



COMMUNICATION

STRATEGY 2022-2025

COMESA Communication Strategy 2022-2025

This strategy is an activity of the COMESA Corporate Communications Unit. It was prepared with support from COMESA staff and partners, including Member States.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
CET	Common External Tariff
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COMFWB	COMESA Federation of Women in Business
COMTEL	COMESA Telecommunications
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GCI	Global Competitive Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPRSP	Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
HQ	Headquarters
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MS	Member States
NTBs	Non- Tariff Barriers
PRO	Public Relations Officer
PTA	Preferential Trade Area
REC	Regional Economic Community
RISM	Regional Integration Support Mechanism
RISP	Regional Integration Support Programme
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMS	Short Message Service
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
T-FTA	Tripartite Free Trade Area
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development



FOREWORD

COMESA 2021 - 2025 Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) was successfully endorsed and adopted by the COMESA Authority at the Summit held on 23 November 2021 in Cairo, Egypt. The Strategic Plan outlines COMESA's strategic vision in pursuit of achieving and accelerating our regional integration goals. The beneficiaries of this strategy are the citizens of our region as this will seek to improve socio-economic conditions through economic growth in the various areas of cooperation.

COMESA recognizes that public awareness is a critical component of achieving the aspirations of the Treaty and the full realization of regional integration agenda. This entails the dissemination of information and raising awareness and the level of knowledge of the public which is a prerequisite in mobilizing their participation. COMESA will use multiple communication channels to disseminate information of regional integration, popularize the MTSP 2021-2025 and advise stakeholders including COMESA staff and the public of key activities and their benefits.

This Communication Strategy answers four key questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? How will we get there? And how will we know we have arrived? These fundamental questions point us in the right direction over the coming years, helping us to become better and better at what we do in fulfilling our promise of ensuring successful and visible regional integration.

The COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan is anchored on the aspirations of the founding fathers as captured in the COMESA Treaty. By enhancing Communication of COMESA activities and results, these aspirations and the MTSP will be owned and achieve better realization of our set goals.

Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe

Secretary General

COMESA

BACKGROUND

The COMESA Communication Strategy 2022-2025 was developed with contributions from COMESA Secretariat staff, COMESA desk officers and Communication Coordinators in the Member States as well as key internal and external stakeholders. The strategy covers the scope of communication activities to be undertaken to repurpose, position and maintain COMESA's reputation as the Regional Economic Community with the greatest impact in Africa.

The Rationale for the Communication Strategy

The need to create public awareness and stakeholder buy-in in the 21 COMESA Member States cannot be overemphasized, and strategic communication plays a critical role in achieving that. The transformation of the 21 Member States into a single market can only be undertaken through the strategic visibility of COMESA; from its aspirations to its work and its impact.

This document was developed in the context of an increasingly digitalized world when the way we communicate changed seemingly overnight. From in-person conversations to online modes of communication such as video conferencing (Zoom, Microsoft Teams and many more). As COMESA, a new era of digital and social communication awaits us that demands we join the bandwagon and alter some of the communication approaches. **To catch up, especially in this digital era and the “new normal” we must run and not walk.** For us to get there, there is a need to invest far more in communication as a strategic management function.

These trends highlight why COMESA must rethink its communication approaches to tap into these growing levels of digital adoption, most of which growth is particularly fast-paced on the African continent. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably altered the way the world connects, shifting what were once in-person interactions to online engagements.

This communication strategy serves as a blueprint for COMESA and its Member States to adopt effective approaches that reflect the changing times to communicate with all its stakeholders. The strategy outlines the process required to ensure timely and appropriate

generation, collection, distribution, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information from COMESA to partners, stakeholders, and other target audiences. It outlines how COMESA will best engage with key stakeholders internally and externally towards the realization of COMESA's goal of regional integration as well as its mission "to achieve sustainable economic and social progress in all Member States through increased cooperation and integration in all fields of economic activity."

Methodology and scope

The development of the Communication Strategy was participatory and consultative. Key COMESA stakeholders (internal and external) were engaged (refer to annexe 1) in developing the strategy to enhance ownership as well as deliver on a practical strategy. The methodology is grounded in best practices for developing practical and effective communication and outreach strategies:

- Phase I: Inception and planning.
- Phase II: Situational analysis (key informant interviews, literature review and surveys).
- Phase III: Stakeholder analysis and prioritization.
- Phase IV: Development of the Communication Strategy and validation.
- Phase V: Implementation matrix.
- Phase VII: Monitoring and evaluation.

WHERE ARE WE?

1.1 Summary of the assessment of internal and external communication

Drawing from the key informant interviews, a review of previous and existing strategies (e.g., the 2016-2020 Communication Strategy, current communications, and visibility strategies of EU funded projects) the assessment of the internal communication conducted with COMESA's staff, national focal points as well as a stakeholders' perception survey, the following identified communication challenges require attention to enhance the effectiveness of COMESA communications, there is a need:

- To enhance visibility, awareness and understanding of COMESA in Member States. To this end, the Communication Strategy shall seek to engage the public with relevant messages cognizant of their perceptions, cultures, and aspirations.

- For an enhanced and efficient, internal communications culture within COMESA to maximize the strategic role of communications in executing and positioning COMESA programmes.
- To strengthen the inter and intra COMESA communication systems to improve information flows within the organization and its Member States.
- To strengthen the capacity of COMESA's Corporate Communications Unit to enhance the organization's image and ability to reach the Member States and their citizens.
- To provide capacity building and incentivize Member States Communication Coordinators to act as information points for COMESA in the Member States.
- To foster buy-in of the COMESA integration agenda by the Member States.
- To establish a digital by default approach in most communication products at COMESA
- To commission/outsource missing internal skillsets from an external media, communications, public relations agency retained to drive COMESA communication/visibility initiatives in the Member States. This might help to address the capacity gaps in the communication and public relations unit, whereby the unit will remain centralised and play more of a coordinating role.
- To be effective, the communication function of the COMESA shall need the right mix of skills and tools in the form of people, infrastructure, systems, and processes.
- Communication from COMESA should focus on benefits arising from COMESA's programmes as opposed to technical details of the said policies and programmes. COMESA should seek to package its messages in layman's language that is simplified for easy consumption by various target groups.
- Management and programme managers to embrace communication as a strategic management function and the critical role it plays in positioning COMESA.
- Communication activities and ambition are restricted by modest budget allocation.
- To create a mutual relationship between COMESA and the national media houses to increase the free flow of information at the national level.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

2.1 The objective of the strategy

Overall objective: COMESA's objectives are clear and not likely to change: the aim is "to be a fully integrated, internationally competitive regional economic community with high standards of living for all its people ready to merge into an African Economic Community." Further, its mission is "to achieve sustainable economic and social progress in all Member States through increased cooperation and integration in all fields of economic activity." This Communication Strategy is aligned with this.

COMESA's strategic vision for communication is to **turn communication into a strategic management function**; where communication is not an afterthought, and not a cost, but rather an investment in programming and operations.

The overall communication objective is to **position COMESA as the leading regional economic community that is strategically and technically fit for purpose and partner of choice in steering regional integration.**

A review of COMESA's Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) 2021-2025 emphasizes the need to create awareness among stakeholders for improved utilization of available opportunities and instruments. Because of this and the prioritized issues, the following are specific communication objectives that form the basis of this strategy:

- **To enhance access to information on COMESA's work for increased visibility:** This will facilitate information exchange and knowledge sharing amongst the COMESA Member States, enhance their participation in the development of regional programmes and create an interest in COMESA's work, thereby strengthening networks and partnerships.
- **To present COMESA as the leading regional economic community by demonstrating its value and impact** through strategic communication and the enhancement of publicity and the visibility of its work, while articulating COMESA's position and contribution toward regional integration. Communicating about COMESA's impact will be a basis for strengthening networks and partnerships.
- **To build the capacity of COMESA's internal communication structures including the national communication focal points for the effective realization of the organization's objectives:** To streamline COMESA's communication structures for the effective realization of its mandate.

Conducting training on communication, advancing knowledge management, information sharing and highlighting impact and lessons learned.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

3.1 Target audience

COMESA's target audiences as identified in the previous strategies are:

Stakeholder	Role
COMESA Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness creation and coordination of all COMESA activities; while managing stakeholders across all Member States, including partners and donors The Corporate Communications Unit within COMESA is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring a coherent and systematic implementation of the communication strategy in the COMESA region
COMESA institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Implementation of COMESA strategic goals, while promoting specific COMESA activities in the respective countries
COMESA decision-making organs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee the execution of the COMESA integration agenda among other objectives by making decisions, directing, and sharing information to the relevant stakeholders Ensuring COMESA is a rules- based organization in accordance with the COMESA Treaty
Coordinating ministries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate COMESA activities in the respective Member States, while engaging stakeholders in the various sectors Identification of key success stories on in the implementation of regional integration at the national level for publicity
Private sector and business associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, discuss, and seek solutions to challenges faced by the private sector in the COMESA region Express the benefit from the integration programs
Donors and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support regional integration through funding of programs. Facilitate a link between the COMESA Secretariat and international media and organizations to enhance visibility of programmes and global dissemination of information.
Regional Economic Communities and continental organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the African regional integration agenda
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public education on regional integration

Stakeholder	Role
Academia and think tanks – COMESA Annual Research forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss and seek solutions to challenges facing regional integration □ Dissemination of research output /products
Communicators in the Member States (actual communicators in government information department)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ensure government websites have a link to the COMESA website □ Establish and manage a COMESA page on the website of the coordinating ministry and/or Trade ministry. □ Ensure COMESA focus on national publications in Member States □ Incorporate COMESA awareness programmes into national communication strategies in Member States □ Facilitate access by COMESA to national broadcasters and educational institutions □ Provide support and oversight to media/PR agencies in respective Member States once the agencies are contracted by COMESA □ Spearhead the implementation of the COMESA communication and promotion strategy at Member States national level by formulating media and PR campaigns □ Provide a link between COMESA and media to publicize COMESA decisions/initiatives being implemented at the Member State level □ Facilitate a link between the COMESA Secretariat and local media for quick dissemination of information □ Compile, maintain and update a media contact database in Member States □ Coordinate communication activities (online/offline) and provide oversight for media/PR agencies where applicable
Beneficiaries of COMESA programmes such as business community etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization of COMESA trade facilitation instruments • Make recommendations that inform policy formulation

Table 1: Target audience and their roles

3.2 Role of COMESA staff members in communication

The most successful projects or organisations communicate collectively. The communications impact they generate is more than the sum of its parts. Through a common endeavour, they achieve more than if individuals communicated alone. Communicating in unison requires message discipline, a deep and shared understanding of what COMESA is trying to achieve, as well as a collective willingness and ownership from internal stakeholders to

contribute to COMESA's communications efforts. They need to be able to communicate messages that are consistent with this strategy to target audiences while implementing activities. Ultimately, COMESA will communicate using an 'orchestra approach' whereby staff members, collectively participate in implementing this communication strategy.

3.3 Alignment of project communication strategies with COMESA Communication Strategy

While it is the expectation of donor-funded projects (e.g., EU funded projects) to develop their communication strategies according to their communication and visibility guidelines, the project teams involved will work closely with the Corporate Communication Unit to ensure alignment with this Communication Strategy as well as alignment with guidelines stipulated in the branding guidelines and social media policy.

3.4 The Communication Strategy

3.4.1 Key messages

Primary positioning and messaging to priority stakeholders must focus on positioning COMESA as **the leading regional economic community that is strategically and technically fit for purpose and partner of choice in steering regional integration.**

Every communication, without exception, should promote trust/confidence in COMESA. Communication which fails to do this, or which undermines this endeavour, is not strategic. Every significant communication activity should have a clear and agreed objective, especially during events. An objective will often be to "get this message to that stakeholder audience". Every objective should be evaluated during after-action reviews. The following are some specific key messages:

- With 21 Member States, and as the largest Regional Economic Community (REC) in Africa, COMESA has restructured to deliver cutting edge programming that offers diverse opportunities for trade and investment.
- COMESA is committed to working with various stakeholders to promote Africa's competitiveness by enabling Intra African trade and free movement of people, capital, goods, and services for improved living standards.
- COMESA remains the regional economic community of choice working to achieve sustainable economic and social progress in all Member States through increased cooperation and integration in all fields of development particularly in trade, customs and monetary affairs, transport, communication and information, technology, industry and energy, gender, agriculture, environment, natural resources as well as advocacy in governance, peace,

and security.

3.4.2 Tactics

Internal communications

Corporate Communication Unit

- The Corporate Communication Unit is the hub and custodian of the general communication of the institution and has a responsibility to enable all the players to successfully fulfil their communication duties and obligations. The unit's communication role is strategic to the organization's success.
- The Unit shall be the leading player in the implementation of this strategy as well as monitoring and reviewing it.
- Brand and reputation management is also the responsibility of the unit.
- The Unit is the custodian of the image of the organization and should ensure that relevant staff are equipped with skills to handle customer and media relations.
- The Unit to play more of a coordinating role: Meeting the communication needs of 21 Member States with a handful of individuals in the Corporate Communications Unit is a demanding task, that needs investment. With limited resources and capacities, it might be strategic for the unit to play more of a coordination role than an implementation role. For that to happen, COMESA will benefit from commissioning/outsourcing skills from external media, communications and public relations agencies that have a footprint in the 21 Member States.
- Since most Member States have national focal points or desk officers, they could also be used as good information points to disseminate information about COMESA. Their incentive needs to be monitored regularly for ownership and commitment.
- COMESA donor funded projects should be encouraged to hire their communication officers with a reporting line to the Head of Communications.
- Programme units should ensure they involve the Corporate Communications Unit during the design of projects as well as during the development of their annual work plans, to ensure communication is integrated into the implementation of programmes.
- The COMESA webmaster function would sit well within the Corporate Communications Unit, to ensure a functional, regularly updated website. IT would be better suited to providing support with infrastructure and security

of the platforms.

- Mainstream team-building activities to strengthen internal communications and staff relations.

National focal points/desk officers/ communicators in the Member States

- Link COMESA website to all government websites.
- Establish a COMESA page on the websites of COMESA coordinating ministries and/or ministries of Trade.
- Ensure dedicated pages and COMESA focus on state-owned media.
- Incorporate COMESA awareness programmes incorporated into national communication strategies.
- Facilitate access by COMESA to national broadcasters and educational institutions.

Enhance the communication role of coordinating ministries: In the absence of country-specific ministries dedicated to the COMESA regional integration agenda, coordinating ministries' roles need to be enhanced. This is by dedicating specific staff (such as Public Relations Officers) to serve as COMESA communication liaisons in their respective countries and facilitating them with resources to effectively play their coordinative role.

Their roles will include coordinating activities for creating awareness on regional integration, raising the profile of COMESA in the Member States, and publicizing the progress of their countries in implementing regional integration programmes. These officers will need to be oriented by the COMESA Secretariat to ensure clarity and consistency. The following are some of the recommended capacity building activities:

- Establishment of a Communication Coordinators Desk including a budget allocation to facilitate the participation of Communication Coordinators in COMESA activities.
- COMESA to host annual capacity building workshops for Coordinators to review the progress in communication activities.
- Jointly organizing COMESA participation in international trade fairs and Expos. Coordinators to share calendars of international expos/fairs in their respective countries and advise on their publicity potential and exposure for COMESA.
- Branding/ visibility - COMESA to provide promotional products (COMESA flag/ banners etc) for branding all COMESA related events in the Member States. Each Coordinator to have a starter kit of one indoor and one outdoor

COMESA flag, a desk flag and two roll-up banners.

- Extend invites to Coordinators to participate as delegates in COMESA activities taking place in Member States to equip them with knowledge on regional integration and make them better communicators on the subject.

Statutory committee on communication and publicity: COMESA to explore the formation of this Committee to mainstream communication in regional integration.

External communications

- **Use communication coordinators as information points:** Since most Member States have national communication coordinators, they should be used to disseminate information about COMESA. Their incentive needs to be monitored regularly for ownership and commitment. A good way could be through the creation of an organisational email address for them.
- **Translate, simplify, and localize informational material:** Most of the publications and information materials produced by COMESA are either in English, French, or Arabic. There is a need however to expand/translate to other local languages that are used in the Member States such as Swahili in addition to local languages depending on the target audience dynamics. This would be one of the advantages of working with an implementing agency.
- **Learn how to use influencers:** People trust what other people have to say. COMESA will consider using social media influencers to drive the key messages to a larger audience in an organic way. Influencers with large social followings can be targeted. For this to be effective, it is important that COMESA draws clear terms of reference and have the influencers' account descriptions include a clause '*these views are my own*' to avoid any reputational risks for the organization should the influencers say something that is not aligned with COMESA's mandate.
- **Observing key calendar moments:** To create awareness and drum up support for its activities, COMESA will each year dedicate a week on its calendar, "The COMESA Awareness Week". This will culminate in a COMESA Day or Regional Integration Day with a theme, where the institution will seek to publicize regional integration, its benefits and existing trade opportunities. With a fixed date each year, this can be alternated every year among the Member States to enhance inclusion and interaction. Coordinating ministries and COMESA institutions in each Member State to lead activities around the commemoration of this week. This activity will be complemented with

sponsored social media campaigns to enhance reach across COMESA's geographical scope. In addition, COMESA should recognize its Member States' independence days by sending out a public message as a show of acknowledgement.

- **Competitions:** In the interest of raising awareness amongst its key stakeholders, academic institutions, COMESA will design, and commission competitions based on regional integration. This will be open to individuals from all Member States, who will be invited to participate through art, essays, innovations, journalism, and music among other constructive activities. A good example of this is the COMESA photo competitions, where photographers in the Member States can submit photos that speak to the regional integration theme. This can be extended to schools and institutions to create awareness at the grassroots level.
- **Youth awareness initiatives:** COMESA recognizes that the youth have a significant contribution to the future of regional integration. As such equipping them with knowledge on the subject is a creative way of publicizing COMESA's agenda. One way to do this is to organize lectures in institutions of higher learning and study tours for students. These will draw the participation of the youth in meaningful conversations on regional integration. This will not only enhance awareness of COMESA and regional integration but also create ambassadors out of the participating youth.
- **Strategic partnerships:** COMESA will seek to establish strategic partnerships with regional media outlets in the form of agreements or Memorandum of Understanding to help create visibility in the Member States. Media houses with footprints in the COMESA Member States will be explored with the support of a centralized media, communication, public relations agency. International organizations/ media to create visibility in the global arena that can assist in resource mobilisation.
- **Annual awards:** COMESA will hold yearly recognition awards for employees, media or journalists who are at the forefront of positioning COMESA as the preferred regional economic community that is strategically and technically fit for purpose and partner of choice in steering regional integration.
- **Awareness campaigns** e.g., 30 Days of Regional Integration, My COMESA led by Ministries of Trade and the COMESA coordinating ministries (if not Trade) in the Member States on a rotational basis and executed annually.
- **Goodwill messages:** COMESA to send goodwill messages such as

congratulations on the election of Heads of State and the appointment of ministers in charge of coordinating ministries. These may also cover messages of commiseration for unfortunate happenings of large magnitude including the death of eminent persons.

- **Op-Ed (Opinion Editorial):** By its nature and stature, the office of the COMESA Secretary General commands respect in media houses across the region. COMESA shall leverage this inherent advantage to get Op-Ed articles syndicated across the leading newspapers within the region. In the said articles, COMESA shall target the opinion leaders with commentaries expounding on the opportunities and benefits of the COMESA policies and programmes.
- **Joint research projects:** In line with its goal to commission studies, COMESA will seek to partner with research institutions and academic institutions within the COMESA region to research various topics related to regional integration. This ensures active and broad participation of COMESA's stakeholders in the integration process thereby granting an opportunity to contribute to the same, building knowledge while creating visibility for COMESA as the preferred regional economic community that is strategically and technically fit for purpose and partner of choice in steering regional integration.
- **Social Media:** This is a two-way interactive platform that thrives on the continued engagement of people. Table 2 outlines the engagement tactics, their importance and how they can be applied by COMESA when communicating.

Tactic	Description and relevance	Channels
<p>Creating diversified digital content to satisfy all tastes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Videos <input type="checkbox"/> Infographics <input type="checkbox"/> Quality images 	<p>While some people prefer visual content such as videos and images, others prefer engaging with content that has high-quality photos.</p> <p>Only high-quality images with messages will grab the attention of the target audience and help easy and quick understanding. Posts with images have better social media engagement than without images and videos. So, using high-quality images will be the most preferred means to improve social media engagement.</p> <p>Videos receive the most engagement and this will be useful when offering tutorials e.g., COMESA in a nutshell.</p>	<p>Facebook</p> <p>Twitter</p> <p>YouTube</p> <p>WhatsApp</p> <p>LinkedIn</p> <p>Instagram</p> <p>TikTok</p>
<p>Participation in e-discussion forums</p>	<p>COMESA's social media accounts will not only be used to post information but will be also used to join relevant conversations on matters concerning COMESA's mandate. Twitter Spaces are a particularly useful avenue COMESA could harness.</p>	<p>Twitter</p> <p>Facebook</p> <p>YouTube</p>
<p>Holding Q&A sessions</p>	<p>Question and answer sessions will allow COMESA to have a conversation with the audience and to identify their views on different relevant matters. Replies to stakeholders' mentions and queries will spark more interest in engagement. The replies should be relevant to the query and be the very latest to grab people's attention. This can be extended to programmes where key influential personalities are interviewed with the purpose of understanding and generating interest to COMESA led programmes.</p>	<p>Facebook</p> <p>Twitter</p> <p>YouTube</p>
<p>Conducting polls and surveys</p>	<p>Polls and surveys are important ways to generate information about the audience.</p> <p>They will allow COMESA to not only obtain useful insights but also to engage the stakeholders. This can be extended to the number of visits to COMESA website including programmes activities and suggestions on what to be included in the programme webpage to generate interest and inclusivity with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Twitter</p> <p>LinkedIn</p>

Posting frequently and consistently	Posting frequently and regularly serves to draw the attention of followers. Additionally, Google considers the freshness score while ranking the websites and social media accounts.	Website Facebook Twitter YouTube Instagram
Job postings	Posting available opportunities at the COMESA Secretariat and/or its institutions presents an avenue through which to create visibility for some of the organization's work/impact.	LinkedIn Facebook Website of other REC's and Member States platforms
Use of long form articles / studies	The conventional view is that audiences today are much more distracted and less likely to have the patience to consume an 800-page, 10-minute read. This is largely true, but there are exceptions for platforms such as LinkedIn. With content such as relevant studies or well-researched industry commentaries, COMESA can go a long way in asserting its thought-leadership, enhancing its standing among this set of stakeholders, creating visibility for its work, and driving engagement.	LinkedIn
Responding quickly and thoroughly	53 per cent of social media users expect a response within 60 minutes. This can be done by using different social media tools (e.g., Hootsuite) setting alerts, and continuous monitoring.	Facebook Twitter YouTube
Making it easy for people to engage	Posting high-quality content and diplomatically asking followers to share their opinion. Such content will have an explanation of the reason for sharing, so that people will be interested to read.	Facebook Twitter YouTube

Sharing other content and comments of others (retweeting)	As engagement works both ways, sharing followers' content or other stakeholders' post will indulge the audience to share COMESA's posts in return. Also liking and sharing other posts will help to grab attention and develop interest in COMESA. Sharing other relevant post will boost social media engagement.	Twitter Facebook
Running simple recognition awards/ contests	Hosting a contest through social media can attract thousands especially, by offering a good prize to stakeholders such as journalists for their efforts in profiling COMESA.	Facebook YouTube
Add (#) hashtags in your post	#Hashtags help people to find relevant content on social media platforms like Twitter, Linked In, Facebook, and YouTube. Appropriate hashtags will be used in posts to reach bigger numbers and generate discussions on topics.	Twitter Facebook LinkedIn
Frequently asked questions	Post questions and answers online for ease of access	Website
Reviews	Posting reviews on relevant content	LinkedIn

Table 2: Social media engagement tactics

3.4.3 Content Development

What makes great content?

Content must have signed-off consent before embarking on sharing information.

Usefulness to target beneficiaries: Ultimately, this will be COMESA's number one goal. The content will aim to be informative, interesting, and relevant. The content will aim to be useful, concise (e.g., less than 600 words for web posts) and valuable. Useful content from COMESA will give the target audience more value, ultimately creating trust and confidence in COMESA's work.

Experiences: To ensure COMESA's content is memorable, it should include emotion and storytelling in all aspects of its content. People react strongly to emotion, and this can have a greater overall impact on how they view and perceive COMESA. Relying on experiences and evoking emotions makes a greater connection with the target audience.

While creating thought leadership content, COMESA should ensure that:

- The content is based on solid industry knowledge.
- The content demonstrates an acute awareness of current events and trends.
- The content demonstrates a deep understanding of challenges experienced in regional integration and trade.
- The content provides real solutions to real problems.
- The content is worth sharing.

Content plan

Content generation

- Weekly and daily key messages will be designed.
- High-quality image graphics and infographics on the key messages will be developed periodically.
- Quality action pictures of COMESA's work events and activities will be taken for use in social media posts.
- Scripting, shooting, and editing quality videos of between 45 seconds and 80 seconds (for Twitter and Facebook) and 3-5 minutes for YouTube will be produced. These will be in line with the messaging framework.
- Interesting posts – on relevant themes and key messages.

- User-engaging tweets –will be crafted regularly (it is ideal for COMESA to develop a 3-month social media toolkit for a start with pre-designed messages), pegged to the messaging framework.
- Periodic research will be conducted on recent happenings, emerging issues, and trends in regional integration. Thereafter discussion forums will be designed based on the issues identified.
- Relevant hashtags for Twitter posts and discussions will be designed and activated periodically.
- Stakeholder Twitter handles (those that need to be mentioned or tagged in tweets and discussions) will be identified.

Content sharing

Channel	Action type	Frequency
Facebook	Post fresh text content, accompanied by relevant images or infographics	Once a day
	Share COMESA's impact videos	Twice a week
	Share relevant content posts made by other stakeholders or relevant institutions on the COMESA websites: Content includes blog posts, Facebook posts, pictures, publications, documents, and videos	Four times a week
	Analyse who is looking at the content	Everyday
	Boost page posts N/B: Short videos or high-quality graphics are the best fit for boosting. Plain text attracts low engagement	On as-needed basis
	Reply to feedback – accurate and in an accommodating tone	As soon as received
	Live on Facebook with hosts	

Twitter	Schedule posts at least 24 hours in advance	Once a day
	Share tweets accompanied by relevant images or infographics (Timeline given based on audience active hours)	Four times a day 8 am–11 am–4 pm–10 pm
	Share COMESA's impact videos	Twice a week
	Retweet – relevant posts from the audience	Whenever applicable
	Retweet posts from relevant sources	Whenever applicable
	Respond to direct messages	As soon as received
	Initiate relevant hashtags	Based on the message plan
	Follow relevant Twitter handles	Every week
	Analyse the engagement metrics	Everyday
LinkedIn	Share posts on relevant issues from the message framework	Thrice a week
	Share posts from relevant stakeholders on the COMESA websites and social platforms	Twice a week
	Join discussion groups on relevant issues	Whenever applicable
	Follow/Connect with relevant entities	Every week
	Respond to feedback from the audience on platform	As soon as received
Website	Post stories and articles on events, trends, media advisory, updates etc.	Based on the messaging framework
YouTube	Share COMESA's impact videos	At least once a month
COMESA TV	Visibility, sponsorship/ donor programmes/ Webinars etc.	At least once a month
COMESA Online radio		At least once a month

Table 3: Content sharing metrics

Listening and monitoring

During social media activity, continuous listening and monitoring will be carried out to:

- describe substance characteristics of message content

- describe form characteristics of message content
- make inferences as to producers of content
- make inferences as to audiences of content
- predict the effects of content on audiences.

Social media tools

To implement an effective social media strategy, it is important to use social media management tools to collaboratively execute campaigns across multiple social networks like Facebook and Twitter from one web-based dashboard and to track and report social media analytics that guides further decision making. Employing a social media strategy without these tools becomes time-consuming, less effective, and relatively expensive. The tools help guide the scheduling of posts and campaigns; listening and monitoring actions; and analysing how effective the use of social media is.

Tool 1: Scheduling posts

- **Hootsuite:** has become an essential tool for managing social media, tracking conversations, and measuring campaign results via the web or mobile devices. Hootsuite offers a free solution for managing unlimited social profiles, enhanced analytics, advanced message scheduling, Google Analytics and Facebook insights.
- **Tweet Deck:** is a web and desktop solution to monitor and manage your Twitter feeds with powerful filters to focus on what matters. COMESA can also schedule tweets and stay up to date with notification alerts for new tweets.

Tool 2: Listening/Monitoring tools

This process will help COMESA to analyse stakeholder behaviour and identify whether messages are meeting the objective and whether they are engaging and relevant. The recommended monitoring platforms are Meltwater, Google Analytics and Facebook Insights. It will also allow COMESA to learn the top keywords, users, hashtags, and sources.

Tool 3: Content creation

As social media transforms so do audience needs. It takes more than just text and static images to engage the audience on a social media platform. The tools listed in table 4 below,

under the different categories, contribute to an overall objective, each is unique – with distinct features for different types of infographic output.

Task	Tool	Purpose
Video creation	PowToon & Magisto	Creation of branded video Synchronize audio and visual aspects to make an emotional connection with the viewer
	Adobe Premier Pro	Advanced video production
	Adobe After Effects	Advanced animation production
Audio creation	Adobe Audition	Advanced audio/podcast production
Publication creation	Adobe InDesign	Advanced print publications production
Infographics	Adobe Illustrator	Customize infographic templates
	Easel.ly	Let's you create innovative, design-intricate infographics complete with icons, images, charts, and interactive maps.
	Piktochart or Canva	
	Biteable	
	Kartograph	
Graphic Design	Adobe Photoshop	Creates quality and professional graphics

Table 4: Content creation tools

3.4.4 Communications channels

Internal communications

The goal of internal communications will be to among others:

- Promote collaboration among COMESA staff, Member States, and institutions.
- Enhance synergies between departments and institutions.
- Engender alignment across functions.
- Mobilize resources for COMESA communication activities.
- Enhance internal staff motivation and commitment to furtherance of the COMESA objectives.
- Provide a channel for feedback, debate, and discussion within COMESA departments and Member States.

The choice of the communication channel to be used depends on the target audience as well as the objectives of the communication. Here are some of the options that are easily available and that should be considered for internal communications:

- Electronic mail (e-mail).
- Electronic newsletter (e-newsletter).
- Mobile SMS broadcasts.
- WhatsApp groups.
- Intranet.
- Notice boards, feedback mechanisms.
- COMESA meetings or working groups: These may include regular weekly, monthly, quarterly, or special meetings scheduled for specific purposes, e.g., Member State/staff appreciation, regular capacity-building training etc.
- COMESA will periodically conduct internal surveys among their internal audiences to establish the most user-friendly channels to use. The assessment should particularly consider the relevance of the channels used, to recommend what works best.
- Suggestion boxes.
- Phone calls.

Policies and procedures for internal communications

Designated spokespersons

In the event of a crisis or a need for media interviews, COMESA will have its authorized spokesperson or spokespersons. The Secretary-General is a designated COMESA spokesperson and only he/she can appoint another spokesperson if not available. These spokespersons are authorized to make public comments relating to COMESA and may make media appearances when authorized. In the context of official COMESA missions, the head of the delegation shall automatically assume the role of the designated spokesperson. At all times, spokespersons are guided by the key and subsidiary messages. They are also subject to regular training to enhance their capacity to represent their organizations accurately and favourably.

Responsibility

COMESA and its staff members bear the responsibility of ensuring that internal and external communications are effective and timely. Internally, they have a role to ensure that they

provide feedback to departmental requests for information or in the documentation that has been submitted simply for review. For the external audience, the technical teams with support from communication teams will ensure that stakeholders' information needs are met through the most appropriate channels.

Guidelines for social media usage

Social media is no longer something people do only in their spare time. While social media was once a tool for leisure activity - with friends and family - increasingly, social media platforms are being used professionally in a work context. This represents an opportunity for COMESA to connect with stakeholders and communicate their work in real-time.

COMESA has a social media policy that should be adhered to. The following guidelines are given as an example and COMESA should decide who will be responsible for social media actions (and always guided by the agreed messages):

- Never tweet anything that you would not say if speaking on a public panel or making a public presentation on behalf of the project.
- Use a professional, expert and evidence-based tone of voice.
- Where possible, use established hashtags to describe COMESA's work.
- Where possible, use the handles of key target stakeholders.
- Be generous in support of other stakeholders on Twitter. This support is likely to be reciprocated.

The stipulations below contextualise the principles of integrity, professionalism, privacy, and impartiality in using social media:

- When posting information on their accounts, COMESA staff should indicate that the views are their own.
- Official information and content about COMESA shared on social media must be approved in advance.
- All online spokespersons must ensure that their posts are completely accurate and not misleading. The spokespersons should exercise sound judgment in determining what to post and what not to.
- Local posts can have global significance. Keep the "world view" in mind when participating in online conversations. Comments and content may be inaccurate (or even illegal) in other countries.
- Acknowledge that the internet is permanent. Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if it is "removed/

deleted" later or an attempt is made to make it anonymous. If the complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character restricted space (such as Twitter), then provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately.

General guidelines for personal social media usage

As a rule, it is important to keep the professional and personal use of social media entirely separate. Do not be tempted to express opinions about work on your media.

- Configure the privacy settings on your social media profile to satisfy your privacy requirements.
- Disclose the nature of your affiliation with the project.
- Portray clear disclaimers that any form of personal views that you express online is of your own accord, and do not represent the views of the project.
- Practice proper conduct and decorum when interacting with other social media users.
- Respect and uphold copyright/trademark laws.

Content copyright

- Adhere to standard copyright principles. Cite with reference, where possible, link back to the source.

Crisis communication guidelines

- A crisis is an event that is likely to subject COMESA to extensive and potentially unfavourable attention from local and international media and other stakeholder groups.

The following details guidelines for pre-crisis preparation:

- Develop a list of possible worst-case scenarios and crisis management plan.
- Put together a group of trusted staff members. They will form the crisis management team whose role is to manage and contain a crisis.
- Develop a list of possible questions and corresponding responses to avoid being caught off-guard by the media; keep it short and clear. Everyone who may have to speak to the media should have a copy of this "Q & A" document.
- Select a spokesperson who will serve as the single contact point in the event of a crisis.
- Develop a message framework that will define the nature and scope of messages to be disseminated to the public (i.e., a holding statement template).

- The assigned crisis team will then test their crisis plan and review it routinely to ensure its efficiency.

During the crisis

In the event of a crisis, COMESA should abide by the following guidelines:

- Establish a crisis information centre that consists of a group of well-informed staff and provide all the technology they will need. This will serve as the source of all information during a crisis.
- COMESA should ensure that the designated spokespersons are always available. The spokespersons should never “go off the record” or respond with a “no comment” to a media inquiry. This allows for media to misconstrue information, which may cause further reputational damage to the organization and its efforts in fostering regional integration.
- The designated spokespersons should be encouraged to communicate off prepared statements, as much as it is practical, as opposed to speaking off the cuff.
- COMESA will have ready, informational material such as backgrounders, factsheets, and brochures. This will not only provide background and current information on COMESA but also allow for the dissemination of information on COMESA's good work with the hope of neutralizing any damage done.
- COMESA will provide updates as events evolve.
- COMESA must be available round the clock for questioning and will for this reason provide contact details of assigned personnel.
- COMESA will tell the truth; this prevents it from further jeopardizing its credibility and progress made in fostering regional integration.

External communications

Website upgrade and optimization

COMESA will seek to be ‘digital by default’ in all its communications, with every resource being made available digitally and hard copies printed only when required. While all digital content should be hosted on the website, content should be created specifically to share through three key channels: email, social media, and SMS.

COMESA's webmaster and content management function should sit within the Corporate Communications Unit. Content on the website should be dynamic and not static. For instance, linking COMESA's Twitter account with the website so that tweets can also

be read on the website. Others include short, downloadable videos for distribution via WhatsApp, etc.

A communication planning grid to gather content from all institutions and Member States can be developed and used to ensure there is a regular stream of content and double as a rolling content creation plan. The website needs a constant and regular stream of dynamic content on the site.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a useful tool for COMESA's website. It is a valuable tool for creating awareness about COMESA and as such, keywords will be researched, chosen, and judiciously used when posting the content to be effective. When researching keywords, COMESA will look for the ones that have high search rates.

Media relations

Media involvement/training: COMESA will enhance the ability of journalists to educate the public on matters of regional integration. To this effect, COMESA will organize annual training workshops for journalists across the 21 Member States. They will undergo training on various programmes under regional integration, and the opportunities and benefits they present for its citizens. It is expected that the journalists' interest in regional integration will be sparked and their ability to report on the same enhanced. Commissioned writers and media producers will be engaged from time to time to write specific articles or produce audio-visual content to promote regional integration.

For effective media relations, COMESA needs to choose only a few media outlets (with a regional, national, and local footprint) to target and with whom to focus on building a deep and ongoing relationship.

Broadcast media coverage is valuable not just for communicating to the public, but also in engaging priority stakeholders. COMESA needs its spokespersons to be able to operate at a high level of confidence and competence in a variety of broadcast media settings and formats. Skills training for them (and a small number of other spokespeople, if appropriate) will be conducted before conducting media interviews.

Journalists need a point of contact from COMESA who will provide a seamless 24/7/365 on-call service. However, it is not reasonable to expect one member of staff to provide this alone. A new task should be added to the job description of one of the CCU staff to provide continuous media relations on matters concerning COMESA's programming. They need to be supported by the relevant departments to ensure they have the confidence to fulfil this task and are prepared to respond to any issues which may arise during the implementation

of communication and outreach activities.

All positive media coverage should be featured on COMESA's website, 'merchandized' on social media and via email, and a hard copy 'cuttings board' should be created and maintained either in the reception area or prominently in Member States institution offices.

COMESA will also tap into the annual media awards. This will incentivize journalists to focus on COMESA programming and its impact. Furthermore, COMESA can choose a handful of relevant journalists with an interest in COMESA's work, and train them on key issues in regional integration. A database of trained journalists can then be created, making it easier to engage them whenever needed. Conversely, it is appropriate to provide stories and tip-offs to these journalists when appropriate. It is important to start somewhere and work on developing deep and ongoing relationships that benefit the journalist/media outlet.

The following media products can be used by COMESA:

- **Radio:** News coverage, interviews, talk shows, promos.
- **TV:** News coverage, feature stories, documentaries, talk shows, adverts.
- **Newspapers, journals, and magazines:** Opinion editorials (Op-eds) news coverage, feature stories, weekly columns on top regional newspapers.
- **Digital screens:** Video streaming, photo streaming, PowerPoint presentations, photo slides, news scrolling.
- **Outdoor advertising:** Billboards.
- **Online news outlets:** (Think Africa Press, The Conversation Africa, Quartz, African Arguments, Devex, How we made it in Africa, AllAfrica as well as leading national news websites).
- **Traditional media:** These will be utilized for target audiences that are not tech-savvy or are not digitally connected. These include the use of community radios and more.

COMESA newsletters

Depending on internal capacities, COMESA might find it convenient to establish electronic newsletters embedded on Mailchimp. This will be easy to generate reports on readership and is more targeted. Content of the newsletter need not be limited to the work that only COMESA does. It must include news from beyond e.g., from the Member States and partners.

Digital content

COMESA will strive to always be 'digital by default' - with everything available digitally and hard copies printed only when required. Online content can be further exploited through cross-posting or embedding on the Member States' websites (with new content featured on the home page).

Systematic use of email

Emails are the preferred channel for sharing information internally and externally. With that in mind, COMESA should establish a regular schedule of email communication, but this need not be a traditional 'e-newsletter'. Emails could be themed by the content or be pegged to external events, but the content of these emails should not be limited to the work that only COMESA does. Rather than 'propaganda' emails, they should be informative and include news and content from COMESA and relevant content from partners.

Emails should be regular, at least once a month, but they should not contain too much content. As a rule, they should include three to six links or items. They should be scheduled using a planning grid.

To build the credibility of COMESA, all internal staff implementing projects or programmes must use official emails and not personal emails. The official emails should also be accompanied by an email signature from the sender which will contain the Name, designation, organization, COMESA logo and tagline, link to the website, COMESA's social media platforms and contact details.

SMS/WhatsApp

Between emails, priority stakeholders should be targeted with SMS and/or WhatsApp. These could be at least bi-weekly but could be more frequent.

Video

YouTube is the best and easiest place to host video content. COMESA will utilize its centralized channel to collate content and make it easier to search for and find through YouTube. COMESA will identify activities and projects amongst its different Member States that have borne the highest transformative impact (success stories). These will be modified into highly visual stories (e.g., infographics and videos) for dissemination to various Member States and stakeholders. All the videos must contain COMESA's and the donor's logo (if applicable).

Audio/Podcasts

Soundcloud or Audioboo are the best and easiest places to host audio content. The alternative is to create an audio player on the COMESA pages or the Member States institution websites, but this is costly and time-consuming (there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel').

Depending on internal capacity, COMESA can create a quarterly podcast. The great advantage of audio is that people can consume it while doing something else. With regular content, COMESA will be able to create loyal followings and feed online communities of interest, using regular and standard podcasts.

Data visualisation and infographics

One of the most effective ways to disseminate data from COMESA or its successes is through data visualization, in other words taking complex data and translating it into visual terms. These are not tools to 'tell human stories' but can quickly communicate key messages from dense documents. When research or data from COMESA is available in long or technical formats, data visualization can be used as an effective additional output to engage audiences and encourage more people to consume more of the ultimate product.

Complex data visualization can often only be produced by graphic artists and is often expensive. Simpler infographics, however, are often more effective communications tools and in-house capacity can be built to allow regular production of infographics using COMESA's branding.

Events

Given the vast spread of Member States and travel restrictions (for example during the COVID-19 pandemic), physical events and meetings may seem difficult for a long time. However, the opportunities provided by digital communications mitigate this. There is an opportunity to host interesting speakers and livestream them using tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. There are no geographic boundaries to inviting people (inside and outside COMESA) to view these events live and to access them via 'catch-up' using audio (like Soundcloud) and video (YouTube) online hosting tools.

Although discussion can be harder to manage 'virtually', networking tools such as LinkedIn Group discussions can help where face-to-face opportunities are too expensive to facilitate. LinkedIn Group discussions are an excellent way for COMESA to facilitate discussion among smaller networks and communities of interest. LinkedIn sends automated emails to push users back when there is an activity in the group, which is far more effective than an

intranet solution.

Whenever anyone from COMESA makes an external presentation, consideration should be given to live streaming, podcasting, and digital sharing. Very few events are genuinely private affairs and transparency should be encouraged. Q&A and discussion can always provide a private space after pre-prepared presentations are projected publicly.

There are several checklist elements essential for COMESA when convening events:

- Have an up-to-date contacts database from which to create an invitation list.
- Sending at least a 'save the date invitation in good time.
- Following up to ensure sufficient RSVPs.
- Being able to publicize speakers or the objective of the event in advance.
- Making adequate preparations for live streaming the event.
- Getting an effective facilitator.
- Creating a social media toolkit.
- Getting a photographer and a videographer.
- Getting a rapporteur.
- Preparing IEC materials in good time.

The key to attracting the right audience is to think deeply about what they can gain from the event. While the decision to initiate an event will almost always be on your terms ("we want to launch some research" or "we want to get buy-in for an intervention"), the way an event is positioned in an invitation is best done from a position of empathy with what is in it for the attendees.

All events should have objectives set in advance of sending out a 'save the date'. Only by having articulated objectives can everyone who is working on delivering the event contribute to making it a success. Every event should be evaluated against the objectives set using an 'After-Action Review' (see Monitoring and Evaluation section). No event should be repeated (stakeholders' meetings/workshops) until it has been reviewed, but the best time to hold an 'After-Action Review' is usually within a few days (2) of the event's conclusion.

Materials from events (such as presentations) should be shared via email to both participants and invitees who were not able to attend, especially to those who RSVPed but did not make it. But there is also benefit in creating digital materials that target people who did not attend the event (such as infographics that highlight a key point made in a presentation). For this reason, it is useful to have access to presentations well in advance of the event, rather than allowing presenters to finish them at the last minute.

Consideration should be given to 'live streaming' public events to reach a wider audience. This can be done by broadcasting a Zoom or Google Meet event to Facebook for example or recording and uploading to YouTube an event conducted on any of these platforms so that it is available as a 'catch-up' facility. While this can be set up at no additional cost, using a laptop with a webcam, higher quality can be achieved by using professional external service providers.

Social media can also be used to reach a wider audience. Twitter is the most appropriate social media platform to use. To successfully 'live tweet' an event, COMESA will select one agreed/official hashtag in advance of the event and publicize it in the event invitation and at the event itself.

Not every event will be appropriate for this 'live' dissemination approach. Again, there is a trade-off decision about the breadth of engagement versus depth of engagement.

It is often easier for target audiences to access audio of events on a 'catch-up' service, to allow them to listen to the content of the event while multi-tasking. Digital audio recording also requires a lower production value than video and can be done for free using a smartphone. However, a more professional recording device or external service provider can boost quality and is especially important to consider if recording audience participation without a PA system and roving/lapel microphone.

If it is not possible to physically bring together a critical mass of participants and audiences, a webinar may be an option.

Live-tweeting events

Preparation

- Choose an agreed hashtag for the event. Try and make it unique and keep it short so that it does not require too many characters to use.
- Make sure you have the login and password for the handle you will live-tweet from. It can be useful to have more than one person from COMESA live-tweeting from both corporate and personal handles.
- Follow people attending the meeting, especially speakers, and any other important stakeholders who would be interested in it but can't attend.
- List the Twitter handles of everyone involved in the event so that you can share them with other participants over email.
- Think about questions your Twitter audience might have and be prepared to

answer them.

- Ask speakers for any visual images they are going to use, for example, their slide deck. Use these to create images that you can use in advance.
- Download the 'Picmonkey' app which helps crop photos to be the optimal size for Twitter (and a range of other social media platforms).
- Ask speakers for their speaking notes or verbatim speeches in advance. Use these to pre-draft tweets.
- COMESA can also pre-draft tweets to be released in advance or at the event. It can be especially helpful to keep the handle of speakers and the hashtag on your cut & pasteboard to speed up live-tweeting.

Announcing the event

- Tweet the relevant handles and hashtags in advance of the event. Also, send these in email invitations to attendees and participants.
- Announce the time of the event through Twitter. Remember that not all followers will be in the same time zone as you.
- Let followers know which accounts will be live-tweeting and encourage them to follow.

During the event

- Display the hashtag prominently and encourage attendees to participate and use the hashtag to join in the discussion on Twitter. Consider making a wi-fi password available.
- Take or upload photos to accompany your tweets and tag up to 10 people who may have an interest in the event.
- Include Twitter handles when you're quoting someone so that they can engage in the conversation.
- Tweet and retweet from both corporate and personal accounts. Be generous. Remember that Twitter is a team sport.

3.4.5 Disclaimers

COMESA communications materials must include the disclaimers and attributions required by the organization producing them and any donors supporting them. These should be, translated into the local language (s) where appropriate.

3.4.6 Checklist for communications activities

Communication efforts will usefully follow the guidelines highlighted in this strategy:

- A clear communication objective.
- Well-defined target audiences.
- Key messages aligned with the project's overall objectives.
- A timeline.
- A budget.
- Context-appropriate communication channels.
- Indicators for monitoring and evaluating the success and reach of communications activities.
- A designated communications focal point.
- Must use accurate information.
- Must be properly planned and sequenced, but also capitalize on any appropriate opportunities that may arise.
- Must be people-centred, adopting where appropriate a story-telling approach that emphasizes the impact of the action on individual lives, rather than administrative milestones or budgets.
- Should use (the) local language(s) wherever possible.
- Must be appropriate to the channels used (e.g., social media) and the audience targeted in terms of style and register.
- Must be proportionate to the scale of the action concerned in terms of cost-benefit
- Must be leveraged where appropriate through partnerships with individuals and organizations, or partners with a potential multiplier effect.
- Must be closely coordinated with the donor's communication unit, and that of COMESA.

3.4.7 Implementation matrix

This communications plan/implementation matrix has been developed to support COMESA meet its communication objectives. The Communication Strategy will be reviewed every year to inform activities for the next years, but with the same objectives.

Time in Years					
		2022	2023	2024	2025
Objective I: To enhance access to information on COMESA's work for increased visibility					
Activities	Creating and maintaining a centralized stakeholder database embedded into Mailchimp)				
	Production and strategic dissemination of digital by default content among COMESA institutions (newsletter, case studies releases, video diaries (e.g., COMESA in a nutshell), press releases, Information, Education Communication (IEC) materials (e.g., brochures, desk, and wall calendars), blog series, podcasts series (e.g., #COMESADelivers)				
	Creation of virtual COMESA Desks for every Member State in the form of a Facebook page				
	Simplifying and localizing information, education, and communication material				
	Developing and managing innovative tools and channels share COMESA's ideas and impact e.g., running an outreach campaign on social media called "30 days of regional integration"				
	Developing a shared global, regional, and national influencing calendar of events that COMESA can piggyback on and engage with for wider reach				
	Development of strategic partnerships with relevant actors (e.g., regional media)				
	Enrol at least 3 national social influencers per Member State to work with in communication activities				
	Development of COMESA landing pages on Member States' coordinating ministry websites				
	Develop keywords for COMESA content posted on the website				
	Creation of centralized/official COMESA pages on emerging social media platforms				
	Develop 6-month social media toolkit with draft messages to be used for social media engagement				
	Conduct outcome mapping exercises and produce short video summaries on the impact of COMESA				

Time in Years					
		2022	2023	2024	2025
	Media training on how to report on regional integration issues to run in tandem with the COMESA annual Media Awards.				
	News coverage before, during and after events				
	Celebration of COMESA's annual anniversary				
	Organize the annual COMESA awareness week				
	Launch joint research projects with academia and think tanks				
	Objective II: Demonstrate the value and impact of COMESA				
Activities	Air documentaries on COMESA's journey and its impact				
	Publish the following: Weekly newspaper columns/Op Eds; Fact Sheets; Journal articles; Quarterly Briefs; Annual reports				
	Produce feature stories				
	Publish and disseminate success stories/human interest stories quarterly				
	Conduct outcome mapping exercises and produce short video summaries on the impact of COMESA				
Objective III: To build the capacity of COMESA's internal communication structures for the effective realization of the organisation's objectives					
Activities	Set up and maintain a central repository for all COMESA information (E.g., captioned photos and video bank)				
	Capacity building for government PR officials and information and knowledge management officials to run with planned government engagements				
	Internal staff training on writing (e.g., blogs, feature stories, success stories, writing for the web, social media management)				
	Capacity building internal stakeholders on the COMESA communication policies.				
	Photography and videography trainings				

Table 5: Implementation Matrix

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE HAVE ARRIVED?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of communication and outreach activities are important to ensure COMESA is aware of whether its efforts are helping to meet communication objectives. Based on the frequency below, the Corporate Communication Unit will set up baselines at the onset of this strategy implementation. This will then inform the quantitative nature of indicators after each month, quarter or year.

Table 6: M&E framework

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Sources of Information	Data Collection Methods	Frequency
Objective 1: To enhance access to information on COMESA's work for increased visibility					
Impact: Enhanced visibility of COMESA in all Member States, manifested by easy access to information on all its programmes and benefits					
Media coverage	Media engagements	Presence of updated media contact lists	Media registration lists	Attendance registers	Quarterly
	Effective media interviews	Ten percent increase in the number of media interviews held quarterly Ten percent increase in the number of COMESA news sources every quarter Interview question guide Training for COMESA news sources	Media monitoring reports	Media monitoring and analysis	Quarterly
	Magazine and newspaper columns	Ten percent increase in newspaper and magazine appearances annually At least 3 Memorandum of understanding with regional media houses operating in 21 Member States signed	Newspapers Magazines MoU file	Newspaper clippings Media monitoring and analysis	Monthly
	Digital platforms	Ten percent increase in number of COMESA mentions on blogs annually Traffic to COMESA digital platforms	Blogs Social media platforms	Digital analytics	Monthly
	COMESA Documentaries	Five documentaries scheduled annually Three documentaries produced annually At least three documentaries aired annually	Documentary footage (raw and edited)	Central repository	Quarterly
	News coverage on COMESA activities and programmes	Ten percent increase in the number of news items on COMESA annually Five percent increase in regional media houses covering COMESA stories	Media monitoring reports	Media monitoring and content analysis	Annually
Access to information	Publicity events (COMESA Awareness week, celebration of the 30th Anniversary)	At least three adverts during/on COMESA awareness week Agenda for COMESA awareness week Press release for COMESA awareness week	Planning meeting reports Advertorials	Media monitoring Digital monitoring Survey	Annually
	Regularly updated website	Number of updates (news updates & photos) on the COMESA website Five percent increase in number of new visits to the COMESA website Stakeholder engagement with website content	Web analytics	Digital audits	Monthly
	Strategic distribution of informational material	Digital library established Networks established with other libraries in MS for dissemination of COMESA knowledge resources established.	Reports Database of libraries in the network	Online surveys	Annually
	Interactive digital platforms	At least five posts updated on social media platforms (Facebook, twitter) weekly Stakeholder interaction with social media content (shares & comments) Three percent number of new likes/followers on social media platforms every month	Social media analytics reports	Social media audits	Monthly
	Use of localized information education and communication (IEC) material	Number of localized IEC material Number of IEC material distributed to COMESA institutions Number of IEC material distributed to Member States	Records of published IEC material Location of posted IEC material	National surveys	Quarterly
Partnerships for increased visibility	COMESA's joint activities with the private sector players	Number of joint activities undertaken Number of private sector players show-casing the COMESA brand	COMESA activity schedules COMESA activity reports MOUs	Report reviews	Quarterly

	Joint research projects with think tanks and universities	Number of engagements with think tanks and universities MOUs Number of ongoing research projects Number of published research findings	Survey reports MOUs Activity reports	Surveys Key Informant Interviews Publication reviews	Annually
	Mentorship and scholarship schemes with Member State universities	Number of engagements with universities Criteria for scholarship award provided Number of scholarships awarded MOUs	Engagement letters/meeting minutes Student testimonials MOUs	Key Informant Interviews Review of documentation	Annually
Objective II: Demonstrate the value and impact of COMESA					
Deeper understanding of COMESA and its benefits	Publish COMESA success stories	Five success stories published print and digital every quarter Discussions on published stories Number of shared publications	Publications audit report Digital audit report	Follow-up interviews Publication's audit Digital audit	Quarterly
	Business to Business forums	Number of participants from private sector and business associations Testimonials from private sector players Level of participation in cross-border trade and other COMESA programs	Attendance registers Testimonials Cross-border trades monitors	Key Informant Interviews Review of forum reports Surveys (even digital) Reports	Annual
	COMESA expos	Number of COMESA expos held/participated Number of exhibitors Number of guests	List of confirmed exhibitors Attendance lists Expo promos	Photography of expo action Key Informant Interviews at the expo	Annually
	COMESA integrated media campaign	Execution the media campaign Number of promos on traditional and new media Level of interaction with COMESA news on digital platforms	Post-campaign analysis reports	Awareness and perception survey	Annually
Objective III: To build the capacity of COMESA's internal communication structures for the effective realization of the organization's objectives					
Coordinated internal and external communication	Communication training for COMESA Secretariat	Number of staff trained Level of staff efficiency in communication	Training material Attendance lists Training reports	Internal staff surveys Staff appraisals Training report reviews	First quarter
	Active intranet system	Level of activity on intranet system Number of staff accessing the system	Digital audit reports	Digital audit Staff surveys	Quarterly
	Shared calendar of events	Entries on calendar Circulation of COMESA activity calendars	Calendars Activity schedules	Calendar reviews	Quarterly, annually
	Digital training for communications team	Number of staff trained Level of efficiency Level of activity on digital platforms	Attendance lists Digital audit reports Staff feedback	Digital audits Staff surveys	Quarterly
	Team building	Number of team building events held Number of staff participated in team building	Activity reports Staff feedback	Internal staff surveys	Biannually
	Revamped communication structure	Additional capacity i.e., editor			

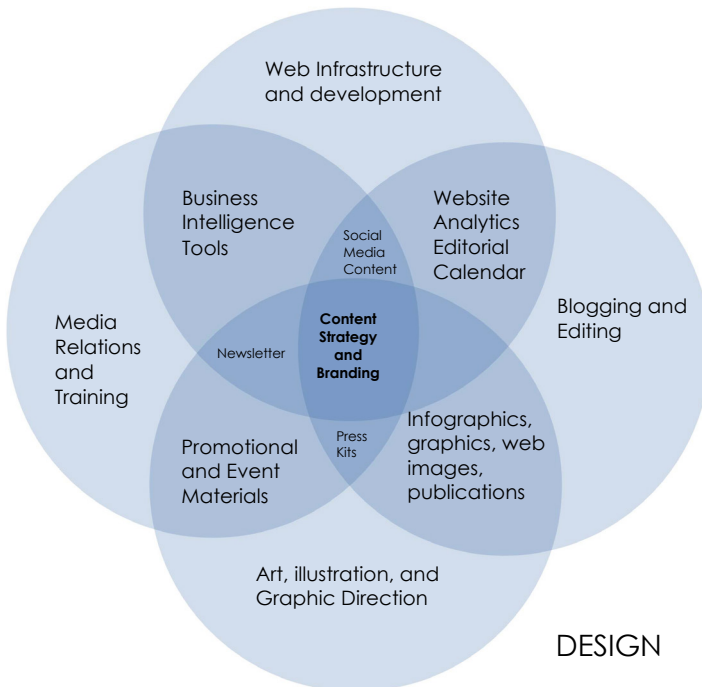
RESOURCING

5.1 Sustainability of the Communication Strategy

Consideration should be given to creating a dedicated budget to facilitate the outsourcing of critical communication skills needed by COMESA where these skills are not available in-house.

COMESA's Corporate Communications Unit requires a range of different skills. These are listed in the diagram below, but broadly include four categories of specialist skills: **outreach**, **content (e.g., editing publications and papers)** **technology**, and **design (publications)**.

Diagram 1: Skills needed for effective communication



It is almost impossible to find all these skills in one unit, much less one member of staff. It is advisable therefore to allocate funds to commission external support and take on the task of managing potentially a centralized media, communication and public relations agency and ensuring quality and timeliness. This should be reviewed, as there is just as much risk of

wasting money on repeated and costly external suppliers and consultants.

When commissioning skills from outside, COMESA should consider value for money based on the 4 'e's:

- Economy (how cheaply can we shop?)
- Efficiency (how likely are they to get it right the first time?)
- Effectiveness (how well can they do what we're asking?)
- Equity (running through each of the three 'e's above, does the way the provider will deliver contribute to COMESA's goals and objectives?)

Whether commissioning a large-scale one-off product (like a website or portal redevelopment) or a small-scale service (like media relations from a local PR agency), using effective commissioning principles will help:

- Start with a clear brief (or develop one based on a proposal)
- Ask for and listen to feedback from experts in their field
- Be clear about which facts need to be used but allow creative professionals the space to express their creativity – don't micromanage
- Give feedback sooner rather than later early drafts. Take responsibility to collate feedback internally and reconcile conflicting feedback – ideally, just one person should speak to the consultant (to ensure clarity)
- At the end of each interaction (meeting, call or email) be clear about who does what next – is the ball in your court (perhaps to draft website content?) or their court (perhaps to upload website content onto mocked-up pages?).
- Be clear about the ultimate deadline from the beginning but also set interim deadlines to keep projects on track and keep commissioned providers motivated

BUDGET

**Some budget lines can be funded from project budgets*

	COST PER YEAR (USD)					
		2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Objective I: To enhance access to information on COMESA's work for increased visibility						
	Creating and maintaining a centralized stakeholder database embedded into Mailchimp)	500	525	551	579	2,155
	Production and strategic dissemination of digital by default content among COMESA institutions (newsletter, case studies releases, video diaries (e.g., COMESA in a nutshell), press releases, Information, Education Communication (IEC) materials (e.g., brochures, desk, and wall calendars), blog series, podcasts series (e.g., #COMESADelivers)	52,000	54,600	57,330	60,197	224,127
	Creation of virtual COMESA Desks for every Member State in the form of a Facebook page	-	-	-	-	-
	Simplifying and localizing information, education, and communication material	20,100	21,105	22,160	23,268	86,633
	Developing and managing innovative tools and channels share COMESA's ideas and impact e.g., running an outreach campaign on social media called "30 days of regional integration"	41,500	43,575	45,754	48,041	178,870
	Developing a shared global, regional, and national influencing calendar of events that COMESA can piggyback on and engage with for wider reach	25,000	26,250	27,563	28,941	107,754
	Development of strategic partnerships with relevant actors (e.g., regional media)	11,250	-	11,813		23,063
	Enrol at least 3 national social influencers per Member State to work with in communication activities		45,900	48,195	50,605	144,700
	Development of COMESA landing pages on Member States' coordinating ministry websites	-	-	-	-	-
	Develop keywords for COMESA content posted on the website	-	-	-	-	-
	Creation of centralized/official COMESA pages on emerging social media platforms	-	-	-	-	-
	Develop 6-month social media toolkit with draft messages to be used for social media engagement	-	-	-	-	-

	Capacity building for Government communication officers and Media training on how to report on regional integration issues to run in tandem with the COMESA annual Media Awards.	91,376	95,945	100,742	105,779	393,842
	News coverage before, during and after events	30,000	31,500	33,075	34,729	129,304
	Celebration of COMESA's 30 anniversary			34,300		34,300
	Organize the annual COMESA awareness week	10,500	11,025	11,576	12,155	45,256
	Launch joint research projects with academia and think tanks	15,500	16,275	17,089	-	48,864
Objective II: Demonstrate the value and impact of COMESA						
Activities	Air documentaries on COMESA's journey and its impact		51,300	21,525	22,601	95,426
	Publish the following: Weekly newspaper columns/Op Eds; Fact Sheets; Journal articles; Quarterly Briefs; Annual reports	10,000	10,500	11,025	11,576	43,101
	Produce feature stories	2,240	2,352	2,470	2,593	9,655
	Publish and disseminate success stories/human interest stories quarterly					-
	Conduct outcome mapping exercises and produce short video summaries on the impact of COMESA	18,800	19,740	20,727	20,727	79,994
Objective III: To build the capacity of COMESA's internal communication structures for the effective realization of the organisation's objectives						
	Set up and maintain a central repository for all COMESA information (E.g., captioned photos and video bank)	-	-	-	-	-
	Internal staff training on writing (e.g., blogs, feature stories, success stories, writing for the web, social media management)	5,000	-	5,250	-	10,250
	Capacity building internal stakeholders on the COMESA communication and team building	3,500	3,675	3,859	4,052	15,086
	Photography and videography training	5,000		5,500		10,500
	Total Budget	342,266	434,267	480,504	425,843	1,682,880

Table 7: Indicative budget

ANNEX 1: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Research

The following details the various forms of studies conducted to inform the Communications Strategy.

I. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

To obtain in-depth insights on COMESA's patterns of communication, as well as the challenges experienced in internal communication, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), were conducted with the internal and external stakeholders. Information from the KIIs can be found under the SWOT analysis section in this document.

II. Communication Assessment

To further corroborate the findings from the KIIs, follow up questionnaires were administered online targeting the Member States Communication Leads and Focal Points.

Below are some of the findings:

- ☐ *"I am not completely unaware of COMESA activities, but I would like to know more, through different platforms and publications."*
- ☐ *"I would like to be informed of whenever COMESA is dealing with a Ministry/Department in my country, be it for some collaboration or training. I want to be made aware of it so that I may write a news item or provide video coverage of the event. And consequently, disseminate it to all media and the population."*
- ☐ *"More collaboration and engagement between the Ministry and COMESA would be good."*
- ☐ *"I would not mind training in multimedia to make content more appealing."*
- ☐ *"Would like to learn more about COMESA and enhance possible future engagements."*
- ☐ *"As a Communication Focal Point for the country, maybe we could be put in copy with regards to correspondences exchanged with other stakeholders in our countries."*
- ☐ *"COMESA partners in the country could be informed that there is a Communication Focal Point, and that person should be contacted so as to give publicity to whatever COMESA related event is happening."*
- ☐ *The following content formats were most preferred to engage audiences in*

Member States.

III. Literature Review

Relevant documentation not limited to those provided were reviewed, providing a wealth of knowledge on the challenges as well as opportunities in strengthening COMESA's communications. Specifically, the documents reviewed were:

- *COMESA Communication Strategy 2016-2020.*
- *Communication and Visibility Plan for the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean region.*
- *Communication and Visibility Plan for the 'Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean Region (EA-SA-IO).*
- *COMESA social media Policy.*
- *COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan 2021 - 2025.*

IV. Media Content Analysis

With media being a key component in raising public awareness on COMESA initiatives, an assessment of media/journalists passionate about COMESA's work in the region were mapped out. The media analysis proved useful in identifying strategic approaches in the utilization of media. (*Refer to external communications - media relations section of the strategy*).

V. Digital Audit

An analysis of COMESA's digital assets was conducted. The aim was to evaluate the usage of social media platforms by @comesa_lusaka (Twitter), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) page (Facebook).

Further to this, the audit looked to assess the effectiveness of these digital platforms as information dissemination platforms.

PESTEL Analyses

The second phase of the situational analysis focused on identifying the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) issues that surround COMESA's internal and external communications.

Political

A focus on political interests or regional dominance compared to regional integration hinders the achievement of COMESA's mandate and the commitment by Member States to foster and actively participate in the regional integration agenda.

Economic

The ability of most African countries to structurally transform their economies and diversify their exports has resulted to reliance on imports from developed nations. With globalization translating into increased trade among African countries, most consumers have developed preference for imported products, resulting in less focus on the development of local productive capacities and promotion of regional integration.

Social

Popular perceptions have deepened the narrative of under-development in the region, contributing to over-dependence and undermining of the region's economic vibrancy and ability to foster regional integration.

Technological

Internet penetration and ownership of mobile phones is rapidly increasing in the region presenting an opportunity for COMESA to tap on digital media and communications to engage its stakeholders in the 21 Member States. Below is an example of the internet and social media usage in some of COMESA's Member States:

Environment (Internal)

A new era of digital and social communications awaits COMESA that demands the institution to join the bandwagon and alter some of its current communication approaches. To catch up, especially in this digital era and the "new normal" COMESA must run and not walk. For COMESA to get there, there is a need to invest far more in communication as a strategic management function.

Legal

Cross-border trade frameworks in the region are either too weak or do not cut across the region for Agricultural trade and marketing policies, causing the Member States to continue imposing barriers to regional trade in staple and other foods.¹ Harsh and discriminatory immigration laws and policies in many Member States are prejudicial to achieving COMESA's agenda.

COMESA SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Robust systems/structures are already in place to mobilize the Member States. □ COMESA has a lot of qualified people, but these need to be given the opportunity to shine and be innovative/creative. □ The communication team keeps the staff updated on what is going on through newsletters, websites etc.; <i>"I must give them some credit that at least every week they will put together a story about COMESA."</i> □ COMESA has readily available stories to sell to its publics. □ Corporate Communications Unit is forward-looking (and has embraced modern technologies). □ There are experts in so many different fields who can be relied on to generate content □ The communication unit consistently produces information materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Not as much communication about what is happening inside COMESA. □ There are no clear communication channels, bottom-up or up-bottom. □ There is no staff consultation before communication is made. □ Communication sometimes is too bureaucratic; there is too much formality. □ Suppression of information/what gets communicated at times, which makes people start guessing, and sometimes start leaking information. □ Staffing: <i>"It is a small unit, yet its output has such a big impact on the image of the organization."</i> □ Communication channels are limited; <i>"It's just the newsletters. Mostly the newsletters."</i> □ Not so much is written in terms of papers, research outputs; COMESA has not been proactive to do some studies and disseminating them. □ The way communication is done is static; <i>"It's been the same things, that were done two, three, four, five years back."</i> □ Limited capacity to do digital communication □ There isn't a data protection policy to guide the management of information that comes in. □ The instruments that should enable the communication team's work (policies, regulations etc.) are lagging. □ The tendency to work in silos means resources are not used in the most effective manner. □ Internal support provided to the Corporate Communications Unit is insufficient e.g., where there is late or no response to interview requests. □ Buy-in from Member States is not adequate. □ The fact that dates for certain key events (e.g., Summit) are not set hampers communications planning as there isn't enough predictability.
Opportunities	Threats

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use the communication liaisons or contacts in member states to provide updates on what COMESA is doing in these countries, so that communication is not one-way. □ Given the right staffing, right numbers, they could do more even to attract resources □ There is an opportunity to tap into donor budgets to boost what the Member States provide for communication. The communication team should do physical copies in addition to the soft copies shared digitally. □ There should be deliberate efforts to benchmark and learn from others (e.g., EU, AU etc.) through study tours for example. □ Using public relations agencies in Member States might provide skills and efficiency in the communications work and free up the CCU team to play a coordinating role. □ Considering how COVID-19 has altered the landscape, the focus should be on digital tools. □ Communication can be more proactive, e.g., quarterly briefs can be sent to Member States, media etc. to provide updates about what is happening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Communication is not treated as a strategic management function and this current positioning curtails its capacity to contribute to the organization effectively. □ The budget devoted to communication work is still quite thin. <i>"If you don't put resources, then you can't be able to sustain the [Corporate Communications] Unit."</i> □ Attitude and willingness to change. □ The fear of losing control because some might feel like communications need to be controlled.
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Table 1: SWOT analyses of COMESA's communications approach

Issues Identification and Prioritization

The final stage of the situational analysis was issue identification. The most outstanding issues (that can be addressed by communication), as revealed by the aforementioned studies were pinpointed.

From the triangulation of the findings obtained during the situational analysis, the key points of concern were determined based on the following:

- Alignment with the concerns for redress as indicated in the consultancy Terms of

Reference (TOR)

- Recurrence – issues that came up severally from the conducted surveys

The situational analysis has highlighted several issues and opportunities for communications and outreach which are summarized in the table below:

Identified Problem/Issue	Prioritized Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Inadequate visibility of COMESA's work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Increase comprehension by target audience on COMESA's regional integration agenda□ Increased flow of information from COMESA to target audiences (research pieces, brochures, factsheets, digital posts, blogs, newsletters, podcasts etc.)□ Increased accessibility of information about COMESA for the target audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Need for enhanced efficiency (internal) in communication and outreach structures and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Build capacity of internal staff and implementing partners on strategic communications (writing articles, blogs, photography, press releases, videography, newsletters) that will help in content generation□ Use low-cost online communication tools to share information including partner websites, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, and external platforms□ Look for efficient ways to harness capacity of implementing partners team or key stakeholders to roll out certain tasks□ Allocate adequate resources (staffing and funding) for the Corporate Communications unit

Table: Identified issues and opportunities strengthening communications

