arena, the Director noted that NTBs continued to thrive and emerge in different forms in the Tripartite region.

"This makes your roles very pertinent in managing cross-border and international trade," he told the delegates who attended the virtual meeting.

The meeting also discussed the modalities of handing over the hosting and management of the NTBs online reporting system to the Tripartite RECs to complete the development of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) databases for Tripartite Member/Partner States and further improvements in the system. The system has been managed by the developer since inception.

Further, the meeting reviewed the establishment and operationalization of NTBs institutions for the management / administration of the Online NTBs/NTMs systems in the RECs and Member/ Partner States.



File: The Tripartite Task Force meeting in Lusaka, July 2022.

Capacity Building for the Implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Underway

Capacity building of stakeholders who will play a key role in the implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) began earlier this year. The initial focus was on the Rules of Origin, which represent the most important cross-border trade instrument in economic integration agenda.

The TFTA brings together the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The three regional economic communities represent 53% of the African Union members, more than 60 percent of continental gross domestic product, and a combined population of 800 million.

The first regional Training of Trainers session on the TFTA Rules of Origin was hosted in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 – 18 February 2023. It targeted the business community, revenue authorities' customs services departments, government ministries and agencies and organizations that support trade to enhance their skills and knowledge on TFTA Rules of Origin. This will improve their operational performance and

support the uniform application of TFTA Rules of Origin to enhance regional cooperation and intra-Tripartite trade.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) describes Rules of Origin as the "Passport for circulating goods under preferential tariffs". Non-preferential Rules of Origin are applied to determine the country of origin for purposes other than granting preferential tariff treatment. They can support production and trade of goods made in the Tripartite region, boost intra-regional trade across existing regional economic communities and therefore enhance structural transformation.

Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA, Dr Christopher Onyango who addressed the participants stressed the need to pay special attention to issues related to Rules of Origin, in particular the administrative processes associated with issuance of Certificates of Origin.

"We must strive to adopt Rules of Origin that are conducive to the emergence of regional value chains as a springboard to structural transformation and export diversification," he said. "Rules

of Origin must be flexible enough to allow producers even from the weakest economies to reap meaningful benefits of regional markets. Thus, they should be simple, transparent, predictable and trade-facilitating for businesses and trade operators."

The Tripartite rules will be a key market access component when trading begins. Each REC or FTA contains a set of rules that are applied by economic operators and administered by customs or other designated authorities.

"It is therefore important for the stakeholders of the exporting and importing partner countries to familiarize themselves with the relevant rules of origin for trade under any given FTA to be enhanced," said Dr Onyango.

The training was organized by Tripartite Task Force to assist Tripartite Member/ Partner States build a regional pool of experts in Rules of Origin. It is invaluable for officials who will be involved in negotiating the Rules in Free Trade Agreements. The trained trainers will undertake national capacity building and sensitization programmes on TFTA Rules of Origin.



COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance, Dr Dev Haman (L) at the Land-linked Zambia Conference and Exhibition

Transport Stakeholders Dialogue to Promote Seamless Movement in the Region

A high-level regional dialogue between stakeholders in the transport sector and the government of Zambia took place on 23-24 March 2023, focusing on the movement of goods and people as part of encouraging intra-Africa trade.

This was the 2nd Edition of the dialogue dubbed 'Land-linked Zambia Conference and Exhibition' themed 'Leveraging on the Impacts of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the African Transport Industry Focusing on the intra-Africa Movement of Goods and People.

Its objective was to promote growth opportunities available in various countries, explore innovations and showcase ongoing trade and investments. Participants were drawn from the eastern and southern African region.

This year's theme sought to address the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area in the transport and logistics industry and eliminate tariffs on goods as well as address non-tariff obstacles to intra-regional and inter-African trade.

The opening ceremony took place, Thursday 23 March 2023, with the Zambia's Minister of Transport and Logistics Hon. Frank Tayali and COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance, Dr Dev Haman addressing the delegates.

Hon. Tayali underscored the role of transport and logistics sector as key enabler of economic growth and development, with Zambia strategically located to complement the regional development plans. Zambia, he said was the key link of the corridor network in the COMESA, EAC and SADC tripartite region.

"By providing the physical networks and services upon which the economy and society depend for the movement of people and goods, transport increases the access of businesses and consumers to market and services," he said. This, he added, promotes diversification and regional integration and thereby supports growth of the wider economy.

Dr Haman stressed the importance of seamless flow of goods and people if the continent is to attain sustainable

economic growth and development.

"We need a single economic space where everything should happen seamlessly. Traders, businesspeople, officials and political leaders should move seamlessly. Everything should happen seamlessly," Dr Haman said.

He added that COMESA has put in place appropriate policies for free movement of goods, services and capital, noting that the private sector is critical in creating wealth and jobs and should therefore work closely with governments.

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"We need a single economic space where everything should happen seamlessly. Traders, businesspeople, officials and political leaders should move seamlessly. Everything should happen seamlessly," Dr Haman



Guests and border officials attending health crisis management training.

Border Officials Trained on Handling Health Emergencies

Senior officials working at strategic border posts in COMESA region attended a four-day training programme on border management during health emergencies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic on 7 - 10 March 2023 in Lusaka, Zambia.

The training targeted immigration, customs, border police, port health and trade officials from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe serving at the Mwami-Mchinji and Chirundu One Stop Border Posts. It was coordinated by the COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the European Union and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) through the Migration EU Expertise (MIEUX) initiative funded by the EU. The aim was to enhance the knowledge and skills of the officials to better manage health emergencies.

Speaking at the opening of the training, Director of Legal and Institutional Affairs at COMESA Secretariat Mr Gabriel Masuku said it would build on the existing COMESA COVID-19 and Tripartite Guidelines on Trade and Transport Facilitation for movement of persons, goods and services.

"This training will provide a

comprehensive approach to strengthening border management capacities, with the inclusion of healthcare systems in border control, and supporting national focal agencies to develop and implement preparedness and response-based action plans in border crossings," Mr Masuku said.

The need for such training became evident when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, at a time when COMESA did not have modalities to deploy to facilitate continued and safe cross border regional trade and investment. Most Member States closed their borders, thus adversely affecting regional and international trade and economies.

Stressing the need for such preparedness, the Director noted that businesses failed, and some ended up closing down permanently leaving a lot of people without jobs and by extension without food for their families and households. This led COMESA to develop the guidelines to facilitate safe movement of goods and services across borders.

In addition, the COMESA-EAC-SADC-Tripartite Free Trade Area exposed the

gap in capacity development for border officials. The MIEUX+ programme sought to therefore sought to close this gap to assist them in facilitating safe movement of goods and services across the political divide during a health crisis.

The Program Manager at the Delegation of the European Union in Lusaka Ms. Christiane Haziyo appreciated the initiative's focus on enhancing migration and mobility which results in facilitating trade and mobility within the COMESA region.

She said: "These training sessions will tool the border community stakeholders with the knowledge and practical examples on how to prepare and manage health crisis."

The ICMPD Project Officer and MIEUX+ focal point for Eastern and Southern Africa Ms. Naike Chancy also addressed the participants. The EU and ICMPD have provided technical support to COMESA for over a decade but this particular project on migration through the MIEUX+ programme started in 2020.



Steps Towards Upgrading Chirundu Border Post

The COMESA Secretariat has supported the Government of Zimbabwe to prepare tender documents to facilitate the implementation of the Chirundu Border Post Upgrade Project. To this effect, a consultative meeting of key stakeholders in various Ministries and Government agencies was held on 23-27 January 2023 in Kadoma, Zimbabwe.

This technical assistance to the country is supported through the European Union under the 11th European Development Funded Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP).

COMESA and Zimbabwe signed a sub-delegation agreement on 15 February 2021 for the project with a total funding of Euro 4,096,820 under the TFP. The project aims at enhancing Zimbabwe's participation in COMESA's regional integration agenda to reduce poverty and inequality and thus contribute towards attainment of sustainable development in the country. Under the

project, priority cross-border infrastructure and procurement of equipment will be upgraded.

These include streamlining of electronic Certificate of Origin and Single Window System, enhancing and upgrading customs automated systems among others at the Chirundu border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. Once completed, these services will facilitate the increased efficiency of border coordinated systems making trade between the two countries streamlined and cost effective.

Twenty-seven focal persons attended the consultative meeting. They included engineers, procurement experts, trade and legal experts, representing government ministries and agencies responsible for the implementation of the programme. The consultative meeting facilitated the development and finalisation of tender documents that will culminate in the effective implementation of the Coordinated Border Management activities

at the border.

The Government of Zimbabwe and COMESA are also in the process of signing a sub-delegation agreement for the construction of the Chirundu Border Market under the 11th EDF Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative.

Once constructed, the market will provide key gender-sensitive infrastructure to facilitate cross border trade between Zimbabwe and Zambia. This will maximize trade opportunities and increase incomes for the border communities.



: National statisticians attending the GDP rebasing workshop

National Accounts Statisticians Trained on GDP Rebasing

More than 70 national accounts statisticians from 37 countries in Africa participated in a workshop on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rebasing in the framework of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA), implementation in Africa. This was part of the Statistical Capacity Building Program, Phase 5 supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB) through COMESA.

The five-day workshop 30 January - 3 February 2023 was conducted in Kigali, Rwanda. It involved expert training sessions on methodological issues related to rebasing of GDP and implementation of the 2008 SNA, country presentations and discussions.

Chief Statistician at COMESA Secretariat Mr Themba Munalula who addressed the participants said the national accounts component of the programme aims at improving the statistical capabilities of African States qualifying for African Development Fund in managing their GDP rebasing efforts and implementing the 2008 SNA.

"The rebasing of the national accounts is an essential exercise, in line with the

need for macroeconomic data that are reliable, exhaustive and consistent with the real economic situation of a country," said Mr Munalula. "The international recommendation is that a country's national accounts should be rebased every five years."

This workshop was one of the activities in the national accounts' statistics component covered by the multi-country statistical capacity building program (SCB-V). The other activity is an in-country technical assistance.

According to statistics experts, the rebasing exercise is becoming imperative and urgent, particularly in the current context of various international, regional, sub-regional and national commitments. It provides an ideal opportunity for countries to comply with international standards in terms of national accounts compilations, in particular, the implementation of the recommendations of the 2008 SNA. They introduce improvements in the measurement of economic activity (hidden economy, social action, foreign trade, informal sector, digital economy, environmental accounting) or to correct errors in estimates and measurements identified

after the previous rebase.

Participants were informed that not all African nations have migrated to the 2008 SNA; some had, while others had just started. Further, the situation in Africa reveals significant challenges of human, material, and financial resources.

While Africa is considering the implementation of the 2008 SNA, great strides are being made vis-à-vis the revision of the current SNA, under the leadership of the United Nations. Thus, opportunity to include African specificity and, more particularly, to create implementation strategies that are more successful than those that were previously used is now presented.

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"The rebasing of the national accounts is an essential exercise, in line with the need for macroeconomic data that are reliable, exhaustive and consistent with the real economic situation of a country," Mr Munalula.



ACTESA Develops a Regional Seed Information System

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

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

COMSIS was developed with support from the European Union (EU) under the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP). The System was validated in August 2022 by the COMESA Regional Seed Committee.

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr.

John Mukuka revealed in an interview in Lusaka that the COMESA region has a total seed market potential of two million metric tonnes of quality and improved seed. However, only 500,000 metric tonnes of quality and improved seed are currently being produced.

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

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

Over the last few decades, formal seed systems in the COMESA region have been gradually liberalized, resulting in increased participation of private seed enterprises. On the other hand, access

to quality seed at affordable prices to smallholder farmers remains a challenge.

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



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



UNDP Zambia Resident Representative, Mr. Lionel Laurens (3rd left), COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe (3rd right) and respective staff at the dialogue

COMESA, UNDP Undertakes to Deepen Partnership

COMESA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have unveiled a roadmap for deepened strategic partnership in the region and announced new areas for joint programming that considers innovation, adaptability and sustained regional leadership.

The undertaking was made at the opening of a two-day partnership dialogue between the two organisations held in Lusaka, Zambia 4 – 5 April 2023. It was themed: ***“Enhancing COMESA-UNDP Synergy for Regional Integration and Promoting Socio-Economic***

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“These initiatives have been facilitated through various cooperating partnerships both at the regional and international level to address the thematic issues, that are critical in the attainment of regional peace and security, and which include transnational organized crimes, youth empowerment, children affected by armed conflict, and climate security,” Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe.

Opportunities in the Borderlands of East and Southern Africa.”

Among the areas in focus included investments, peace and security, environmental sustainability, and cross border cooperation. The dialogue was also intended to strengthen collaboration in achieving the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda and Africa Union’s Agenda 2063.

Secretary General of COMESA, Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe, who addressed the forum underscored the role of regional integration in the realization of the region’s aspirations for sustainable and inclusive growth and development.

She cited the COMESA initiatives on trade integration focusing on gender equality and youths, democracy and governance, small-scale cross-border trade, conflict prevention and post conflict reconstruction and development.

“These initiatives have been facilitated through various cooperating partnerships both at the regional

and international level to address the thematic issues, that are critical in the attainment of regional peace and security, and which include transnational organized crimes, youth empowerment, children affected by armed conflict, and climate security,” she said.

UNDP Zambia Resident Representative, Mr. Lionel Laurens said that there is need to unlock the full potential of the region by creating a more prosperous future for all.

“Through our collaboration, the UNDP and COMESA we will strive towards building resilient economies that can withstand shocks, promote sustainable development, empowering women, and youth, and improving the livelihoods of the people in the region. This includes promoting job creation, developing infrastructure, and promoting sustainable agriculture and natural resource management,” Mr. Laurens said.

Participants at the dialogue were drawn from the UNDP regional office in Kenya and Zambia as well as COMESA members of staff.

The 8€m Regional ICT Programme Implementation Reviewed

The 3rd Project Steering Committee Meeting conducted in Kenya

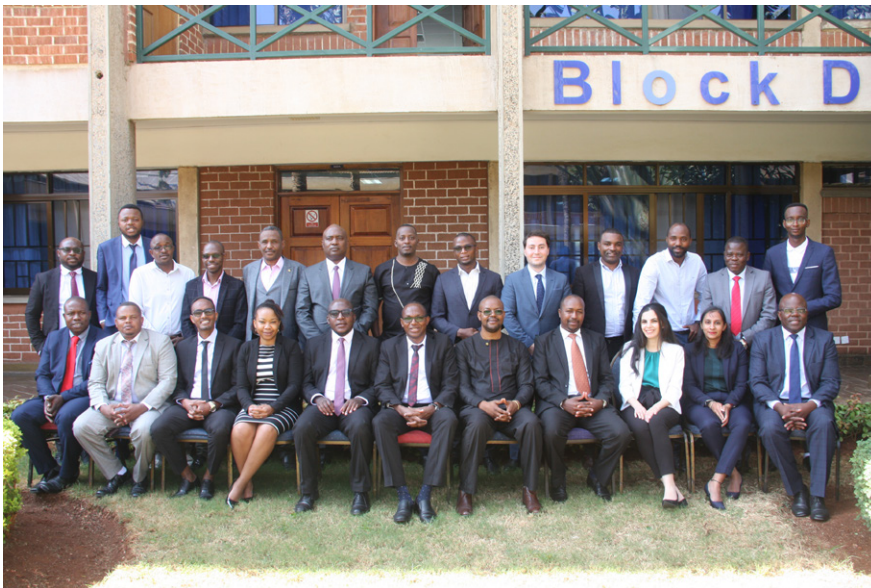
The Steering Committee of the programme on Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean region (EA-SA-IO) reviewed the programme's performance, since it was launched two years ago. The review was done in Nairobi, Kenya 2 – 3 March 2023 during the third meeting of the steering committee.

The eight million euros four-year programme aims at enhancing the governance and enabling environment in the ICT sector in the EA-SA-IO region. It supports the review and development of regional policy and regulatory frameworks in a harmonized manner, thus contributing to enhanced competition and improved access to cost effective and secure ICT services. The programme is funded by the European Union.

Beneficiaries of the programme are countries in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). COMESA is the programme implementation lead.

The Principal Secretary, Ministry of Information, Communication, and Technology and the Digital Economy in Kenya Eng. John Tanui opened the meeting. He urged countries in the

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Staff from regional Central banks and COMESA Monetary Institute at the training on strengthening financial inclusion

Strengthening Regional Regulatory Banks to Advance Financial Inclusion

The COMESA Monetary Institute is building the capacity of regional Central Banks on using Financial Access (FinAccess) datasets to inform policy and advance financial inclusion along the dimensions of access, usage, quality and impact.

The initiative involves training of the banks' staff on the application of econometric software to cross sectional data using financial inclusion data and its implications on financial stability.

Between 20 and 24 February 2023, 20 delegates from 10 Central Banks of COMESA Member States namely: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended the training in Nairobi, Kenya.

The training was also aimed at ensuring a better understanding of the financial access landscape regionally and internationally and improving the measurement of financial inclusion by COMESA member countries.

At the opening of the training, the CMI Director, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, noted:

"It is important for Central Banks in the

region to continue enhancing skills in this field for a better understanding of the Financial Access Landscape, in order to come up with appropriate policy interventions that would increase financial inclusion without compromising financial stability."

He observed that most countries in the region were making good progress in collecting and analyzing financial inclusion data.

The training provided practical exposition of FinAccess Household Survey Data with emphasis on hands-on application using STATA econometric software. It provided econometric tools for the analysis of survey datasets as well as insights on the development of survey instruments and how they can be replicated in other research areas.

In addition, it enhanced knowledge among Central Bankers and policy analysts on how to successfully roll out surveys and carry out analysis using modern statistical software for policy.

The training is also expected to enhance the implementation of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan.



The PS Ministry of ICT, Kenya, Eng. John Tanui (front middle) flanked by COMESA Directors Mr J.B Mutabazi (R) and Ms Lanka Dorby (L) and other delegates at the EGEE-ICT meeting.

region “to seize the significant socio-economic opportunities that digital technologies offer.”

“All of us would agree that living in a modern society without ICT is unimaginable. Think about how many times and how often we are using the internet, mobile phones and computers,” said the PS. The technologies that enable this have been integrated in every aspect of our business activities and daily lives.”

He stressed that accessibility and affordability are the key factors for utilizing ICT solutions for e-services and for reaching all groups of society in order to transform the landscape for development.

He added: “The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy in Kenya has committed to digitalize all government services, lay 100,000km of fibre optic cable across the country under the Digital Superhighway, install 25,000 public Wi-Fi hotspots, establish 1,450 digital

village smart hubs and studios and enhance cyber security management, in the next five years.

The Director of Infrastructure and Logistics in COMESA, Mr Jean-Baptiste Mutabazi said programmes such as the EGEE-ICT that target the ICT sector, are significant because they ensure that current development issues in the sector are prioritized.

“Regional Harmonisation is one of the best approaches in achieving success in development. Therefore, Regional cooperation needs to be strengthened. The EGEE-ICT programme creates an exceptional opportunity of bringing together multiple stakeholders to work towards handling some of the critical ICT issues with the aim of creating an enabling environment that will foster ICT growth,” he said.

The Nairobi meeting was the third for the Steering Committee whose objective was to review the progress of the programmes’ activities undertaken between May 2022 and January 2023

and adoption of the its Annual Work Plan for 2023.

Th EGEE-ICT programme is one of the contributors to the AU flagship projects namely the Pan African e-Network, Policy, and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA), and the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030.

Members of the PSC comprise of representatives of the five regional economic communities, Member/ Partner States, and private sector. Representatives from the regional ICT Associations and continental ICT sector will participate in the meeting as observers.

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**“Living in a modern society
 without ICT is unimaginable,”
 Eng. John Tanui**



COMESA, Partners Hold High-Level Engagement on Sidelines of CSW67

COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the three Regional Economic Communities which are jointly implementing the 50 million African Women Speak digital platform (50MAWSP), held a high-level partners engagement on 8 March this year to mobilise support for the next phase of the initiative.

The meeting took place at the United Nations headquarters in New York on the sidelines of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67). In attendance were Ugandan State Minister for Gender and Culture Hon. Peace Regis Mutuuzo, AU Permanent Observer to the UN Amb. Fatima Kyari Mohamed, ECOWAS Commissioner Prof. Fatou Sow Sarr and high-level representatives from partners including the World Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the AfCFTA Secretariat, among others.

The dignitaries took turns to emphasize the importance of 50MAWSP as a viable tool for

the empowerment of women and appealed to partners to support its transformation, citing its untapped potential to create economic opportunities for women and youth.

The speakers at the event unanimously agreed that undertaking significant platform feature enhancements would be key to unlocking this potential.

"The recommendations that have consistently featured in the feedback from users include the integration of e-commerce to enable the women to trade with each other on the platform, enhancement of the platform to support live trainings to build the capacity of women to manage their businesses better, integration with financial services providers to allow users to seamlessly access credit, for example by requesting loans in-platform," COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said.

Hon. Mutuuzo, who presided over the opening of the event, made a passionate appeal for the platform to be supported so that it could in turn support women and youth.

"Imagine how much support we could lend to the post-COVID recovery effort of building back better by enabling this platform to facilitate access to credit by creating grant schemes for the exclusive benefit of platform users.

"My appeal is for you to extend a hand of support that launches us into the next critical phase," she said.

On her part, AU Permanent Observer to the UN Amb. Fatima Kyari Mohamed affirmed that the continental body fully endorses the work of our regional economic communities on this initiative, "because in (50 Million African Women Speak) we see a real potential to transform the lives of millions of women, literally with a click of a button."

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"My appeal is for you to extend a hand of support that launches us into the next critical phase," Hon. Peace Mutuuzo.



Gender experts from Zambia attending a Capacity Building Workshop on Gender Statistics in Lusaka, Zambia

Stakeholders from Public Institutions in Zambia Trained on Production of Gender Statistics

More than 40 officials from different government institutions in Zambia were trained to produce and use timely data for effective policy making. This is in addition to building their capacity in gender statistics terminologies and methodologies, thereby strengthening their knowledge of different gender policies at the global and regional level.

The training was conducted during a workshop on 28 February to 2 March 2023 in Lusaka, Zambia. It was supported by the European Union through the Institutional Capacity Building Programme (ICBP). This was the second of the series that COMESA Secretariat has lined up to support Member States on strengthening the capacity of gender statistics. The first workshop was conducted in Djibouti in 2022 while the next is planned for Sudan.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Assistant Secretary General Administration and Finance Dr Dev

Haman, said the Secretariat takes gender equality as central to the process of sustainable development and the foundation of the effective national development policies and programmes, for which data that reflects the current geopolitical reality is required.

Gender statistics are needed to measure and monitor the realities of the lives of women and men and of girls and boys, so that development is inclusive and does not leave anyone behind.

At COMESA level, the instruments developed and adopted by Member States include among others, the COMESA Gender Policy, the COMESA Gender Policy Implementation Plan and the COMESA Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines, Indicators and Check Lists.

"Therefore, gender statistics have a crucial role in gender mainstreaming in social, economic, political and in

the development and implementation of poverty reduction policies. As COMESA Secretariat we are working with Member States to strengthen the production of gender statistics," Dr Haman added.

The participants agreed on the need to enhance collaboration between the Ministry of Gender, other ministries and entities and the national statistics office if the objective of producing comprehensive, quality and timely statistical information on gender dimensions across sectors is to be successfully attained.

The Director of Gender in Development from the Zambian government Mr Henry Nkhoma noted that the absence of clear indicators for monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming as well as limited availability of gender statistics data for effective programme design has made it difficult to assess the impact attributable to gender mainstreaming efforts.



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (L) and ARC's Faustin Mukena at the signing of the MoU to strengthen public health supply chains

ARC and COMESA Sign Agreement to Strengthen Collaboration

The Africa Resource Centre (ARC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 24 February 2023, in Cape Town to strengthen public health supply chains by enhancing medicine access in the region.

The MoU is based on the need for mutual co-operation in areas of common interest in pursuing their respective mandates and strategic objectives of contribution towards sustainable economic growth and development.

ARC is Africa's public health supply chain institution and a not-for-profit organisation that work towards strengthening public health systems by providing independent, expert advisory and enablement services to African health ministries. COMESA is a regional economic community of 21 member states that work together to achieve sustainable economic and social progress through increased regional cooperation and integrated economic development.

As part of the MoU the two organisations agreed to work together to establish a Health Desk for COMESA.

Part of the Health Desk's role will be to develop recommendations for resilient national supply chain infrastructure among COMESA Member States.

"The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of inter-regional cooperation in the supply of essential medicines, and having a centralised Health Desk in East Africa can facilitate better collaboration, knowledge-sharing and expertise around medicine access in the region" said Faustin Mukena, Chief Operating Officer at ARC "so we are delighted that the need has been acknowledged and that we are moving forward to ensure more people have access to medicine."

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, who signed the MoU on behalf of the regional body hailed the agreement. She said:

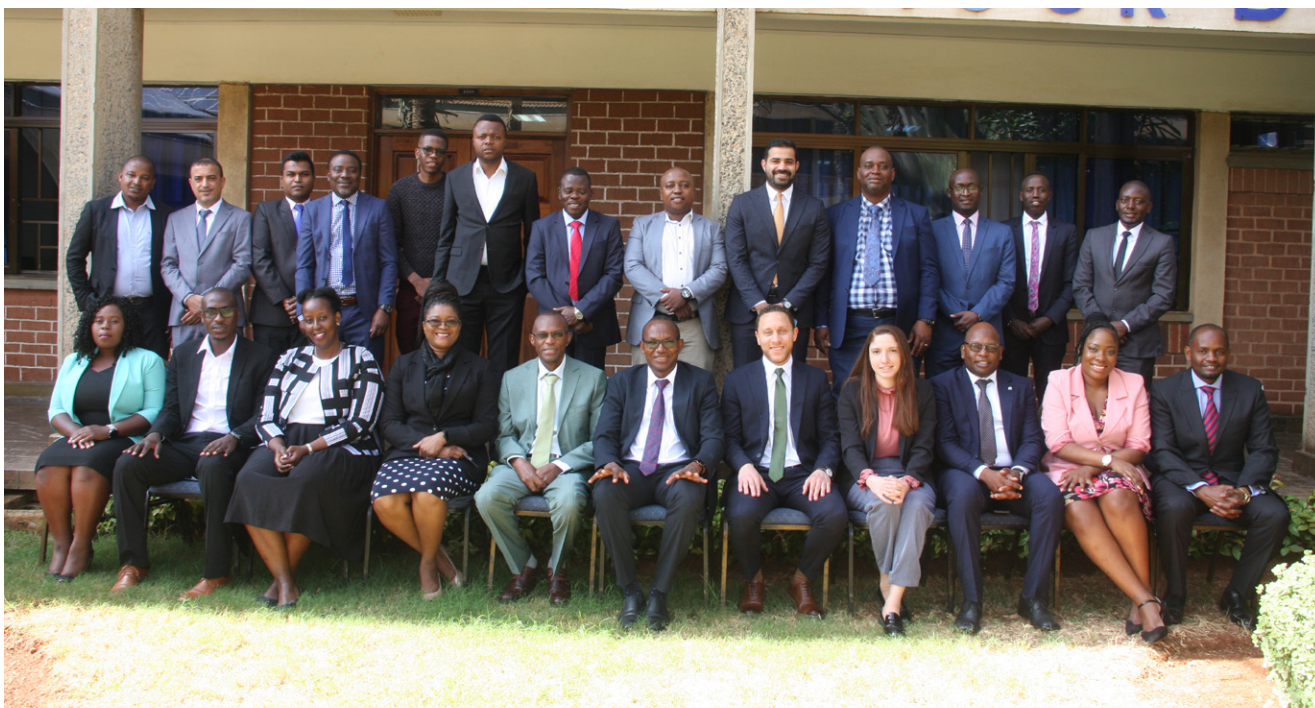
"The areas of cooperation outlined in the MoU are very pertinent, critical and timely as they seek to address the key challenges that COMESA member States continue to face especially regarding public health, the gender equality activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that partnership and solidarity are essential for confronting shared public health

threats."

The MoU also includes an agreement to cooperate in areas with shared interests. As part of this, ARC has committed to provide advisory services around framing and advancing gender equality and increasing the profile and proportion of women in public health sector procurement and supply chain services. COMESA will also leverage ARC's expertise on gender and women's rights to support capacity building and promote research on gender mainstreaming and women empowerment in policies, programmes and projects.

ARC will also provide advisory services on local and regional manufacturing of medicines and other health products and market access to these manufactured products, including supporting research initiatives.

COMESA will also promote innovations such as engagement with the private sector and outsourcing, for resilient supply chains in the public health sector through the COMESA Research Forum. It will also promote engagement with the private sector for services in public health through the COMESA Business Council and COMESA Investment Agency.



Banking Supervisors and Financial Stability analysts from regional Central Banks attending the validation workshop for the User Guide on Basel III.

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

Twenty-two banking supervisors and financial stability analysts from 11 Central Banks of COMESA Member States attended a validation workshop for the User Guide on “Basel III and Macro-prudential Surveillance” conducted on 06 – 10 March 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The User Guide was developed to enhance better understanding of the Basel III standards, principles and detail the applicable tools and techniques for conducting supervision under the revised Basel III framework by COMESA member countries. Hence the validation workshop provided a platform to get feedback on the User Guide to further improve its content.

Central banks of Burundi, Congo DR, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe were represented at the event.

The User Guide provides an easy-to-use document on Basel III standards and principles within the context of conducting supervision under this revised framework for the COMESA region. Basel III is an international regulatory accord that introduced a set of reforms designed to mitigate risk within the international banking sector.

In his address to the delegates,



“COMESA member countries are making progress at implementing the different facets of the Basel accords, with the User Guide providing a critical input that will ensure harmonization and comparison of progress,” Dr Lucas Njoroge.

the Director of the CMI, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, underscored the need for the implementation of Basel III framework within the internationally agreed timeframe to strengthen the resilience of the banking system, improve market confidence and promote a level playing field.

“COMESA member countries are making progress at implementing the different facets of the Basel accords, with the User Guide providing a critical input that will ensure harmonization and comparison of progress,” he said.

He added that the Guide will be an important knowledge product to enhance the implementation of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan as it provides a detailed exposure to Basel III standards and elaborates in detail the tools and techniques for conducting supervision under Basel III framework.



File: A training session at the COMESA Monetary Institute

Understanding Financial Market Volatility is Critical for Implementing the COMESA Framework for Assessing Financial Stability

Twenty-one staff from 10 Central Banks in COMESA Member States namely: Burundi, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been trained on modelling and forecasting financial markets volatility.

The training was organized by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) on 27 - 31 March 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. Its objective was to develop the capacity of the bank staff to better understand the policy direction in the context of the current challenging macroeconomic environment that the region is facing. These include severe exchange rate pressures owing to multiple global shocks of elevated inflation, adverse effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

Addressing the participants, CMI Director, Dr. Lucas Njoroge noted that Central Banks were confronting

high inflation thus compelling them to accelerate monetary policy tightening to avoid inflationary pressures from becoming entrenched.

“The tightening global financial conditions associated with interest rate hikes in some advanced countries has disrupted capital flows, leading to financial market volatility especially in small open economies, including those in the COMESA region,” he noted.

Given the on-going turmoil in the external environment, he added, there is renewed need for a better understanding of financial variables volatility, their estimation and forecast, as this is important for gauging the vulnerability of financial markets and the economy. A better understanding of financial market volatility is therefore critical for the implementation of the COMESA Framework for Assessing Financial Stability.

Region's Annual Inflation Rate Rose to 125.4%

The year-on-year annual inflation rate in the COMESA region stood at 125.4% for the month of December 2022 as measured by the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI-COMESA). This was an increase from 99.3% registered in November 2022. A year earlier, the rate was at 147.5%.

The January 2023 HCPI-COMESA Monthly News Release by COMESA Statistics stated that the inflation rate represents price changes recorded in the 12 divisions of expenditure.

These include food and non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and footwear, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels. Others are furnishings, household equipment, health, transport, communication, recreation and culture, education, restaurants and hotels among others.

Based on the main components of expenditure, the housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels registered the highest annual inflation rate of +171.0% while restaurants and hotels registered the least average price change of +55.3%.

Member States that contribute to the HCPI-COMESA were Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



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

More Countries Keen to Join the TFTA

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

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

"We are engaging and strategically approaching all the remaining Member States who are yet to sign to do so as soon as possible so that by mid-2023 we can have the three or more remaining to bring the countries required to 14 for the Agreement to enter into force," said Dr Christopher Onyango, the Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA Secretariat.

He was addressing the press on the sidelines of the 17th Meeting of the

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

The two-day meeting which opened on 25 January 2023 received reports from the 21st Tripartite Trade Negotiation Forum held at the same venue earlier in the week on progress attained towards operationalizing the TFTA.

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

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

Tripartite members in the decision-making processes.

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

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

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



L - R: Japanese Ambassador H.E. Takeuchi Kazuyuki, COMESA SG, Chileshe Kapwepwe and Italian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Enrico De Agostini at the accreditation ceremony

Japanese and Italian Envoys Accredited to COMESA

On 28 February 2023, the Italian and Japanese Ambassadors to Zambia were accredited as Special Representatives of their respective countries to COMESA. H.E. Dr. Enrico De Agostini (Italy) and H.E. Takeuchi Kazuyuki presented their letters of credence to the Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe at a brief ceremony conducted at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

At the event, the Secretary General called for enhanced commitment and strengthened collaboration with both Italy and Japan especially in the areas of agriculture and technology.

"There are more potential areas where COMESA and Italy could work together to further strengthen our cooperation and partnership such as agro-processing, the leather sector and livestock among others," she said. She noted that apart from the bilateral collaboration between Italy and COMESA, there is also collaboration through the European Union of which Italy is a member.

The European Union is the biggest

development partner of COMESA and based on the 'Team Europe' approach, the EU and Italy will work towards the effective implementation of the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Madam Kapwepwe also applauded the Japanese Government, which through the 7th Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD7) meeting agreed to focus on promoting business projects between COMESA and Japan. This has resulted in Japan's exports to Sub-Saharan Africa, including COMESA Member States, increasing to approximately 6.3m USD with imports at 7.5m USD.

"Since TICAD7, we have not had any joint programmes/projects with Japan and we look forward to identifying possible areas of cooperation to further our partnership," she added.

Ambassador Agostini said his country is willing to engage with COMESA and collaborate in infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing and green energy in order to

overcome the common global challenges.

"Italy and our industries with their enormous expertise in infrastructure, agriculture, and green energy are ready to cooperate with COMESA and its Member States in order to bridge the gap in the named sectors," Amb. Agostini said.

In his remarks, Ambassador Kazuyuki promised to engage more closely with the COMESA Secretariat and Member States to deepen the cooperation.



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"There are more potential areas where COMESA and Italy could work together to further strengthen our cooperation and partnership such as agro-processing, the leather sector and livestock among others," COMESA Secretary General



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