

First-Ever COMESA Week Celebrated in Madagascar



Middle: Madagascar's Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Mrs Rasata Rafaravavitafika with COMESA ASG A & F Dr Dev Haman (right) cutting the ribbon to officially launch the COMESA Week and Mini Expo at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offices in Antananarivo on 24 June 2024

The inaugural COMESA Week was held in Madagascar from June 24 to June 29, 2024, highlighting COMESA's 30 years of impact. The event featured a variety of publicity and stakeholder engagement forums, including trade fairs and a business conference.

Activities throughout the week included multi-stakeholder dialogues focusing on women and youth, a mini expo for small-scale entrepreneurs in Antananarivo, a national media sensitization forum on regional integration, engagements with university students at the University of Antananarivo, and several bilateral meetings between high-level government officials from Madagascar and the COMESA Executive.

The COMESA Secretariat organized the event in collaboration with the Government

of Madagascar, with financial support from the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund. It also marked the launch of activities to commemorate the COMESA's 30th anniversary.

The climax of the week was the 5th COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) Trade Fair and Business Conference, held on June 28 and 29, 2024. This event brought together national chapters of COMFWB from COMESA Member States and women entrepreneurs from Madagascar and across the region. Various international and local corporations supported these events.

The First Lady of Madagascar, Her Excellency Mialy Rajoelina, graced the opening of the trade fair, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms.

Rasata Rafaravavitafika, officially launched the COMESA Week activities.

In her address at the opening ceremony, the Minister expressed pride in Madagascar hosting the first COMESA Week.

"It is a great pride for my country and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that we are inaugurating this important and useful event, which is once again a concrete expression of regional cooperation and integration within COMESA," she said.

She added, "Madagascar remains a committed member of COMESA, and we are working to ensure that the country takes full advantage of regional integration by actively participating in

to page 2



Participants at the Multi Stakeholders Meeting in Antananarivo, Madagascar

Women, Youth in Focus in COMESA Publicity Blitz

Women and youth in business in Madagascar were key targets for COMESA Week awareness-raising initiatives, given their critical role in economic development. On June 25, 2024, in Antananarivo, over 100 participants attended a multi-stakeholder dialogue organized by the COMESA Secretariat. The objective was to equip women and youth with the necessary tools to enhance their participation in regional trade.

In total more than 130 participants from public and private sectors and civil society institutions attended the dialogue. They were introduced to various COMESA trade facilitation tools, COMESA- European Union initiatives supporting women, COMESA's gender frameworks, and the women in business digital platform.

Opening the dialogue, Mr. Kola Emi-Haulain, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Madagascar, emphasized that while women and youth form the bulk of the continent's population, they face significant hurdles in seeking economic livelihoods.

"Women and young people represent the majority of the African population and constitute the main pools of potential, skills, and resources on the continent. They face challenges linked

to access to financing, markets, mentoring, and business opportunities," he said.

He described the multi-stakeholder dialogue forum as a valuable platform for information and knowledge exchanges, assisting in identifying the best strategies and practices to better involve women and young people in regional programs and trade.

This point was further stressed by COMESA Assistant Secretary General Dr. Dev Haman, who highlighted that being part of COMESA allows entrepreneurs in Madagascar to access a much bigger market, urging women and youth to take advantage of this opportunity.

Mrs. Anna Cichocka, Charge d'Affaires at the European Union (EU) Delegation to Madagascar, noted that the event demonstrated the strong relations between the EU and COMESA. "An efficient COMESA is impossible without women and youth," she stated. She highlighted the various initiatives the EU supports, focusing on women, such as the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Market Programme (RECAMP).

First-Ever COMESA Week ...

► continued from page 1

the different programs and activities that will enhance trade and development for our people." Madagascar benefits from several sectoral programs covering trade facilitation, the pharmaceutical sector, air transport, the environment, competitiveness, market access, energy, agriculture, and statistics. Its annual exports to the COMESA region range between \$50 million to \$100 million.

Under the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM), funded by the European Union through COMESA, the country received nearly 2.6 million euros in direct funding for technical cooperation, much of which has benefited the private sector by equipping production units and supporting access to the African market.

Dr. Dev Haman, Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance at the COMESA Secretariat, commended Madagascar for hosting the first-ever COMESA Week and kicking off the celebration of 30 years of existence.

Noting Madagascar's low share of intra-COMESA trade, he outlined various sectors where the country holds immense potential. "The current intra-COMESA trade is just \$14 billion, but there is potentially over \$100 billion worth of trade that Madagascar and other Member States should take advantage of and trade more," he stressed.

He highlighted agriculture and value addition as areas where the country could optimize production.

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The 5th COMFWB Trade Fair was a success and attended by various stakeholders including VIPs, government officials, regional and international partners, the media and entrepreneurs

Regional Businesswomen Gather in Madagascar for COMFWB Trade Fair

A splendour of pink marked the COMESA Federation of Women in Business Trade Fair and Conference as local and international female entrepreneurs from 20 COMESA Member States gathered in Antananarivo, Madagascar, on 28 and 29 June 2024.

The Fair themed “Enhancing Participation of Women Entrepreneurs in the COMESA Regional Markets under the AfCFTA anchored on Green Investment, Value Addition, and Tourism” was the 5th since it was launched in 2020.

Previously, the Fair has been held in Malawi, Zambia, Uganda, and Egypt and serves as a important platform to promote trade among COMESA Member States, with a special focus on the role of women entrepreneurs in the advancement of intra-regional trade. The First Lady of Madagascar, Her Excellency Mrs. Mialy Rajoelina opened the trade fair and business conference.

In her statement, Mrs. Rajoelina called on regional governments to invest extensively in empowering women, highlighting their resilience in driving economic emancipation and reducing

poverty.

She stated, “I have seen the determination of women in Madagascar and the COMESA region to better the lives of not only their families but the communities at large. I strongly believe that women are the key to ending poverty and bringing about sustainable development for our region and beyond. We cannot afford to leave them out.”

Dr. Dev Haman encouraged traders in Madagascar and beyond to seriously consider the COMESA market, which offers a large market of more than 600 million people. He emphasized the importance of addressing the challenges faced by women to ensure they thrive in various sectors. “By having such events, we are building bridges with all stakeholders, including women, governments, COMESA institutions, partners, and key players,” he added.

Ms. Maureen Sumbwe, the COMFWB Board Chairperson, called for governments to facilitate the free movement of people. She expressed regret over the current difficulties, citing long flight connections, lack of flexible routes, visa

requirements, and inadequate facilities for women travelers.

“It is regrettable that moving from one COMESA country to another has remained a thorn in the flesh,” she noted.

Other speakers at the fair and conference included the Minister of Industrialisation, Trade, and Consumption, Hon. Edgar Razafindravahy; Mr. Issa Sanogo, the United Nations Coordinator in Madagascar; COMFWB Madagascar Chairperson Ms. Fanja Razakaboana; and COMFWB Chief Executive Officer Mr. Chikakula Miti. They all stressed the need to fully empower women in business with the right resources and skills and to open access to markets to promote intra-regional trade.

COMFWB, a COMESA institution dedicated to enhancing the role of women in the business sector, has its head office in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Madagascar Media Enlisted in COMESA Communications



Journalists from different Media houses based in Madagascar participated at the Media Interaction session with COMESA staff

As an agenda-setter for public discourse, the media significantly influences what the public considers important by how topics are communicated, framed, and emphasized. Therefore, to gain public traction on any topic, media engagement is essential.

This understanding led to the decision to invite the local media in Madagascar to a one-day sensitization forum about COMESA. The aim was to educate them on what COMESA is, the benefits and opportunities of being a member, and to encourage them to inform the public through their various platforms.

Journalists from various media organizations,

along with communication officers from the public sector, participated in the interactive forum hosted by COMESA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madagascar, with support from the European Union. This event was part of the COMESA Week activities in Antananarivo, Madagascar, and aimed to raise awareness of COMESA's 30-year impact.

Technical experts from the COMESA Secretariat and the Coordinating Ministry guided the journalists through various programs covering trade, industry, agriculture, gender, and support from development partners, among others.

The role of the COMESA Court of Justice was

a key topic that generated significant interest from both journalists and government officials in attendance, highlighting the need for more engagement with key stakeholders.

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) also participated in the forum, helping to raise awareness about its mandate and role in regional integration.

Presenters included Ms. Nyambura Mbatia, Registrar of the Court; Mr. Chikakula Miti, Chief Executive Officer of COMFWB; Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender; Ms. Esther Mwimba, Senior Private Sector Development Officer; and Ms. Jane Kibiru, Research Fellow.

Date	Activity/Event	Venue
3 – 4 July	National Workshop on Gender Equality and Available Career Opportunities for Women in the Air Transport	Zambia
14 - 16 July	COMESA - African Union Election Observation Mission in Rwanda	Rwanda
30 – 31 July	Validation workshop on Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation in COMESA	Rwanda



Ms. Nakitto Florence CEHA Uganda chapter chairperson, Mr. Fred Zake, Executive Director of Hortifresh, Dr. John Mukuka, Chief Executive Officer of COMESA-ACTESA, Mr. Steven Byantware, MAAIF Director for Crop Resources

CEHA to Boost Growth in Uganda

On 21 June 2024, the Uganda chapter of the COMESA – East African Community Horticultural Accelerator (CEHA) launched in Kampala in an event that brought together representatives from the private sector, the government, and various partners, signaling a major advancement in the growth of the horticulture industry in the country and region.

Established in 2022, CEHA is a collaborative initiative created by public and private sector partners to better coordinate policy, value chain development programs, financing, and Research and Development (R&D) in the horticulture industry.

The primary aim of CEHA is to accelerate the growth of the Fruit and Vegetable (F&V) sub-sector across the COMESA and EAC regions, which includes Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda; Chapters launched this far are Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, while Ethiopia and Tanzania are lined up for launching.

Hortifresh, the Uganda CEHA Secretariat, serves as the apex association for exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables in Uganda. At the launch event, Mr. Fred Zake, Executive Director of Hortifresh, praised the initiative for uniting Uganda's private sector fresh fruit and vegetable exporters and producers under

a common goal. He emphasized the importance of collective effort in achieving the accelerator's objectives.

Paul Mwambu, Commissioner for Crop Inspection and Certification at the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) in Uganda, highlighted the broader economic impact of supporting the horticulture sector.

"Backing up horticulture will lead to economic transformation through an increase in food and nutrition," he stated, underscoring the sector's potential to drive substantial economic and social benefits.

Mr. Steven Byantware, MAAIF Director for Crop Resources, noted the commendable efforts of the Horticulture Accelerator in boosting the growth of Uganda's Fruit and Vegetable sub-sectors. He emphasized that such initiatives are critical for the sustainable development of the agricultural sector.

The CEHA Uganda Chapter's mission is to enhance coordination in policy formulation, value chain development programs, financing, and R&D within the horticulture industry. This initiative aims to expedite the growth of the F&V sub-sector, ultimately contributing to the economic prosperity

of the COMESA and EAC regions.

Dr. John Mukuka, Chief Executive Officer of COMESA-ACTESA, expressed optimism for the future of the horticultural industry in the region. "The COMESA Secretariat through ACTESA is looking forward to the transformation of the horticultural industry in our region, currently valued at USD 4 billion, to double or triple in the next 10 years. CEHA will provide many opportunities for the COMESA and EAC Regions, especially for landowners with access to less than one hectare of land," he remarked.

The launch event also included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACTESA and Hortifresh, cementing their commitment to collaborate and drive the horticulture sector forward. This partnership is expected to facilitate the development of innovative solutions and strategies to overcome challenges and harness opportunities within the horticulture industry.

Bilateral Meetings - COMESA & Madagascar Govt Officials

COMESA Assistant Secretary General Dr Dev Haman held a bilateral meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Madagascar H.E. Mrs Rasata Rafaravavitaika. The Minister expressed gratitude to the COMESA Secretariat for selecting Madagascar to host the first COMESA Week and to launch the celebration of COMESA's 30th Anniversary. She emphasized that the event sends a powerful message demonstrating that COMESA is a tangible, accessible market, not just a dream.

She reiterated the importance of COMESA's support for artisans and small entrepreneurs from Island countries like Madagascar, suggesting the initiation of pilot projects this year to provide tailored support for Malagasy artisans to access various markets. On his part, Dr Haman highlighted that the COMESA Secretariat and its institutions are already aiding artisans in market access. He mentioned the annual "Fashion Show" event organized by African Leather and Leather Products Institute, which assists entrepreneurs and artisans in finding regional and continental markets.

Meeting with the Minister of Trade and industrialization

Dr Haman held a bilateral meeting with Madagascar's Minister of Trade and Industrialization H.E. Mr. Edgar Razafindravahy who emphasized that industrialization is a key pillar for his country's development. He revealed that Madagascar has adopted various instruments aligned with international standards, including new laws and regulations. Over the past two years, Madagascar has established 75 small industrial units managed by young people and women. The Assistant Secretary General underscored the importance of cooperative societies, particularly in the production of fruits, vegetables, and other goods. He encouraged Madagascar to exchange and learn from the experiences of other COMESA countries, such as Zambia, which produces beer from cassava.

Meeting with National Assembly

Another bilateral meeting was held with the Acting President of the National Assembly HE Mr Jean Jacques Rabenirina. The two leaders discussed various issues including the fact that Madagascar is a founding member of COMESA and has continued to implement key programmes.

Dr Hamand emphasized that COMESA has developed numerous instruments, with the Assembly playing a crucial role in adopting and ratifying them. He expressed gratitude to the Acting President for the instruments already signed and ratified but encouraged Madagascar to adopt the remaining unsigned and unratified instruments.



From Left: Ms Jeromine Fanjanirina Madagascar Country Officer, Mr RABENIRINA Jean Jacques Acting President of National Assembly, COMESA Assistant Secretary General Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman, Mr Mamy RABENIRINA, Quaestor in charge of governance and transparency and Mr RANDRIAMAHAFANJARY Calvin, Secretary General



COMESA Assistant Secretary General Programmes, Amb. Dr Mohamed Kadah paid a courtesy call on Minister of Preparation, Housing, and the Commissioner for Management of the Ministry of Transport, Mrs. Sarah Al-Zafrani Al-Zanzari

High Turnout for the Inaugural COMESA Investment Forum in Tunisia

The COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA) working with the Government of Tunisia and funding from the European Union 11th Development Fund (EDF11) organised a successful first ever COMESA Investment Forum (CIF 2024) which had participation from national investment agencies from all 21 COMESA Member States.

More than 350 prominent figures, including ministers, decision-makers, businesspeople, investors, representatives from the Tunisian private sector were joined by officials from investment agencies and authorities from the 21 states. Several international and African organisations, including the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also attended.

The event was officially opened by Tunisia's Secretary of State for Small and Medium Enterprises at the Ministry of Economy and Planning, Samir Abdel Hafeez who expressed Tunisia's eagerness to host the forum as it contributed to the creation of a platform to be used for exchanging vital information and contacts for key actors in the business world.

He also expressed hope for Africa to play a larger role on the regional and global stage through such forums and contribute to solving global crises. "These aspirations are legitimate and achievable given the rich natural resources of the continent

through enhancing joint cooperation, whether government or with the private sector as we are doing here," Minister Hafeez said.

Speaking on behalf of COMESA Secretariat, Amb. Dr Mohamed Kadah thanked Tunisia for hoisting the CIF 2024 saying the event was part of the organisation's key goals of promoting regional integration among member States and enhancing investment in Africa and the COMESA region.

He noted that despite a 30% decrease in the number of projects since 2019, capital investment in Africa was more than 2.5 times higher in 2022 compared to 2019. The number of announced Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects in Africa increased from 517 in 2021 to 734 projects in 2022. FDI into the COMESA region jumped by about 52% in 2022 to USD23bn compared to 2020 and by 43% in 2021.

"COMESA aims to create a favourable and competitive business environment, increase international and local investment flows, enhance participation in global value chains and at the same time address current challenges including geopolitical tensions, rising commodity prices and debt pressures other others," Dr Kadah said.

Head of the Economic Section at the EU Office in Tunis, Marco Stella expressed pride in the partnership with COMESA through numerous

programmes funded by the EU. These include the first ever CIF 2024 and he affirmed the EU's continued support to enable the region access other markets, implement programmes to enhance competitiveness and build capacities to achieve set targets.

President of the Tunisian Union for Industry, Commerce and Handicraft (UTICA) Samir Majoul highlighted the significant interest in investment opportunities available in COMESA countries. He stressed that cooperation with COMESA countries can enhance economic growth and diversify Tunisia's exports.

He said Tunisia was keen for more partnerships with other COMESA countries, given the region's multiple competitive advantages, a conducive investment and economic partnership climate, its strategic location as a gateway between Europe and Africa. He cited other advantages as a competitive tax system, skilled labour and a multilingual workforce.



National Workshop on Gender Equality in Aviation Held in Lusaka

A three-day national awareness workshop focusing on gender equality and opportunities for women in the aviation sector was held in Lusaka, Zambia, from 3rd to 5th July 2024. Similar events are planned targeting Member States in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region with the primary aim of bolstering the regulatory and institutional capacities of civil aviation institutions and fostering an inclusive environment within the industry.

The workshop, jointly organized by the COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the Ministries of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Ministry of Transport and Logistics, Ministry of Education, and the Civil Aviation Authority, was funded by the European Union under the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme.

The event aims to generate interest among policymakers and industry leaders to encourage the active participation of women in aviation and to promote equal opportunities.

Speaking at the official opening ceremony, Civil Aviation Authority Director General Captain Derrick Luembe emphasized the importance of gender equity in aviation.

"Gender equity in aviation is not just about fairness," he stated, "but about leveraging the full potential of the workforce by promoting inclusivity and

ensuring sustainable growth and innovation in the industry."

Captain Luembe, represented by the Civil Aviation Public Relations Manager Sepiso Zimba, acknowledged the long-standing challenges faced by the aviation industry.

"For a longtime, the aviation industry has struggled with the under-representation of women in technical roles and leadership positions. Stereotypes and biases negatively affect the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in aviation careers," he stated adding that "A workplace culture where the industry is male-dominated, with unequal access to training opportunities, lack of mentorship, and the need to balance work, family, and career responsibilities, especially disadvantages women due to societal expectations around caregiving responsibilities."

At the same function, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA Secretariat, called for the transformation of the aviation sector from a masculine corporate culture to one that attracts, promotes and retains female talent.

"It is crucial to create relevant opportunities at the state, regional and international levels for more women to pursue careers in the aviation sector and advance their careers on an equal footing with their

male counterparts," she added.

Hamusonde highlighted the ICAO Assembly Resolution A41-26, which urges states, regional and international aviation organizations, and the international aviation industry to demonstrate strong, determined leadership and commitment to advancing women's rights.

"The resolution calls for the necessary measures to strengthen gender equality by supporting policies and establishing and improving programs and projects to further women's careers in the aviation industry," she noted.

The awareness workshop was also extended to Pupils at Saint Mary's and Saint Patricks Secondary Schools in Lusaka where they had a chance to ask questions related to various Professions in the Aviation sector.

Participants observed that the workshop was a pivotal step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable aviation sector, aiming to inspire significant changes and improvements in gender equality across the regions involved.



Reaching out to University Students

Two universities in Madagascar were beneficiaries of a stakeholder's outreach initiative conducted during the COMESA Week. They were the Catholic University and the University of Antananarivo. Close to 100 students, the majority of whom had not interacted with COMESA before attending the lectures by COMESA Staff and the COMESA Court of Justice. One of the key areas of interest was the COMESA Masters Degree programme on regional integration, which many admitted were not aware of.

