

More Member States Launch the COMESA eCO Programme

1



Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Ms Christine Zakeyo (7th from left), with various Stakeholders after the launch of the COMESA e-CO in Blantyre

Malawi and Zambia have launched the implementation of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (eCO) Programme meant to enhance trade efficiency by simplifying the process for exporters and reducing the time and costs associated with obtaining traditional certificates.

Since its introduction in 2000, the COMESA Certificate of Origin has been issued and processed manually, a method that has often introduced inefficiencies and administrative burdens.

Recognising these challenges, the 32nd meeting of the COMESA Council of Ministers urged Member States in 2014 to adopt and implement the eCO system.

Fast forward to 2024, the Kingdom of Eswatini became the first COMESA country to launch the implementation of the eCO in November. It was followed by Malawi and Zambia in December of the same year.

The launch in Malawi on 17 December was characterised by pomp and splendour as senior government officials described the event as a game changer for trade in the country.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Christine Zakeyo, underscored the importance of the

eCO in promoting trade within Malawi and beyond.

Ms Zakeyo stated that the launch aligned seamlessly with the Malawi 2063 Vision, particularly the pillar on industrialization and economic transformation, adding that a modernized trade facilitation process is integral to achieving sustainable economic growth.

"By simplifying trade, we empower our private sector, attract investment, and create jobs for our people. Moreover, the adoption of the e-CO system reflects our dedication to leveraging technology as a driver of economic progress," she added.

She hinted that as Malawi embraces the digital economy, the Government is creating an environment that fosters innovation and competitiveness, which are critical for the Country's industrialization journey.

Zambia launched the implementation of the eCO on 31st December 2024 and described the system as a significant step towards deepening efficiency in the country's trade facilitation agenda. Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Lillian Bwalya reaffirmed government's support towards the initiative and implementation of instruments of trade facilitations such as the eCO, stating that this will help with the advancement of Zambia's development goals. She

added that so far about 500 stakeholders have been trained in using the system and more are expected to join this group.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe commended both countries for advancing regional integration using digital platforms. She pointed out that the introduction of the eCO is a transformative step towards addressing challenges, showcasing the collective commitment to leveraging technology for economic growth and improved trade facilitation.

"As we celebrate 30 years of COMESA's impact, this moment provides an opportunity to reflect on our regional integration journey – highlighting achievements, addressing challenges and charting a path forward for deeper economic cooperation, sustainable growth and development across our region," said Ms. Kapwepwe who was represented at both events by Ms Balness Sumani Senior Customs Affairs Officer.

The Secretary General commended the European Union for their support through the 11th European Development Fund Trade Facilitation programme. Through this programme, the COMESA Secretariat has extended comprehensive support to Member States in the implementation of the electronic Certificate of Origin System. More Member States are expected to launch the eCO this year.



Left: IFDC president Dr Hendrik Jan Warner Van Duijn and ACTESA CEO Dr John Mukuka shake hands after the signing of the MoU

ACTESA, IFDC sign MoU to bolster Agricultural production

The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) and the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at enhancing agriculture productivity and sustainability across the continent.

This collaboration marks a pivotal step in strengthening agriculture research, policies, and regulations to ensure small farmer-holder access to quality and affordable fertilizer.

The MoU, officially signed at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia on January 21st, 2025, also included high-level discussions on strengthening regional partnerships to ensure coordinated efforts, sustainability, and inclusive economic development for the COMESA Member States.

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr John Mukuka, remarked on the relevance of ensuring smallholder farmers access to quality, accessible, and affordable fertilizer in the region.

Dr Mukuka highlighted that the partnership with IFDC is crucial to coordinating and accelerating the implementation of the COMESA Fertilizer Regional Programme (COMFREP). COMFREP aims to improve smallholder farmer's timely access to quality, and affordable fertilizers for the 21 COMESA Member States.

COMESA Director for Industry and Agriculture, Ms. Providence Mavubi, reiterated COMESA's commitment to advancing smart agriculture initiatives aimed at improving the livelihood of farmers and ensuring food security in the region.

"We continue to ensure that the agriculture sector in the COMESA region is competitive through supporting agriculture extension services, investments in research, and supporting policy formulation and implementation for increased trade in agricultural produce". She remarked.

IFDC president, Dr Hendrik Jan Warner Van Duijn underscored the importance of private sector engagement and partnerships in fostering agriculture productivity as a key economic driver.

"Agriculture restructuring and policy reforms are crucial in creating opportunities for smallholder farmers to produce most efficiently. Member states can leverage their respective agriculture initiatives and innovations to boost soil health and agriculture sustainability across the continent.

Together, COMESA through ACTESA and IFDC are committed to enhancing intra-regional agriculture trade by supporting small-holder farmers.

New Continental Pastoral Markets Development Platform Launched

COMESA has reaffirmed its support to the growth of pastoral markets by being part of the newly launched African Pastoral Markets Development (APMD) Platform. Launched by the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) on 17 January 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya, the Platform aims to enhance the livelihoods of pastoral communities particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel regions by addressing systemic challenges in livestock trade.

This will be done through innovative business models, robust policy frameworks and enhanced knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

Speaking on behalf COMESA Secretariat, Senior Fisheries and Livestock Officer Dr Yoseph Mamo emphasized the need to improve livestock and veterinary services across COMESA Member States stating that the future of pastoral livelihoods hinges on the region's ability to strengthen veterinary services, enhance disease control and create robust market linkages.

He commended the APMD Platform and added that it will help tackle long-standing barriers that have hindered the growth of pastoral markets, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance and fragmented policy frameworks.

"By fostering innovation and regional cooperation, the platform seeks to enable pastoral communities to better access markets, enhance productivity and withstand climatic shocks that threaten their livelihoods,"

During the launch and workshop, discussions centered on innovative approaches to transforming pastoral value chains such as mobile technology for market information, improved animal health services and capacity-building initiatives for pastoralists and traders.

Dr Mamo's call to action resonated throughout the workshop as he urged stakeholders to collaborate and deliver tangible benefits to communities that depend on livestock for their survival. The launch of the APMD Platform marks the beginning of a transformative journey for Africa's pastoral market ecosystems.



More Member States Aim to Strengthen Structural Resilience



The Government of Malawi has made a great leap to strengthening structural resilience by launching the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA).

The launch by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malawi Hon. Nancy Tembo took place on 17 December 2024 at the Bingu International

Convention Centre in Lilongwe. Malawi becomes the fourth country on the continent to undertake the process after Ghana, Ivory Coast and Zambia.

Hon. Tembo expressed the Government's appreciation to COMESA, the African Union (AU) and other partners for supporting Malawi to undertake the process.

Malawi volunteered to the CSVRA process in 2023. The CSVRA is a voluntary self-assessment process developed by the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The process is meant to identify country specific structural vulnerabilities, strengthen existing resilience and develop mitigation strategies to address vulnerabilities. Regional consultations were concluded on 14th December 2024 covering the whole country and were supported by COMESA, AU, APRM, SADC, ACCORD and UNHCR.

The next steps will be for Malawi to consolidate the findings, conduct analysis and develop a CSVRA/ Country Structural Vulnerability and Mitigation Strategy reports.

"COMESA, AU and partners will continue to support Malawi throughout the entire process," said Dr Oita Etyang, Head Governance, Peace and Security at COMESA Secretariat.

COMESA and World Bank Host Webinar for Program to Promote Clean Energy Access in Africa

On January 14, 2025, COMESA and the World Bank co-hosted a webinar to discuss the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Ascent-Green Program. The ASCENT-GREEN initiative is designed to implement "predictable result-based financing and grants," specifically targeting Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) and clean cooking companies to align financial support with regional aspirations.

The program aims to increase equity investments, thereby promoting the growth of DRE companies and enabling them to expand their operations throughout the region. Moreover, it will provide affordable local currency financing, addressing the challenges posed by foreign exchange risks to streamline the financial management of DRE companies' costs and revenues.

The webinar convened a range of notable participants, including Mr. Erik Fernstrom from the World Bank, senior government officials from ASCENT countries, and stakeholders from ASCENT-eligible partner states.



Clean cooking using Liquefied petroleum gas

During his opening remarks, Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, Dr. Bernard Dzawanda, emphasized the necessity of strategic interventions to confront the energy access challenges facing Africa.

"I commend the World Bank for its tireless efforts to enhance the energy landscape in Eastern and Southern Africa," he remarked, underscoring the importance of these interventions in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7, which aims for universal energy access by 2030.

Highlighting the ASCENT Program, a significant \$5 billion initiative, Dr. Dzawanda expressed his appreciation for the ongoing resource mobilization by the World Bank to support ASCENT goals.

He stated that access to reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy is fundamental not only for economic growth but also for poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

"Over 700 million people globally, predominantly in Africa, continue to lack electricity," Dr. Dzawanda noted, adding that "bridging this gap requires significant financial resources, and climate finance can play a crucial role in addressing this challenge."

He identified several barriers impeding investments in renewable energy, including high-risk perceptions, elevated borrowing costs, and low consumer affordability. In response, he outlined the key interventions of the ASCENT-GREEN initiative aimed at overcoming these obstacles.

Dr. Dzawanda further urged ASCENT countries to actively support the initiative, asserting that its implementation would bolster country-led efforts to enhance clean energy access and facilitate a transition towards sustainable energy systems.

The ASCENT-GREEN initiative signifies a commitment to scaling up climate finance and represents a hopeful stride towards a future where clean, reliable energy is accessible to all.

COMESA and OIF Promote French Language Skills



Left: Mr Olivier Durand Director at AF Lusaka, Ms. Mouna Ismael Abdou, Coordinator of the French Language at the OIF, Ms Jeromine Fanjanirina Resource Mobilisation Officer, Ms Roberthine Raharisoa French Secretary both from COMESA Secretariat, Mr Pascal French Tutor and Ms Monique Orsini from AF Lusaka

In a significant move to enhance regional cooperation, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) signed a partnership agreement in 2024 aimed at strengthening French language skills among twelve COMESA officers.

This partnership agreement aligns with the OIF's

strategic vision to bolster French language skills and promote multilingualism within international and regional organisations, thereby fostering better communication and more effective cooperation. The comprehensive training program, co-financed by OIF and COMESA, has been designed by the Alliance Française of Lusaka and will be implemented in collaboration with both organisations. This initiative forms part of a broader

joint effort by COMESA and OIF to promote multilingualism within international and regional contexts, with a particular focus on strengthening the use of French as a global language of communication.

During her visit to the COMESA headquarters and the Alliance Française of Lusaka from 15 – 17 January 2025, Ms. Mouna Ismael Abdou, Coordinator of the French Language, and International Language Project at the OIF, had the opportunity to observe the progress of the training program. She participated in a session, gaining valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and impact on the participating officers.

Through this collaboration, both organisations aim to harness the benefits of multilingualism, including increased regional integration, improved communication, and enhanced cooperation among member states.

As the training program progresses, it is expected to yield positive outcomes, not only for the participating COMESA officers but also for the entire region.



A group Photo of the VIPs

Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Through its flagship Regional Food Balance Sheet initiative, COMESA also registered its determination to scaling up the initiative that provides real-time data on food availability and support trade and food security decisions.

On the sidelines of the Summit, COMESA participated as panellists in two key events hosted by Pan-African Farmers' Organization and AUDA NEPAD on putting farmers at the centre of implementing the CAADP Kampala Declaration and addressing food safety and healthy diets through a food systems approach respectively. During these side events, COMESA provided insights on key interventions in place to support meaningfully participation of farmers in value chains and outlined several approaches being undertaken to enhance food safety at regional level that include Global Markets Programme and the COMESA Green Pass initiative.

In his closing remarks of the meeting, H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni reiterated the need for stronger collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the Kampala CAADP Declaration and CAADP Ten-Year Strategy represent a critical step toward realizing Africa's agricultural potential.

COMESA Commits to Kampala CAADP Framework

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has reaffirmed its commitment towards implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (Kampala CAADP) Framework which was recently adopted during the African Union Extraordinary Summit held on 9 – 11 January 2025 on the Post-Malabo CAADP Summit.

In a statement delivered by the Director of Industry and Agriculture, Ms. Providence Mavubi, the 21-member regional trade bloc outlined its priority areas that included aligning of agricultural policies

to the CAADP framework across the Member States and developing competitive regional value chains.

Other key areas highlighted included promoting climate-smart agriculture and enhancing market access for smallholder farmers. Director Mavubi used the occasion to underscore the importance of Agro Industrial Parks in enhancing value addition and agro processing to achieve the targets outlined in the framework and emphasised COMESA's commitment towards implementation of the cross-border Common Agro-Industrial Park between



Seated Centre: Director of industry and agriculture, Ms Providence Mavubi with a team from Coca-Cola Africa joined by staff from the COMESA Business Council during the courtesy call.

Coca-Cola Beverages Africa Engages with COMESA Secretariat to Foster Economic Growth

Coca-Cola Beverages Africa paid a courtesy visit to the COMESA Secretariat to discuss strategies for strengthening partnerships aimed at driving economic growth and enhancing investments in regional value chains. The meeting which took place on 21st January 2025 underscored Coca-Cola's commitment to sustainable local initiatives and job creation across the region.

During the visit, the Coca-Cola team presented a range of their ongoing investment projects, highlighting their efforts in promoting local employment and sustainability. The discussions revolved around unlocking the full potential of Africa and the COMESA region, with a focus on exploring opportunities to expand value chains and promote regional growth.

Ms. Karyn Harrington, Vice President of Public Affairs, Communications, and Sustainability, expressed the company's dedication to contributing to the region's economic landscape. "We believe that our investments not only help create jobs but also empower local communities," she stated.

COMESA's Director of Industry and Agriculture,

Ms. Providence Mavumbi, emphasized the significance of fostering high-level partnerships that deliver direct benefits to local communities. Ms. Mavumbi also encouraged Coca-Cola to leverage ongoing initiatives such as the Local Sourcing for Partnerships and many others, urging the company to prioritize local producers for sourcing raw materials.

"Empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is vital for sustainable development," she remarked, underscoring the need for collaborative efforts with industry leaders like Coca-Cola.

Ms Mavubi noted that by sourcing locally, Coca-Cola can help strengthen regional supply chains and enhance economic resilience for the region at large and Member States in particular.

The Coca-Cola delegation included Ms. Karyn Harrington, Vice President of Public Affairs, Communications, and Sustainability, Mr. Shiletsi Makhofane, Senior Director, Public Policy as well as Mr. Ian Hirschfeld, Senior Director, Economic Policy. Others are, Mr. Eugene Ngumi, Director, Public Affairs, Sustainability for East and Central Africa and Mr. Simon Kaheru, Director, Public Affairs, Communications, and Sustainability for East Africa and Mr Panji Banda the Marketing Manager at Coca Cola Zambia.

Further meetings were agreed upon to foster building of robust partnerships that benefit local communities in the COMESA Member States which will further stimulate investment in value chains.

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