

COMESA NEWS

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Spotlight on CONSUMER RIGHTS in Air Transport

In this edition

- Reviewing Current Trade Remedies to Deepen Intra-Regional Trade
- COMESA, EU Launch New €40 Million Regional Circular Economy Programme
- Time to Reform the Simplified Trade Regime
- COMESA Finalises Revision of SPS Regulations, Strategy and Implementation Plans

Editorial



Revised Agreement Heralds a new era of Regional Investments

The recent endorsement of the Revised Regional Investment Agreement by our Member States marks a significant milestone for the region, heralding a new era of opportunities for investment. The establishment of a harmonised Common Investment Area has long been a goal, aiming to bolster investment within the COMESA bloc and foster economic growth.

The backbone of this initiative—the COMESA Common Investment Agreement (CCIA)—has undergone years of meticulous development and scrutiny. With the invaluable support of UNCTAD experts, this pivotal document has been refined and tailored to create a supportive investment landscape across our region. Stakeholders recognize its crucial role in enhancing competitiveness and unlocking the vast potential for investment that lies dormant within our borders.

As we look to the future, the opportunities within the COMESA region and across Africa present a compelling case for optimism. The CCIA is more than just a framework; it is an essential tool for tapping into the region's comparative advantages and fully harnessing its resources. The revised Agreement brings with it the promise of sustainable development, encouraging investments that not only generate economic returns but also contribute to societal well-being.

It is heartening to witness the strong ownership of the Revised CCIA by our 21 Member States, which is crucial as we move towards the effective implementation of the Agreement. The path ahead is bright, and we eagerly anticipate the full realisation of the Revised CCIA, which holds the potential to transform our region into a wellspring of investment and innovation.

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COMESA INSTITUTIONS

COMESA Clearing House
COMESA Monetary Institute
Trade and Development Bank
African Trade & Investment Development Insurance
COMESA Competition Commission
PTA Reinsurance Company
COMESA Regional Investment Agency
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Specialized Agencies

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

Judicial Arm

COMESA Court of Justice

CONTENTS

- 3 Reviewing current Trade Remedies to Deepen Intra-Regional Trade
- 6 Member States Endorse Revised Regional Investment Agreement
- 11 High Turnout for the Inaugural COMESA Investment Forum in Tunisia
- 14 COMESA and China Strengthen Ties
- 16 Empowering Madagascar on the Use of Gender Statistics
- 18 Empowering Central Bank Staff with Macro-Prudential Policy Framework Skills
- 22 Ethiopia's Horticulture Sector Poised for Growth with CEHA
- 23 COMESA Hosts Regional Conference on Youth and Climate Security
- 25 Countdown to the 23rd COMESA Summit
- 27 Aviation Experts Convene in Juba for SAATM Awareness Workshop
- 28 COMESA, IOM Dialogue on Free Movement Protocol
- 29 ICT Experts Validate Business Models and Training Modules for regional Associations
- 30 COMESA Drives Rapid Implementation of Seed Trade Harmonisation in Ethiopia and Eswatini
- 40 COMESA Launches Horticulture Trade Mission to the European Union

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Delayed

Spotlight on Consumer Rights in Air Transport

Consumers of aviation services in Africa often lack protection from poor service delivery and are largely unaware of their rights. Even when informed, they frequently encounter institutional challenges such as weak enforcement and limited access to relevant information.

Recognizing the importance of air transport consumers in effective aviation regulation, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) emphasize the need for their involvement. To achieve this, there is a pressing need to establish a framework that operationalizes consumer protection units across Member States, RECs, and at the continental level, benefiting air transport consumers.

In light of this, COMESA and the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), through the European Union funded, Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme, organized capacity-building workshops for regional states.

The first workshop, held in Kampala, Uganda from August 26–30, 2024, focused on reviewing national laws, regulations, and policies related to air transport consumer protection. It targeted Consumer Protection Officers from countries in Eastern and Northern Africa, which are member states of the East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and COMESA.

The workshop aimed to enhance understanding of air passenger rights, specifically under Article 9.6 of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) on Consumer Protection Regulations. The YD seeks to liberalize Africa's air transport market.

Eng. Nicholas Ndema, Aviation Expert at COMESA, addressed the delegates, highlighting the fact that many African states continue to protect their national carriers. This approach has stunted the growth of the continent's air transport industry, even as new entrants, like low-cost carriers, seek to foster competition.

"This has ushered in competition in the air transport industry hence the need to ensure our regulations protect air passengers from "false" advertising, tarmac delays, baggage pilfering, and baggage loss," Ndema said. "There is a need to give them access to information necessary to facilitate compensation when required."

Ndema emphasized the need for harmonized consumer protection regulations across Africa, or a specialized set of rules focused on air transport consumer rights.

Mr. Fred Bamwesigye, Director General of the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority, stressed the importance of balancing consumer protection with the sustainability of the air transport industry.

"Building consumer confidence in the aviation sector requires protecting their rights while ensuring the industry's continued growth," he said.

He added: "This workshop should therefore identify specific consumer issues that need prioritization, identify capacity gaps, share global best practices in consumer protection. Above all identify ways and means of implementing or "harmonizing" consumer protection policies, laws and regulations."

Mr. Paul Christan Rwegasha, Principal Civil Aviation Officer at the East African Community, urged government authorities to create consumer protection laws that balance the interests of consumers with industry competitiveness. These laws must consider the diverse social, political, and economic contexts of African states while maintaining aviation safety and security.

Dr. Zacharia Kingori, IGAD's Infrastructure Coordinator, outlined the benefits of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) for consumers.

"Liberalization increases competition, leading to better services, lower prices, and more choices," he noted. "However, it also requires robust protection of consumer rights related to flight cancellations, delays, and lost baggage."



Heads of RECs and other Regional Economic Mechanisms during the 6th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities in Accra, Ghana

Tripartite Free Trade Area Officially Starts

July 25, 2024, marked a significant milestone in the journey towards economic integration in Africa as the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) Agreement officially came into force. This landmark agreement is set to reshape the trade landscape across Eastern and Southern Africa.

The TFTA Agreement aims to create a vast unified market by integrating the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This ambitious project, initiated to liberalize tariffs fully and eliminate non-tariff barriers, will foster regional trade and economic cooperation among Member States.

The Agreement officially entered into force following the ratification by 14 out of the 29 Member States. Malawi, Lesotho, and Angola were the latest countries to join, meeting the required threshold for the agreement to come into effect. Other nations that had ratified the agreement included Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, and Zambia.

The TFTA aims to fully liberalize tariff lines, providing a significant boost to intra-African trade. It also addresses the complexities associated with membership in multiple regional economic communities by presenting best practices in transport and

trade facilitation instruments and value chain development at regional levels.

These measures are crucial in enhancing trade efficiency and reducing costs for businesses operating across borders within the region.

The TFTA, signed in 2015, represents a monumental step towards economic unity in Africa. It comprises 29 countries, representing over 60% of the continent's GDP and a combined population of 800 million. The agreement's ambitious tariff liberalization schedule aims to fully liberalize tariffs, except for specific security exemptions, within five to eight years.

The Tripartite FTA offers significant opportunities for business and investment within the Tripartite and will act as a magnet for attracting foreign direct investment into the Tripartite region. The business community, in particular, will benefit from an improved and harmonized trade regime which reduces the cost of doing business as a result of elimination of overlapping trade regimes due to multiple memberships.

As the TFTA takes off, it promises to unlock new economic opportunities, drive growth, and strengthen regional cooperation. However, realizing its full potential will require addressing the existing challenges and ensuring robust implementation of its pillars.

The announcement of this milestone was made during the 6th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities held in Accra, Ghana on 21 July 2024. COMESA was represented by Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

The Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) is built on three core pillars: market integration, infrastructure development, and industrial development. COMESA spearheads market integration, while the EAC focuses on infrastructure development, and SADC takes the lead in industrial development.

Despite the progress, several technical and institutional challenges remain. A critical issue is the absence of a dedicated secretariat to coordinate and implement TFTA activities. Currently, coordination is handled on a rotational basis among the three RECs, but there is a pressing need for a regional headquarters to streamline operations.

Financial constraints also pose a significant challenge. While the market integration pillar is supported by the African Development Bank, negotiations on the infrastructure and industrial development pillars have been slower due to inadequate financing. These pillars are essential for fostering sustainable trade and development, and their delay could impact the overall effectiveness of the TFTA.



Reviewing Current Trade Remedies to Deepen Intra-Regional Trade

The COMESA Committee on Trade Remedies is reviewing the 2002 Regulations on Trade Remedy Measures which have been in existence for more than 20 years. Trade experts believe that once amended, these remedies can help significantly boost intra-regional trade which has remained at less than 10% on average over the last few years.

The need to align them with new trends in trade development is in line with the decision of the 44th COMESA Council of Ministers Meeting in 2023 that called for the operationalisation of the Committee on Trade Remedies to oversee the application of the Regulations on Trade Remedy Measures.

The main objective of the review is to investigate whether trade remedies are well applied to prevent injury across all sectors of the economy in the COMESA

Member States that may be caused by unfair trading practices and unforeseen surges in imports.

The Committee is also expected to report annually and make recommendations to the COMESA Trade and Customs Committee.

To activate this process, the second Meeting of the Trade Remedies Committee was held virtually on 4 and 5 September 2024 and officially opened by the COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Dr Mohamed Kadah, who urged the region to guard against inappropriate application of the remedies that may result in Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs).

He pledged COMESA Secretariat's commitment to provide capacity building to Member States. The aim is to ensure

none of the remedy measures are applied in a manner to protect Member State domestic markets, thus disregarding their commitment in the implementation of the COMESA Free Trade Area.

"The amendment of the Regulations should ensure relevance to the current trade related daily challenges faced by COMESA including the never ending NTBs that prevent the increase in intra-COMESA trade," said Dr Kadah.

Latest COMESA statistics show that despite much progress realised in the implementation of the COMESA FTA, intra trade has remained low in the last few years, while exports to the European Union, the major export destination, increased by 24% from US\$72bn in 2021 to US\$90bn in 2022.

China has remained COMESA's second largest export destination with a 22% increase recorded US\$20bn in 2021 to US\$24bn in 2022.

The delegates were encouraged to reflect on key points such as why the region trades more with external markets and not within. What is the role of trade remedies in restrictions to trade? To what extent have the trade remedy measures translated into NTBs thereby prohibiting intra-regional trade and what should be the right regulation on trade remedies that respond to the current situation of the COMESA region and contribute to an increase of intra-COMESA trade.

The meeting agreed on the need for a proper revision of the regulations to ensure important aspects of trade are taken into consideration to ensure free movement of goods and services is achieved with fair trade practice across the region.

The meeting also received a report on the Kenya Sugar Safeguard which has been in existence for more than 20 years and ends in 2025.

Continued to page PB

COMESA, EU Launch New €40 Million Regional Circular Economy Programme



Ambassador Karolina Stasiak (L) exchange signed financing agreement with COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe.

The European Union (EU) and COMESA launched a new regional Circular Economy Programme, on 16 August 2024 following the signing of a €40 million financing agreement for the “SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa (SWITCH-2-CE in ESA)” initiative.

The agreement was signed by the Head of the European Union Delegation to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, Ambassador Karolina Stasiak, and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe on the margins of a strategic dialogue conducted at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

The initiative focuses on the inclusive transition from a linear to a circular economy, while promoting sustainable business models, impact investments and creating jobs for the future.

SWITCH-2-CE in ESA will contribute to reverse environmental degradation and recover natural capital, improve resource efficiency and reduce waste and pollution. More specifically, the programme will target the Packaging & Plastic Waste, as well as the Electronics & E-Waste value chains development within the COMESA region.

As such, it establishes a close link to the sustainable sourcing of critical raw

materials in East and Southern Africa.

At the dialogue, attended by Ambassadors and representatives of EU Member States, discussions focused on aligning key priorities, and exchanges on institutional developments, as well as on the ongoing and new cooperation and partnership projects.

The EU confirmed that its political priorities for 2025-2029 will continue to champion partnerships promoting sustainability, green, circular and digital transformation, as reflected in the Global Gateway Strategy, the European Green Deal, the Digital Strategy, and the Africa-EU Partnership, which frames our relation as the closest neighbours.

In view of geopolitical uncertainties, but also of geopolitical challenges and opportunities, the EU will further invest in economic resilience with its closest strategic partners.

Ambassador Stasiak emphasized, “Our joint regional programmes have been instrumental in addressing key issues, such as trade facilitation along key transport corridors, the development of regional value chains, facilitating market access, infrastructure development, and capacity building. These regional initiatives have not only strengthened our partnership but have also

contributed to upgrading the lives and increase prosperity in our regions.”

The Ambassador also congratulated COMESA on the recent entry into force of the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) with SADC and EAC – an important milestone towards the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Ms Kapwepwe underlined COMESA's commitment to working closely with the EU to deepen this partnership and ensure its continued success.

“This Strategic Dialogue provides an opportunity to review the progress and effectiveness of ongoing EU programmes within the COMESA region, explore potential areas for future cooperation and new programme development, align our strategic goals and ensure that upcoming initiatives are well-coordinated and mutually beneficial.”

EU and COMESA have a long-standing cooperation and partnership, built on a shared vision of regional integration and connectivity, dismantling barriers to regional trade, to increase policy coherence, and to stimulate sustainable economic growth and development.



Participants attending the Policy Dialogue on the Simplified Trade Regime

Time to Reform the Simplified Trade Regime

On August 6–7, 2024, representatives from nine countries in eastern and southern Africa convened in Machakos, Kenya, for a critical Policy Dialogue on the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR).

The gathering aimed to tackle the policy and technical challenges that have emerged in the STR's implementation and to propose actionable reforms. Countries represented were Burundi, D.R. Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The STR was designed by COMESA in 2010 to assist small-scale cross border traders, to access the privileges of the COMESA Free Trade Area and to reduce the time spent at borders through simplification of border procedures.

Its implementation is premised on four key tools that include the Simplified Certificate of Origin, the Simplified Customs Document, the Common List and the Threshold value of consignment set at US\$2000.

At the Dialogue, Dr Christopher Onyango, Director of Trade and Customs, COMESA stressed the need to continuously explore ways of improving its functioning, given the vital role played by Small-Scale Cross Border Traders in facilitating movement of goods and services across

borders.

“For instance, trade under the STR is only for products that are on the agreed Common Lists. However, the Common Lists exclude some products that have originating status,” he observed.

This, he added, places small scale traders at a disadvantage as they would not obtain preferences for those products which are not on the Common List even though the products have originating status.

Stressing the same point, Mr Micheal Mandu, acting Secretary of Trade, in the Ministry of Trade and Investment, Kenya, urged governments of STR implementing countries to embrace the reforms for the STR to work effectively.

“From time to time, it may become necessary to adjust the way the STR is implemented, with the aim of making the STR more user friendly and to meet the expectations of the small-scale cross border traders,” he said.

He noted that the STR Common List of eligible products, which is negotiated and agreed between two contiguous countries require updating, given the dynamics of trade and consumer tastes as well new products that may be produced in the COMESA countries.

Further, he said there is need for uniformity in the application and processing of the STR transactions and learning from best practices in East African Community and Southern African Development Community in the context of the Tripartite.

Small-scale cross-border trade, estimated to account for 40% of total trade, is predominantly conducted by women and youth. The products they trade are primarily essential food items. Through this trade, small-scale traders help balance supply and demand by moving goods from areas of abundance to those of scarcity, thereby stabilizing prices across countries.

Since 2018, the subsector has experienced a significant boost through the European Union-funded Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI). This initiative includes the deployment and training of Trade Information Desk Officers at selected borders, completion of several studies and collection of informal cross border gender sensitive trade data.

As the SSCBTI comes to an end this year 2024, Dr Onyango called upon Member States and other beneficiaries to own and carry on with the activities to support small scale cross border trade.



Delegates at the CCIA Workshop in Cairo, Egypt

Member States Endorse Revised Regional Investment Agreement

Member countries of COMESA have endorsed the revised Common Investment Agreement (CCIA). The CCIA is a COMESA investment tool aimed at creating a harmonized and conducive investment environment across the region.

The revised agreement is intended to promote a competitive investment climate, enhance cooperation among member states, and address barriers that may hinder progress. It was presented to member states for endorsement during a validation workshop held in Cairo on from September 30 to 01 October 2024.

The workshop, organized by COMESA Secretariat, in collaboration with the COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA), brought together representatives from 19 Member States, including Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The primary objectives of the workshop were to present the draft of the revised CCIA, which had been reviewed and refined by UNCTAD experts, and to encourage member states to take ownership of the agreement. Additionally,

the workshop outlined the next steps for assisting member states in the domestication and implementation of the CCIA.

Egyptian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration Ambassador Aboubarkr Mahmoud described the CCIA as a robust framework that not only amplifies investment procedures but also enhances transparency and fosters an environment of mutual trust among Member States. He added that the CCIA is a tool that empowers the region to attract foreign direct investment while also nurturing local enterprises, thus allowing the creation of joint ventures.

“Egypt, as a proud member of COMESA, is committed to advancing the objectives of the CCIA. We believe that a harmonized approach to investment will yield greater benefits for our peoples,” he said.

Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General, highlighted the wide range of opportunities available within the COMESA region and across the continent.

“The region holds 60% of the world’s uncultivated arable land and is rich in valuable mineral resources—comprising 16% of global uranium, 18% of gold,

26% of bauxite, 53% of diamonds, 53% of cobalt, 75% of platinum, and approximately one-third of all other mineral resources,” Kadah said. “With a median age of 19.5 and 60% of the population under 25, the region has a significant comparative advantage, and the CCIA is essential for unlocking these resources.”

Dr. Dahlia El Hawary, Vice President of the General Authority for Investment, said COMESA provides a platform for regional integration and is a cornerstone of Egypt’s strategy to promote inclusive growth and strengthen regional cohesion. At the same event, the COMESA Community of Practice (CoP) Online Platform was launched and is now hosted on the COMESA website. This platform is designed to facilitate the sharing of best practices to improve the business and investment environment, with a focus on value chain development.

The interactive resource will provide Member States, the private sector, and other stakeholders involved in private sector reforms with up-to-date information and tools to enhance the business and investment climate. It is anticipated that a significant number of investment stakeholders will be drawn to join and actively engage with the platform.



Delegates at the 17th Meeting of the technical working group on Rules of Origin at Protea Safari Hotel in Chisamba, Zambia

Aligning Rules of Origin for Enhanced Intra-Regional Trade

In a step towards refining trade practices in the region and boost intra-regional trade, COMESA trade and customs experts are seized on updating the COMESA Rules of Origin, which have been in place since the establishment of the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) in 2000.

This initiative aims to harmonize these rules with those governing the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and to align them with global best practices in accordance with the guiding provisions of the COMESA Treaty.

On September 26 to 27, 2024, a meeting of the technical working group on Rules of Origin from the COMESA Member States was convened Chisamba, Zambia for this purpose. Discussions centred on the proposed amendments to the Protocol and Procedures Manual on Rules of Origin made by the Trade and Customs experts at a validation workshop held at the same venue on 23 – 25 September 2024.

The proposed amendments are designed to enhance regional trade, facilitate inter-regional trade, and encourage both regional and cross-regional value addition

and investment. In this review, COMESA is working closely with the World Customs Organization (WCO) under the European Union-World Customs Organization (EU-WCO) Rules of Origin Africa programme.

The meeting provided updates on the implementation of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (eCO), which is set to be launched during the upcoming 45th meeting of the Council of Ministers in November 2024. The eCO aims to streamline intra-regional trade by replacing the cumbersome manual procedures currently in use for issuing and verifying Certificates of Origin.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes, Dr. Mohamed Kadah, highlighted the significance of the COMESA FTA, describing it as a central pillar of the region's efforts to establish a single market for goods and services. He noted the expansion of intra-COMESA exports and imports, which reached US\$ 14.071 billion (7.5% of global exports) and US\$ 13.693 billion (5.2% of global imports) respectively in 2023.

"Despite these achievements, he pointed out that studies indicate the region has the potential to achieve US\$ 100 billion

in intra-COMESA trade, an aspiration that hinges on the effective implementation of Rules of Origin," he said. "Besides, the Rules of Origin are an important vehicle to support investment, production, and value addition in the COMESA region."

He cautioned, however, that these rules could sometimes lead to unintended outcomes if they fail to reflect the realities of a region that must balance consumer and industrial interests.

While the existing COMESA Rules of Origin have effectively supported regional integration since their inception, Ambassador Dr. Kadah noted that recent developments at both continental and regional levels, along with technological and legal changes, necessitate a thorough revision of these rules.

He added that the ongoing discussions and the proposed amendments reflect a commitment to foster a more integrated and responsive trade environment within the COMESA region. The review of COMESA Rules of Origin is timely given that the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement for three regional economic communities entered into force on 25 July 2024. COMESA is a key player in the operationalization of this agreement.



Fresh Initiatives to Tackle ICT Access and E-Waste Management

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experts and stakeholders from Eastern and Southern Africa gathered in Matsapha, Eswatini, from September 24 to 26, 2024, to validate a comprehensive study on authorization, universal access, and e-waste management.

The study was conducted under the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT Sector (EGEE-ICT) Programme, a European Union funded programme for Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region.

The study examined current ICT policies, regulatory practices, and principles regarding market authorization, universal access, and e-waste management. The initiative aimed to enhance access to quality and affordable ICT services. This improvement heavily depends on the structure and behavior of the ICT market—specifically, identifying the key players and defining their roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, as environmental sustainability becomes a growing priority in development projects, contemporary ICT frameworks are increasingly incorporating e-waste management to address the sector's ecological impact. With these goals in mind, the EGEE-ICT Programme conducted the study to pave the way for the development of relevant policy and regulatory frameworks, which are essential tools for creating a robust ICT market.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Phesheya Dube, Principal Secretary of Eswatini's Ministry of ICT, emphasized that accessibility and affordability of ICT services are key to leveraging digital solutions for e-services, particularly in remote and disadvantaged areas.

"In rural areas, where isolation and poor infrastructure services are common, access to telecommunications can play an important role in enhancing social and economic development," he stated. He noted that the issue of e-waste management is a growing concern in Africa, with the continent generating 2.9

million metric tons of electronic waste in 2022, equating to about 2.5 kilograms per capita, the lowest regional rate globally. "We need to act and have candid discussions on e-waste management," said Dude. "I am glad that the study handles aspects of E-waste. As we give authorisation and licenses for ICT services, we need to ensure that aspects of E-waste management are considered."

COMESA Director of Infrastructure, Dr. Benard Dzawanda, called for continuous stakeholders' engagement, especially during the subsequent development of policies and regulations for authorization, universal access, and e-waste management.

Once the policy and regulatory frameworks are developed and adopted, they will be domesticated into national and regional frameworks. This will be followed by implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure long-term success.



Advancing the Agriculture Biotechnology and Biosafety Practices

The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa, a specialized Agency of COMESA and ISAAA AfriCenter organized a pivotal meeting focusing on advancing biotechnology and biosafety across the region. The gathering, held on September 18 and 19 in Lusaka, Zambia brought together key stakeholders with the goal of enhancing understanding of biotechnology and biosafety among Member States, fostering informed decision-making and robust policy development.

In the meeting, participants shared valuable insights into existing biosafety regulations, highlighting successes and identifying areas that require improvement for better harmonization. This exchange of knowledge proved essential in pinpointing regulatory gaps and ensuring that all countries are aligned in their approaches to managing

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). A significant focus was placed on the current state of global and regional trade in genetically modified commodities.

Discussions revealed trends that underscore the growing acceptance of GM crops worldwide, presenting an opportunity for Member States to adapt their national policies and trade strategies accordingly. The potential for increased market access, with a special focus on livestock feeds, raw materials and emergency food aid access were recognized as critical benefits of embracing biotechnology in agriculture.

Collaboration emerged as a key theme, with strong support for establishing a platform for ongoing dialogue among Member States. This platform would facilitate shared decision-making and foster mutual recognition of regulatory standards. The importance of creating

centralized information repositories to streamline processes and enhance transparency was also emphasized, ensuring that all stakeholders can easily access vital information.

Ultimately, the meeting laid a solid foundation for advancing biotechnology and biosafety in the region. By prioritizing understanding, reviewing regulations, assessing trade dynamics, and addressing harmonization challenges, participants are poised to create a safer and more innovative agricultural landscape.

The commitment to collaboration and shared learning is a promising step toward enhancing food security and improving livelihoods across the region, ensuring that biotechnology can be harnessed responsibly for the benefit of all.



COMESA States Participate in Simulation Exercises to Tackle Emerging Pests

In the ongoing battle against agricultural pests, simulation exercises have become a critical component of global plant protection strategies. These scenario-based drills mimic real-world outbreaks, enabling countries to be at the forefront of tackling potential pest infestations. They are especially relevant for emerging pests and have recently been employed by national plant protection organizations as a prevention and preparedness tool against *Fusarium oxysporum* f.sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 (TR4), a significant banana pest.

The first *Fusarium* TR4 simulation exercise for the COMESA region took place in Kenya in May 2024, implemented under the COMESA Trade Facilitation Project, funded by the European Union. This was part of a wider capacity development programme which included the development of International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) guides and e-learning courses and in-person and virtual *Fusarium* TR4 diagnostic and surveillance training courses for representatives from the COMESA region.

The simulation exercise was led by the IPPC Secretariat, in partnership with FAO

Mesoamerica and, as the first simulation exercise to be conducted in Africa, it was an important milestone for the region.

Representatives from COMESA countries, namely Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Madagascar, Somalia, Burundi, Congo, Malawi, Sudan, Eswatini and Zimbabwe met in Nairobi for a simulation exercise that covered all stages from preparation to response to a first outbreak or positive case, to containment of infected plants.

The simulation scenarios were staged at possible entry points including on a farm and in a diagnostic laboratory. Through these real-life simulations, in a controlled operating environment, participants were able to test and improve preparedness to respond to a *Fusarium* TR4 outbreak through capacity building, improving understanding of techniques, tools, and resources, and improving coordination and application of risk reduction techniques. As part of the exercise, participants worked on developing elements of a contingency plan to cover all key aspects of an emergency response system.

Core to the success of this simulation exercise was the transference of skills

between FAO Mesoamerica and the COMESA region.

As emphasized by COMESA representative Dr. Yoseph Mamo during the opening ceremony in Kenya:

“This simulation exercise, and all the preparatory work that has gone into planning it, has significantly benefited from the sum of capabilities and experience to train, update and define roadmaps and concrete actions in each of the countries that are participating in this first exercise. I specifically thank our colleagues from FAO and the IPPC Secretariat.”

With the effects of climate change increasing the threat of emerging pests, strengthening phytosanitary preparedness and response capacities is ever more important. Following the success of the COMESA trade facilitation project, simulation exercises will continue to be a priority for the IPPC Secretariat, with the transfer of knowledge to other regions taking place within Pest and Outbreak Response System framework.

(Source: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news>)

High Turnout for the Inaugural COMESA Investment Forum in Tunisia



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

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) on 27 June 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

“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 among others,” Dr Mohamed Kadah.

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.

Continued to page 12

Push for Greater Value Addition, Green Investments and Tourism at the 11th COMESA Research Forum

The 11th COMESA Annual Research Forum was held virtually on 17 – 19 September 2024, bringing together policymakers, academics, think tanks, and the private sector from COMESA Member States and beyond to discuss emerging issues in regional integration.

The forum, themed “Fostering Economic Integration and Inclusivity in COMESA through Value Addition, Green Investments, and Tourism,” is part of ongoing capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening economic and trade policy research and analysis to bolster integration and trade within the COMESA region and across Africa. It serves as a platform to bridge the gap between academia, the private sector, and policymakers in the formulation of economic integration and regional trade policies.

In her opening address, COMESA Secretary-General Chileshe Kapwepwe hailed the event as a key milestone, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of COMESA.

“The use of scientific research and evidence has become crucial for sound policy formulation, significantly reducing the rate of policy failures,” Kapwepwe stated. “This forum helps us stay connected with current policy challenges while drawing upon new knowledge and insights from scholars, researchers, academics, and policymakers.”

Keynote speaker Ms. Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, emphasized the need for accurate and timely data for exporters, policymakers, and small businesses.

“The greatest hurdle standing in the way

of greater integration, through value addition, green investment and tourism – and the benefit this can bring to COMESA small business – is the lack of timely, comprehensive data on trade and market trends, analysis and export requires,” she noted.

Mr. Georges Chikoti, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS), highlighted the significance of research and development in value addition. He pointed out that 70% of the organization’s member states rely on commodities for 60% of their revenues.

Over the course of the three-day forum, eight full research papers were presented, addressing topics such as green investment, climate finance, value chain development, tourism, and the inclusion of women and youth in regional economic integration.

The forum recommended the need for the COMESA Secretariat, universities and cooperating partners, in particular the ITC to strengthen mechanisms to enable increased data access for enhanced research and policy analysis.

In addition to COMESA Member States, universities, and COMESA institutions, this year’s forum also features participation from key partners, including the OACPS, African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), Afreximbank, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Development Bank Group, AfCFTA Secretariat, World Bank Group, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency (NPCA), the European Commission Delegation to Zambia, and the International Trade Centre.

...COMESA Investment Forum in Tunisia.

Continued from page 11

“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 among 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.



Dr Mohamed Kadah addressing delegates at the SPS workshop

Revision of SPS Regulations, Strategy and Implementation Plans Finalized

COMESA has finalized the revision of its Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regulations, strategy, and implementation plans. This initiative aims to strengthen SPS capacities across Member States by eliminating inconsistencies that have hindered regional trade in food and agricultural products.

SPS measures are regulatory tools designed to protect human, animal, and plant life from risks such as additives, contaminants, toxins, or disease-causing organisms. By recognizing the SPS measures of exporting Member States, the revision will streamline cross-border trade, reducing the need for repeated testing and certification, ultimately lowering business costs.

The review process took place on September 2–6 in Nairobi, Kenya, in a workshop attended by experts from COMESA Member States. Organized in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC), the workshop focused on key areas such as harmonizing SPS measures, establishing equivalence in standards, risk assessment, and ensuring transparency in the implementation process.

The finalized regulations, strategy, and implementation plans will be submitted for approval by COMESA's Policy Organs later this year 2024.

In addition to the regulatory revisions, Member States also completed the SPS strategy. This strategy emphasizes building capacities in both public and private sectors, enhancing regional leadership, coordination, and collaboration on SPS issues.

The strategy also focuses on developing human, institutional, and infrastructural capabilities to establish harmonized, science-based SPS systems. Implementing these regulations will foster a favorable business environment, contributing to COMESA's regional integration and economic development goals.

During the opening session, COMESA Assistant Secretary General, Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah, encouraged Member States to ensure the revised regulations are robust, clear, and in line with international standards, unlocking the region's trade potential.

"Our common aim here is to eliminate the

differences in SPS measures that exist among Member States, and which have continued to constrain regional trade in food and agricultural products," he said. "In turn, this will reduce the cost of doing business through the recognition of exporting Member States SPS measures by the importing Member States, thereby eliminating repeated testing and certification."

Noting that the region lacks capacity in risk assessment/analysis, making it difficult for Member States to establish risk-based SPS measures, he called for the establishment of a risk assessment/analysis centre. This will support Member States to implement risk-based SPS measures and build their capacity to do so and also ensure that the region is able to address the risks whether they are global in nature or unique to the region.

Dr. Janet Edeme, Head of the Rural Development Division at the AUC, represented by Senior SPS Advisor Mr. Mwape Chiluba, highlighted that the revised regulations will enhance the implementation of science-based SPS systems, promoting food security and safer trade.



Ambassador Mr. Han Jing presents his letter of accreditation to COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe

COMESA and China Strengthen Ties!

COMESA is set to formalize a major partnership with China during the upcoming Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This MoU will focus on key areas like capacity building, agricultural development, and investment opportunities across various sectors.

Key areas of focus include capacity building, agricultural development with a focus on value addition and post-harvest loss management, as well as investment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Other priorities include the development of the leather industry, public and private sector investment, and technological advancements in irrigation systems and logistics.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe disclosed this during a ceremony at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia, on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, where she received credentials from the Chinese Ambassador to Zambia, Mr. Han Jing, accrediting him as Special Representative to COMESA.

Key areas of collaboration include hydropower and solar energy, industrialization, trade—particularly e-commerce—and infrastructure

development. Additionally, the focus extends to digital payment systems for clearing goods and sovereign currency settlement, fostering globalization through both blue and green economies, and addressing climate change mitigation.

“China remained one of the major sources of imports for the COMESA region commanding a market share of 19% of COMESA's imports in 2023,” the SG noted.

In 2023, the value of imports from China reached US\$ 49 billion rising by 1.8% from US\$ 48 billion in 2022. COMESA's exports to China grew by 3% from USD 24 billion in 2022 to USD 25 billion in 2023. The China export market accounted for 13% of COMESA's global exports in 2023.

Since 2016, China and COMESA have jointly operated the International Centre on Small Hydro Power in Hangzhou. Earlier this year, COMESA and the International Centre organized a capacity-building workshop on small hydro power development standards, aimed at policy makers and energy project developers, at COMESA

Headquarters. The workshop was funded by the International Development Fund through the UNIDO Small Hydro Power Program.

In addition, China, through its Ministry of Water Resources, and COMESA signed a cooperation agreement establishing a visiting scholar program. This initiative is designed to support COMESA's development while deepening China-Africa cooperation.

As part of this initiative, the COMESA Secretariat received one Chinese visiting scholar for one year from 1st June 2023 to 31st May 2024. The scholar served as focal point for strengthening collaboration between China and COMESA.

This year, China has provided 10 COMESA Staff with scholarships for short-term training in various universities in China.

Ambassador Jing pledged to uphold the strong relationship between his Embassy and COMESA, highlighting the organization's crucial role as Africa's largest regional economic bloc.



Left: 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 at the launch in Kampala

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, 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.



Director of Gender, Beatrice Hamusonde (L) presents a certificate to a participant in the gender statistics training

Empowering Madagascar on the Use of Gender Statistics

Gender statistics are crucial for informed decision-making. They highlight areas where gender disparities exist, ensuring that policies and programs effectively address the needs of men, women, boys, and girls for inclusive social and economic development.

In a novel initiative to enhance the collection, analysis, and use of gender-disaggregated data, the COMESA Secretariat, in collaboration with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility, organized a training workshop on gender-disaggregated data and statistics for Madagascar on 24 – 26 July 2024.

This workshop aimed to equip statisticians, researchers, and policymakers with the necessary skills and tools to better understand and address gender disparities across various sectors.

This initiative aligns with the COMESA Gender Policy, African Minimum Gender Indicators, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

By strengthening the capacity to produce and use gender statistics, Madagascar

will move closer to achieving regional, continental and global targets on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Speaking at the forum, Mr. Rakotonaradany Michael, Acting Director General of the National Statistical Institution of Madagascar, emphasized the transformative power of data.

“By enhancing our capacity to collect and analyze gender statistics, we can create more equitable and effective policies that benefit everyone in society. The importance of gender statistics cannot be overstated,” he stressed.

He added, “The limited availability of gender data and statistics makes it challenging to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving targets and goals related to gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA, highlighted the significance of the workshop, towards building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Participants were taken through various key topics including an introduction to gender and gender statistics to enhance understanding of the basics

and importance of gender-disaggregated data.

Other topics were data collection techniques and best practices for collecting reliable and accurate gender data; data analysis and interpretation featuring tools and methods for analysing gender statistics and policy implications of using gender data and gender statistics to inform and shape policies and programmes.

This joint initiative by COMESA and the ICR Facility underlines their commitment to promote gender equality and empower institutions and individuals through capacity-building initiatives by providing the tools, knowledge and evidence-based research necessary to address critical gender issues.

The ICR Facility is co-funded by the European Union (EU), the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), together with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council. It is implemented by GIZ, the British Council, Expertise France, and SNV.



Dr Lucas Njoroge (R) presents a certificate to a participant accompanied by Dr. Naglaa Nozahie (centre) and other guests.

Advancing Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Central Banks

As part of an initiative to accelerate the adoption of Big Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Machine Learning in the financial sector, the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) conducted a training program for regional Central Banks in the third quarter of this year 2024.

The main objective was to build Member States capacity for adopting Big Data technology and AI, with a focus on relevant use cases within the financial and banking sectors. This initiative is aligned with the CMI's 2024 work plan, which was approved by the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks in November 2023.

One of the trainings was held in Cairo, Egypt, from August 18 to 22, 2024, under the theme "Applications of Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Central Banking." The event saw the participation of 50 delegates from 11 COMESA member Central Banks, including representatives from Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tunisia, Zambia, and

Zimbabwe.

In her address to the delegates, Dr. Naglaa Nozahie, Governor's Advisor for Africa Affairs at the Central Bank of Egypt, emphasized the importance of the training in light of new private sector financial products and services. She highlighted the impact of digital wallets, mobile payment apps, and emerging digital assets such as cryptocurrencies and stablecoins, all of which are driven by technological advances, demographic shifts, and evolving consumer behaviour.

"These technological advances are largely powered by Big Data analytics and artificial intelligence," Dr. Nozahie stated.

Echoing the importance of technology in modern banking, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, Director of CMI, emphasized the synergy between AI and Big Data. He noted that the vast amounts of data generated, combined with AI's capability to process and analyze such data, make the two technologies almost inseparable.

The training provided participants with a step-by-step approach to understanding the application of Big Data Analytics and AI in central banking. It began by exploring the need for these technologies, their evolution, and the broader ecosystem surrounding them.

In addition to expanding their knowledge of Big Data—its origins, characteristics, and implementation challenges—participants also gained insights into Machine Learning (ML) and its potential benefits for the financial and banking sectors, particularly for central banks.

The delegates shared their knowledge and experiences and committed to advancing the adoption of these technologies in the daily operations of their respective central banks.



Delegates visit the COMESA ASCENT Booth during the I4C Conference in Berlin Germany

COMESA Participates in Climate Conference in Berlin, Germany

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) participated in the Innovate for Climate (I4C) Conference, as well as the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation (ASCENT) Programme.

(ASCENT) Day event, took place at the Estrel Congress Center in Berlin, Germany, from September 10th to 13th, 2024. This involvement was part of COMESA's commitment to advancing sustainable and clean energy solutions under the ASCENT Programme.

The I4C conference aimed to enhance awareness about carbon markets and energy planning tools. The ASCENT Programme's participating countries, along with other stakeholders, engaged in discussions to address the specific needs of ASCENT-qualifying countries, focusing on climate finance and the adoption of digital technologies. The Innovate for Climate (I4C) platform facilitated dialogue between the public and private sectors, showcasing opportunities and innovations for low-carbon, resilient development. It

also fostered knowledge exchange to promote investments in transformative climate-smart solutions.

The ASCENT Day, a key feature of the conference, was jointly organized by the World Bank and COMESA. The COMESA delegation was led by Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah.

In collaboration with the World Bank, COMESA extended invitations to two participants from each ASCENT country, including a Focal Point for Digitalization Tools and a Focal Point for Climate Finance/Carbon Markets. These representatives played a pivotal role in implementing ASCENT activities at the national level and will serve as key contacts beyond the conference.

During the three-day conference, COMESA showcased various components of the ASCENT Programme at a dedicated pavilion. The Programme Implementation Unit (PIU) provided detailed explanations of ASCENT's initiatives, including on the digital planning tools for energy that were

displayed by potential collaborators.

Key components of the ASCENT Programme include the Digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (D-MRV) Platforms for Energy Access and Climate Finance, the Project Preparation Facility, the Advisory Support Facility, and initiatives focused on knowledge exchange, skills development, and consumer engagement.

The ASCENT Programme, financed by the World Bank with an investment of US\$5 billion, is an ambitious energy initiative aiming to leverage an additional US\$10 billion from other investors and financiers and provide electricity access to over 100 million people across more than 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa over a seven-year period. It seeks to accelerate energy access efforts through both grid-based and Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) solutions, as well as promoting clean cooking technologies and fuels.

AU-COMESA Observe Rwanda Elections



Picture: Joint AU-COMESA Election Observers in Kigali

The African Union and COMESA 48 short term observers in a Joint Election Observation Mission to the 2024 Rwanda General Elections. The Mission was sent to all the four provinces of Rwanda including the capital Kigali. It was headed by H.E Jorge Carlos De Almedia Fonseca, former President of Cabo Verde and deputized by Rt. Hon. Ruhakana

Rugunda, the former Prime Minister of Uganda. He is also a member of the COMESA Committee of Elders.

The joint AU-COMESA EOM based its assessment on the legal framework governing elections in Rwanda and the OAU/AU Declaration on the principles governing democratic elections,

standards and obligations stipulated in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

At the end of the mission, a preliminary statement was issued:- <https://www.comesa.int/joint-au-comesa-communique-2024-rwanda-general-elections/>

COMESA and Partners to Host Second Edition of IRSK Annual Conference

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in collaboration with the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK), the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) based at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa will host the Second Annual IRSK Conference.

The conference will take place on 20 – 22 November 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya.

Themed “Fostering Integration and Cooperation in the COMESA Region through International Relations and Diplomacy, this second edition of the IRSK Annual Conference represents an exciting convergence of theory and practice in international relations and diplomacy and seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the promotion

of peace, stability, and prosperity in the COMESA region.

The conference will bring together key stakeholders, including government officials, diplomats, policymakers, scholars, business leaders, media, and civil society from the COMESA region and beyond. It will feature a blend of insightful keynotes, roundtable discussions, research presentations, book launches, workshops, and networking events all designed to foster collaboration and facilitate knowledge sharing among participants.”

With close to 200 participants from over 30 countries expected to attend, the IRSK Annual Conference is poised to be a landmark event for stakeholders within the COMESA region. The participants will include a mix of seasoned experts and emerging voices in international relations

and diplomacy, providing a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences.

The objective of this conference is to explore possible solutions to the multifaceted challenges and competing priorities that the region faces by facilitating discussions and outcomes that are truly holistic and inclusive.

From the 1st Joint conference held in 2023, the 30 papers presented were published by COMESA in a special edition while other papers will be published in the African Journal on Conflict Resolution by ACCORD.

The conference’s outcomes shall be converted into actionable strategies and policies that will help pave the way for a more integrated and prosperous COMESA region.



Digital Platform for Women Entrepreneurs now has new Resources for Learning

In a bid to enhance its support for women entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment, the digital platform for women in business – 50 Million African Women Speak – has introduced a new section which provides a broad range of learning resources on various aspects of business.

The resources are available via the landing page of the platform (www.womenconnect.org) and through the 50MAWSP app.

They were generated through the boot camp for African women entrepreneurs which the 50MAWSP implementing RECs, namely COMESA, East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States jointly organized with the African Development Bank (AfDB) between March and July this year.

Approximately 1,000 women

entrepreneurs from more than 25 African countries signed up for the business training boot camp, which was conducted online.

The newly added content is designed to be relevant to users irrespective of the country or region they come from and covers areas which include: starting a business, structuring the operations of your business, developing go to market strategies, e-commerce and building an effective online presence, structuring a scalable business and financial structuring and funding options for entrepreneurs.

COMESA's Director for Gender and Social Affairs Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde said the new addition to the platform would facilitate self-learning for women in business and enhance their capacity in key areas such as marketing their businesses online, managing finances, identifying opportunities for funding and scaling their enterprises.

"The resources which the platform is making available were generated following a survey where women entrepreneurs who use the platform indicated which areas they needed their capacity to be enhanced, so we are confident that they will facilitate them to do business better, while also going a long way in enriching our platform," Mrs Hamusonde remarked.

"We are grateful to our implementing partners, EAC and ECOWAS, as well as the AfDB and 50MAWSP national focal points who all played a critical role in ensuring that the boot camp for women entrepreneurs took place and through it a wealth of knowledge was generated for the benefit of women who may not have been able to participate in the live training sessions," she added.

The learning resources are available in text and video formats.



Energy Experts meeting in Addis Ababa

Energy Experts Urge Enhanced Electricity Regulations in COMESA

Energy experts and stakeholders from the COMESA region are advocating for harmonised policies and regulations to govern the sector which in turn would grow the industry and lead to increased access to the much-needed electricity for millions of Africans.

To realise this, the experts met in Addis Ababa Ethiopia from 18 – 20 September to validate some parts of the framework and initial reports for harmonized electricity tariffs and cost assessments for the COMESA region. This initiative, supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and COMESA since its approval in 2022, aims to strengthen the sustainability of the electricity sector in Eastern and Southern Africa through improved regulatory frameworks.

Dubbed the “Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation in COMESA,” this \$1.5 million initiative seeks to establish effective, transparent, and enforceable regulations to stimulate cross-border electricity trade and enhance energy access across the region.

At the workshop’s opening on September 18, 2024, Mrs. Seharla Abdulahi, Director General of the Petroleum and Energy Regulatory Authority of Ethiopia (PEA), emphasized the need for harmonized regulations to unlock regional energy trade and enhance energy security. She highlighted the alarming gap between energy supply and demand in the region, noting that 365 million people lack electricity access, while 558 million do not have access to clean cooking facilities.

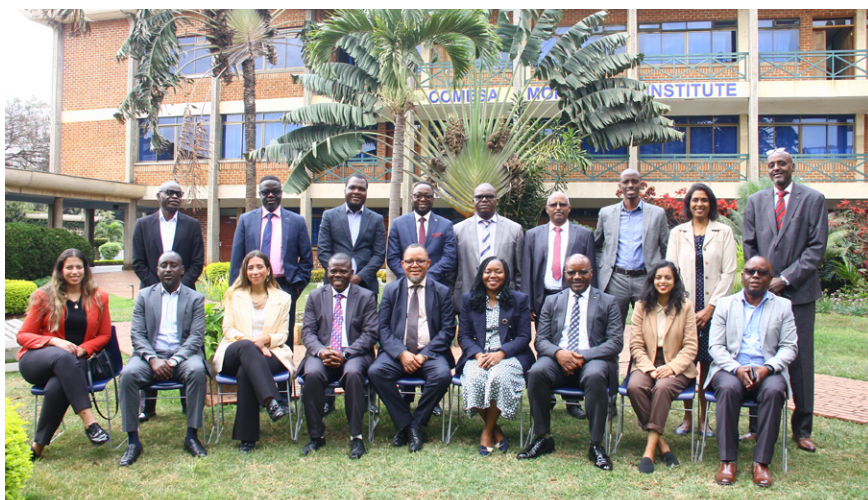
“It is imperative that we transform this narrative,” Mrs. Abdulahi stated in a message delivered by Mr. Bahru Olijra Debel, PEA’s Director of Electricity Sector Regulation. “By leveraging our collective expertise and political will, we can accelerate electrification, attract investment, and create a sustainable energy future for all.”

Dr. Mohamedain Seif Elnasr, CEO of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), spoke on behalf of the implementing agency, noting that

the validation of key project deliverables will advance progress on policies’ harmonization. He stressed COMESA’s commitment to developing regional energy infrastructure, highlighting the importance of a supportive regulatory environment in attracting private investment and fostering competition.

Dr. Elnasr also referenced other collaborative programs between COMESA and the World Bank aimed at increasing energy access for 100 million people and promoting renewable energy deployment. These include the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility and the newly launched Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation in Eastern and Southern Africa Multi-Phase Programmatic Approach (ASCENT MPA).

Mr. James Wahogo, Secretary General of the East African Power Pool, praised RAERESA for securing AfDB support and effectively coordinating project activities. “We all need to build on this momentum while addressing the ongoing barriers to deeper integration of our regional power systems,” he remarked.



COMESA Monetary Institute Reviews Climate Impact on Central Banks

The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) convened the 21st meeting of the Monetary and Exchange Rate Policies (MERP) Sub-Committee in Nairobi, Kenya, from 21st to 22nd September 2024. The meeting aimed to review the activities undertaken by the CMI under the MERP Sub-Committee in 2024 and to outline a work plan for 2025.

Prior to this, a validation workshop was held at the same venue from 19th to 20th September 2024, focusing on country studies conducted by staff from COMESA member central banks. These studies explored the “Macroeconomic Impact of Climate Change and the Role of Central Banks.”

The workshop report highlighted key findings, noting that climate change shocks drive inflationary pressures, hinder economic growth, and disrupt banks' balance sheets, particularly through an increase in non-performing loans (NPLs).

The meeting further identified common policy recommendations, including: the need for central banks to integrate climate shocks into their monetary policy frameworks and the introduction of proactive green financial policies and regulations, such as green lending, greening central bank portfolios, and providing interest subsidies for green loan-supported projects.

Further recommendations were intensifying banking and prudential supervision; offering support to financial institutions facing challenges due to climate shocks and encouraging governments to integrate climate change considerations and nationally determined contributions (NDCs) into public finance management, development planning, and budgetary cycles.

The MERP Sub-Committee meeting also reviewed training activities and other initiatives conducted by the CMI, preparing a comprehensive work plan for 2025, which will guide future efforts. Delegates from thirteen COMESA member central banks participated, including those from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Ethiopia's Horticulture Sector Poised for Growth with CEHA National Chapter Launch

Ethiopia's horticulture sub-sector is set for significant growth following the launch of the COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) National Chapter. This initiative, unveiled in Addis Ababa on August 13, 2024, is part of a broader strategy to tap into the vast potential of the horticulture industry across the region.

At the launch event, industry stakeholders praised the efforts of the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA-COMESA) and its partners. The CEHA program aims to drive sustainable growth in the horticulture sector across the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC).

H.E. Dr. Meles Mekonnen, Ethiopia's State Minister of Agriculture and Horticulture Development, highlighted the importance of the CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter in coordinating and accelerating the country's horticulture development. The initiative will focus on three key crops—potatoes, avocados, and onions—chosen for their potential to drive economic growth and align with development partners' investment priorities.

“These crops have been selected based on their production capacity,

Continued to page 24



Young climate leaders and advocates, policy makers, and civil society organisations from across the region during the Regional Conference of Youth (RCOY) on climate change in Lusaka.

COMESA Host Regional Conference on Youth and Climate Security

COMESA in collaboration with a coalition of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), hosted a Regional Conference on Youth and Climate Security under the theme “Shaping Financial Climate Resilience for Child and Youth-led Adaptation and Mitigation.”

Coordinated by the COMESA Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) programme, the event was focused on empowering young leaders in the Southern Africa region to enhance financial resilience in the face of climate change, fostering adaptation and mitigation strategies that are child and youth led.

This 3-day international gathering, was held at the Mulungushi International Conference centre in Lusaka from 24 – 26 September 2024 and was aligned with the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Conference of the Parties (COP).

Among the delegates were 400 policymakers, youth activists,

environmental experts, and stakeholders from across the region. Participants engaged in dialogues, workshops, and presentations aimed at shaping actionable strategies for climate resilience.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Head of the GPS programme, Dr Oita Etyang called on youths to utilize the space provided by COMESA to realize their full potential.

“The future belongs to young people so they will set the agenda of today and tomorrow, but this agenda needs to be set meaningfully because COMESA can only provide the platform for youth engagement, but the solutions ultimately lie with the youth,” he noted.

United Nations Development Programme UNDP Resident Representative James Wakiaga who spoke on behalf of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Beatrice Mutali, said that children suffer the most from climate change, as disasters lead to food insecurity and malnourishment which often leads to

early marriage and trauma.

“Action to protect children and to achieve climate resilience is needed. This conference is an opportunity to craft creative solutions and to foster intergenerational collaboration,” he said.

Regional Conference of Youth (RCOY) Chairperson Nawa Silishebo stated that Southern Africa’s future lies in the hands of young people because they too are affected by climate change.

The youth leader said that despite this disproportionate impact, children and youth are often overlooked in countries’ environmental negotiations and policymaking, including those related to climate change.

“We need to protect children and youth from the effects of climate change. We need to act now,” Silishebo added.

Poised for Growth....



Participants at the launch of the COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) National Chapter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

significant potential to drive economic growth, and development partners' investment priorities," said Dr. Mekonnen, represented at the event by his Advisor, Prof. Ali Mohamad.

The CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter is expected to unite key stakeholders and provide vital support to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) within the selected value chains through matching grants and technical assistance. This approach is anticipated to create jobs, boost regional trade, and reduce postharvest losses, according to industry experts.

ACTESA-COMESA Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Mukuka underscored the initiative's potential impact. He revealed that under the 2021-2031 Strategic Plan, ACTESA-COMESA is committed to strengthening the horticulture sub-sector. Dr. Mukuka projected that the combined value of avocados, Irish potatoes, and onions could generate an additional USD 230 million annually for approximately 450,000 smallholder farmers in the region.

In 2023, avocados and onions collectively contributed USD 11.2 million in foreign

exchange earnings for the region.

"There is significant headroom for growth and job creation through investments and modernisation in these value chains," Dr. Mukuka remarked. He also emphasized the pivotal role of women in the horticulture value chain and the need to embrace climate-smart technologies.

The implementation of the CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter will involve a series of targeted activities, including advocacy for policy reforms to enhance trade facilitation and market access, provision of financial resources, training, and capacity-building programs for value chain actors, and sector coordination.

Development partners, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA), participated in the event and pledged their support to ensure the program's success.

BMGF Senior Programmes Officer Mr. Rafael Flor highlighted the horticulture

sub-sector's potential for job creation, economic development, and foreign exchange earnings. He noted that focusing on these three crops would help the government diversify beyond its traditional emphasis on grains.

FDCO Country Representative Ms. Nina Hissen affirmed the British government's commitment to fostering partnerships for growth and creating a world free of poverty. She praised CEHA as a prime example of such a partnership.

AGRA Country Director Dr. Yihenew Zewdie called for the harmonization of policies to facilitate cross-border trade within the horticulture sub-sector. He urged stakeholders to ensure the availability of necessary seeds in the right quantities and sustainable manner, expressing confidence that the CEHA initiative would spur innovation.

Established in 2022, CEHA is a collaborative effort to accelerate growth in the fruit and vegetable sub-sector. Ethiopia is the fourth country to launch the CEHA National Chapter, following Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.



Burundi's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Albert Shingiro (R) and COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe signing the Summit Host Agreement

Countdown to the 23rd COMESA Summit as Burundi Signs Host Agreement

The countdown to the 23rd COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit officially begun with the signing of the Host Agreement between the Government of Burundi and the COMESA Secretariat.

Burundi's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, signed the agreement in Bujumbura, on 13 August 2024. The ceremony was attended by the Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry and Tourism, Madame Marie Chantal Nijimbere and senior officials from the Government and COMESA.

The Summit will take place on October 31, 2024, in Bujumbura. Its agenda will include a review of the state of COMESA integration, the priority issues on programmes and activities and reports from the Council of Ministers and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. A Declaration from the COMESA Business forum will also be presented to the Summit.

This year's Summit will be anchored on the theme, "Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism."

"This theme acknowledges the need to

tackle many of the challenges that are being faced by our continent, especially on climate resilient agriculture, regional value addition to move away from the export of raw materials and the need to create additional wealth and jobs, especially in support of the growing sectors such as mining and tourism," Ms Kapwepwe explained in a press conference after the signing.

Minister Shingiro said the focus on agriculture, mining, and tourism was aligned with the Burundi national development plan. He cited the promotion of climate smart agriculture, which is resilient to climate change as a key focus for Burundi.

During the forthcoming Summit, President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, will take over chairmanship of COMESA from President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia and henceforth Burundi will be chairing COMESA technical and policy meetings. Hosting the COMESA Summit is expected to shift attention to Burundi thus positioning the country as an investment destination and attracting potential investors in agriculture, mining and tourism.

Business entities will get the opportunity to engage with potential partners during the Summit meetings through

side events and exhibitions leading to increased trade and investments for the country in the long run and improving cross border investment and enhanced regional trade and integration. The country's share of COMESA trade is also expected to rise.

In 2023, Burundi's total exports to the region increased by 12% from US\$ 69 million in 2022 to US\$ 77 million. Over the same period however, Burundi's imports from the COMESA region decreased by 15% from US\$ 212 million in 2022 to US\$ 180 million in 2023.

Preceding the Summit, On 28 – 30 October will be the COMESA Business Forum, a high-level dialogue focusing on engaging public and private stakeholders on solutions that will support transformation of the COMESA region into competitive and sustainable growing economies for the expansion of regional and global trade and investment.

The dialogue will be led by a Ministerial Round Table, to discuss with private sector stakeholders on the measures to accelerate the economic growth of COMESA Member States, focusing on value addition for agriculture, mining and tourism.

The last Summit was hosted by Zambia in June 2023.



Comoros officials Trained on the Use of Gender Statistics

The COMESA Secretariat partnered with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility to organize a three-day training workshop on gender disaggregated data and statistics for Comoros from 31 July to 2 August 2024.

The workshop held in the capital Moroni, aimed to equip statisticians, researchers, and policymakers from various sectors with the necessary skills and tools to better understand and address gender disparities across various sectors.

Gender statistics are crucial for informed decision-making. They highlight areas where gender disparities exist and ensure that policies and programmes effectively address the needs of both men and women, and boys and girls for inclusive social and economic development.

The training initiative aligns with the COMESA Gender Policy, Gender Reporting Framework, Council Decisions on Gender Statistics, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators in Africa, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Mr. Said Abdou Salime, Secretary General of Ministry of Trade, COMESA Coordinating Ministry, officially opened the workshop, and highlighted the importance of gender statistics to

achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

“The availability and quality of sex-disaggregated statistics must be improved, and a gender perspective must be consistently integrated throughout the planning, implementation and dissemination processes of any statistical data collection project,” Mr Salime said.

He emphasized that gender inequalities within COMESA in different economic sectors influence women's participation in trade and undermine trade integration in the region.

The Director of Gender and Social Affairs, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde observed that the workshop was a significant step toward building a more inclusive and equitable society.

The areas in which participants were trained included an introduction to the basics of gender and gender statistics; data collection techniques and best practices for collecting reliable and accurate gender data. Also included was training on data analysis and interpretation as well as implications of using gender data and gender statistics to inform and shape policies and programmes.

By strengthening the capacity to produce

and use gender statistics, Comoros will move closer to achieving regional, continental and global targets on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. A steering committee comprised of representatives from the national statistics office and the gender commission was constituted to coordinate the collection of gender disaggregated data to feed into the COMESA dashboard on gender and social integration.

COMESA and the ICR Facility are committed to promoting gender equality and empowering institutions as well as individuals through capacity-building initiatives to provide the tools, knowledge and evidence-based research necessary to address critical gender issues. During the three-day workshop, participants were engaged in interactive sessions and hands-on exercises facilitated by a statistics expert.

The ICR Facility is co-funded by the European Union (EU), the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), together with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council. It is implemented by GIZ, the British Council, Expertise France, and SNV.



Delegates at the SAATM Awareness Workshop in Juba

Aviation Experts Convene in Juba for SAATM Awareness Workshop

More than thirty-five aviation experts gathered for a two-day Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) Awareness Workshop in Juba, South Sudan, on 15–16 July 2024. The workshop was organized by the East African Community (EAC) under the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) project in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region.

The Juba workshop aimed to help South Sudan fully understand the requirements and benefits of joining SAATM. Following the workshop, South Sudan is expected to work towards operationalizing the Single African Air Transport Market and strengthening the regulatory and institutional capacity of its civil aviation institutions.

Mr Benny Gideon Mabor, Under Secretary in the Ministry of East African Community Affairs, South Sudan emphasized the potential benefits of SAATM for the country.

"South Sudan, being the center of the continent to every destination in Africa and worldwide, has much to gain from the full operationalization of SAATM," he

said.

He highlighted that becoming a hub could create employment, boost trade and tourism, generate more revenue, and offer competitive fares.

"I believe that after this workshop, officials will clearly understand the benefits of the Single African Air Transport Market, the regulatory and institutional framework of the Yamoussoukro Decision, and the steps required to operationalize SAATM."

COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, Dr. Bernard Dzawanda, thanked the EAC for facilitating the engagement, given that South Sudan is not a COMESA member. The EAC's support towards the implementation of SATSD, funded by the European Union to the tune of eight million Euros, was also acknowledged.

"South Sudan is among the many African countries facing air transport challenges such as high fuel prices, expensive air tickets, and visa restrictions that hinder citizens' access to other African destinations. "The main objective of this workshop is to create awareness of SAATM," said Dr. Dzawanda.

He added that while many air transport markets outside Africa have been liberalized significantly, most intra-African air transport markets remain largely closed. This he said affects air connectivity within Africa as air travel costs remain prohibitive, limiting potential economic growth and trade.

He encouraged South Sudan to join the other African Union member states that are already benefiting from a liberalized African Air Transport Market. SAATM is one of the fifteen African Union flagship projects for Agenda 2063, aimed at creating a single unified air transport market on the continent to boost economic integration and growth.

Since its launch in 2018, 37 Member States have signed the Solemn Commitment to establish SAATM. Of the 18 Member States that have not signed, 15 are in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean Region.

One factor contributing to the slow uptake of the Decision's principles is the lack of clear and specific information regarding the impacts and potential benefits of such liberalization.



Immigration and Trade Experts during a two-day dialogue on the COMESA Free Movement Agenda and Stakeholders' Validation Workshop in Kigali, Rwanda.

COMESA, IOM Dialogue on Free Movement Protocol

COMESA and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) convened a two-day dialogue on the COMESA Free Movement Agenda and Stakeholders' Validation Workshop in Kigali, Rwanda. The event focused on the "Draft Impact Assessment Report" on the economic and social benefits of free movement of labour and skills mobility within the region.

Participants included migration and trade experts from the 21 COMESA Member States, alongside representatives from the African Union Commission, the European Union Delegation, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Director for Southern Africa, and the Regional Director/Country Representative of the IOM.

The workshop was officially opened by Dr. Alexis Kabayiza, Chief Technical Advisor in the Ministry of Trade and Industry for Rwanda on 26-27 August 2024. He called on the participants to come up with recommendations to ensure the implementation of the free movement protocol for the benefit of the region.

"These bilateral and trilateral instruments are most welcome as they are in line with the principle of variable geometry and edge the Member States incrementally closer to realizing the full benefits inherent in free movement of factors of

production within the Common Market," Dr. Kabayiza stated.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Dr. Mohamed Kadah, emphasized the importance of the free movement protocol, noting that the region cannot achieve proper regional integration if factors of production, such as labour and capital, cannot move freely across borders.

He acknowledged the challenges posed by negative political sentiments toward migration, including xenophobic attacks, modern slavery, and the violation of migrants' rights, particularly those of migrant workers. However, he stressed that an effective migration management system can lead to economic development and growth.

"Our ability to manage migration effectively also depends on having reliable migration data at both regional and national levels," Dr Kadah said, announcing that the COMESA Council had decided to develop a regional migration database.

This database will link with existing regional and international databases, such as those of the IOM and the SADC Labour Migration Observatory.

Dr Kadah also highlighted the increase in bilateral agreements among Member

States, noting that as of August 2024, several agreements had been signed between countries like Burundi, Zambia, Rwanda, and Eswatini. These agreements, ranging from social protection to defence cooperation, reflect a positive impact on COMESA's migration programme.

He commended Rwanda and Seychelles for fully implementing the free movement protocol by removing visa requirements for African citizens.

IOM Director Mme. Mariama Cisse noted that the dialogue presented a great opportunity for the COMESA Secretariat and Member States to address challenges related to labour migration.

"Protocols on the free movement of persons, labour, services, rights of establishment, and residence were developed to create a true common market within the region," she said.

She emphasized that the movement of people is central to regional integration, as it strengthens the political and cultural bonds within a region. Additionally, enabling the movement of people helps create opportunities in labour markets, particularly for the millions of youth entering the workforce each year.



Participants at the validation workshop in Kigali

ICT Experts Validate Business Models and Training Modules for Regional Associations

Experts in Information Communication and Technologies (ICTs) have endorsed the business models and training modules for Regional ICT Associations (RICTAs) affiliated to the East African Community (EAC), COMESA and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This was done during a three-day validation workshop on 17 – 19 July 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda and attended by 28 experts who represented regulators, operators and from the postal sector. Representatives of partner regional economic communities namely, EAC, IGAD and SADC attended the meeting.

The documents would next be presented to the General Assemblies of the different RICTAs before implementation. Once fully in use, the models and modules are expected to enhance the RICTA's organizational capacity with respect to business development and service delivery.

The validation was part of the deliverables under the European Union funded Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) Programme being implemented in the East Africa-Southern

Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region.

Speaking during the opening session, Rwanda's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of ICT and Innovation Mr. Yves Iradukunda recognised the contribution that the RICTAs make to the ICT ecosystem and commended them for promoting ICT development at a regional level.

"Through the Regional ICT Associations, the region has seen practical solutions to topical ICT issues managed and discussed," he said.

Mr. Iradukunda revealed that at the recently concluded ITU Global Symposium of Regulators 2024 (GSR-24), which took place in Kampala early in July, the role of Regional ICT Associations was evident.

However, he noted that Regional ICT Associations face challenges that affect their performance and inhibit them from achieving their mandates and reaching their full potential. They include limited budget, staffing challenges at the secretariats, limited visibility, slow pace of transposition/domestication of guidelines, organization sustainability

and membership challenges.

Mr Leonard Chitundu, COMESA Telecommunications Officer said the support provided to RICTAs under the EGEE-ICT programme is key for the region as it will lead to an efficient ICT sector. The programme supports the review and development of various ICT policy and regulatory frameworks that contribute to enhanced competition and improved access to affordable and secure ICT infrastructure and services.

Regarding RICTAs, the EGEE-ICT programme provides a set of support activities, all of which result in institutional and human capacity building. The development of business models as well as the preparation and delivery of training modules is one such support activity for the RICTAs.

The five RICTAs are the East African Communication Organisation (EACO), Association of Regulators of Information and Communication in Eastern and Southern Africa (ARICEA), Communication Regulators Association of Southern Africa (CRASA), Southern African Telecommunications Association (SATA) and Southern Africa Postal Operators Association (SAPOA).



Delegates attending the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulation awareness meeting in Eswatini

COMESA Drives Rapid Implementation of Seed Trade Harmonization in Ethiopia and Eswatini

COMESA, through its Specialized Agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), conducted awareness campaigns and policy dialogue meetings in Ethiopia and Eswatini to accelerate the implementation of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations. These efforts aimed at advancing the regulations both nationally and regionally.

Conducted on 13 and 17 August in Eswatini and Ethiopia respectively, the meetings marked the official launch of the gazetted National Aligned Seed Regulations. The events were designed to enhance understanding and assist the two COMESA Member States in strategizing the operationalization of the COMESA Seed System at the national level.

During the Eswatini meeting, Nelson Mavuso, Eswatini's Director of Agriculture, emphasized the importance of the COMESA Regulations in reducing barriers to cross-border seed trade. He noted that harmonizing seed regulations across the region is crucial for

minimizing trade bottlenecks that affect seed movement.

"The COMESA regulations are crucial in contributing to solving the problem of inadequate quality seeds in the COMESA region," Mavuso said. "The process of availing quality seeds to farmers requires a true public and private seed stakeholder partnership as demonstrated by the cordial partnership between the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and COMESA/ACTESA since 2010 in moving forward with this harmonization."

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Mukuka highlighted the significance of the Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations in improving farmers' access to quality, effective, and affordable seeds.

He pointed out that only 20 percent of the 90 million smallholder farmers in the COMESA region have access to quality and improved seeds. This limitation impacts approximately 130 million people out of the 610 million COMESA population, leaving them food insecure and trapped in chronic poverty and

hunger.

"Regional seed market is still fragmented into small national markets; each country operates its seed policies and regulations differently from other COMESA Member States," Dr. Mukuka noted. "This fragmentation is costly for seed companies and leads to delays in getting quality seeds to small-scale farmers. The COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations are designed to address these challenges."

This is not only costly for the seed companies but also results in prolonged delays before the seed of good quality can find its way to the small-scale farmers, these are some of the challenges that the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations seeks to address.

Dr. Mukuka also highlighted the development of the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP) as a testament to COMESA's commitment to advancing the Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations.

COMSHIP is aimed at enhancing seed production, reliability, and trade, while boosting the competitiveness of the seed industry in the Southern and Eastern African (ESA) region. It represents an ongoing process to adapt the seed regulations, facilitate trade between COMESA Member States, and support local companies and small-scale farmers.

The four strategic objectives of COMSHIP are: preparing for and supporting phased domestication, raising awareness of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations, monitoring and improving the implementation strategy, and building capacity in seed production and support for smallholder farmers.

Since its facilitation, COMSHIP has led to the gazetting of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations in May 2014 in ten COMESA Member States: Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Malawi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Regional Banks' Staff Trained on Financial Crisis Management and Resolution Strategies

In an initiative to build the capacity of regional financial institutions, the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) conducted a virtual training on "Financial Crisis Management and Resolution Framework for Banks and Non-Banking Financial Institutions," on 8 - 12 July 2024. It was attended by 40 delegates from seven COMESA Member States' Central Banks namely Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia and

Zimbabwe.

The training was necessitated by the need to improve crisis management tools to mitigate the negative impact of financial crises particularly in low-income countries in general, including those in the COMESA region. Moreover, macroeconomic and financial stress associated with shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted the complexities of managing a financial crisis and the necessity for adjusting universally applicable good practices to prevent such crises.

Among the key adverse effects of financial crises are job losses, reduced access to credit, large fiscal deficits, significantly enhanced sovereign debt levels, and decreased economic growth, among others.

Thus, the training was designed to provide participants with the knowledge

and skills to identify, prevent, and manage financial crises in countries characterized by underdeveloped financial markets and weaknesses in legal and institutional arrangements required to facilitate bank resolution.

Addressing the participants, CMI Director Dr. Lucas Njoroge observed: "Since most countries in the COMESA region share similar characteristics, the training equips participants with the necessary tools and strategies to effectively manage banking or financial crises in their respective economies."

At the training, participants shared knowledge and country experiences on crisis management and resolution frameworks and gained skills on strategies and tools to effectively manage banking or financial crises in their jurisdictions.

COMESA Region Annual Inflation Rate Stood at 23.2% in June 2024

The year-on-year, inflation rate (annual percentage change) in the COMESA region as measured by the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI-COMESA) stood at 23.2% for the month of June 2024, down from 23.7% registered in May 2024. A year earlier, the rate was 29.2%.

The participating Member States that contribute to HCPI-COMESA include Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo; Djibouti, Egypt; Eswatini Ethiopia; Kenya; Madagascar, Malawi; Mauritius; Rwanda; Seychelles; Tunisia; Uganda; and Zambia.

HCPI-COMESA comprises 12 divisions of expenditure whose performance was as follows: Food & Non-alcoholic Beverages (+24.5%); Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (+99.6%); Clothing and

Footwear (+15.2%); Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas and Other Fuels (+12.1%); Furnishings, Household Equipment and Routine Household Maintenance (+22.7%); Health (+24.3%); Transport (+14.4%); Communication (+13.4%); Recreation and Culture (+15.1%); Education (+11.0%); Restaurants and Hotels (+15.2%); and Miscellaneous Goods and Services (+18.9%).

The participating Member States that contribute to HCPI-COMESA registered the following rates of total inflation in June 2024 compared to June 2023.

Burundi (+19.7%); Democratic Republic of Congo (+20.2%); Djibouti (+0.4%); Egypt (+26.0%); Eswatini (+4.1%); Ethiopia (+23.3%); Kenya (+4.6%); Madagascar (+6.9%); Malawi (+34.3%); Mauritius

(+3.7%); Rwanda (+6.6%); Seychelles (+2.7%); Tunisia (+7.9%); Uganda (+3.9%); and Zambia (+17.1%).

With the COMESA-HCPI annual inflation rate pegged at (+23.2%) in June 2024, Malawi, Ethiopia, and Egypt had the higher rates of annual inflation relative to the regional inflation rate. The rest of the participating Member States had annual inflation rates below the regional average of (+24.2%) with the Seychelles recording the least annual rate at (+2.7%).

Based on the main components of expenditure the Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco division registered the highest annual inflation rate of (+99.6%) whilst the Education division registered the least average price change of (+11.0%). More on: <https://comesa>.



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 were 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 aimed to generate interest among policymakers and industry leaders by encouraging 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, 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.



Ambassador Dr. Kadah Mohamed (2nd from right) with fellow panelists during a high-level panel discussion at the I4C Conference in Berlin, German.

New Opportunities Emerge in Energy Access amidst Challenges in Eastern and Southern Africa

The Eastern and Southern Africa region is grappling with a significant energy crisis, as approximately 365 million people lack access to electricity, accounting for more than half of the global total of 675 million. This energy deficiency not only hinders socio-economic development but also deepens the digital divide, particularly in an era marked by rapid advancements in artificial intelligence and big data.

Despite these challenges, new opportunities are emerging. The “Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation” (ASCENT) initiative, a partnership between the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the World Bank, aims to transform energy access by introducing 100 million new electricity connections across over 20 countries by 2030.

A vital aspect of this initiative is the Regional Energy Access Acceleration Platform, which seeks to leverage climate market potential through innovative digital monitoring and reporting systems.

Speaking when he addressed delegates

during a High-Level Panel discussion in Berlin Germany on 10th September 2024, COMESA's Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes (ASGP), Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah emphasized the financial barriers that hinder carbon project development in the region.

“The upfront costs can range from \$200,000 to \$1 million, making it difficult for small and medium-sized projects to secure the necessary funding,” he said.

High level panelists from different sectors and different perspectives discussed their experience, plans and opportunities to leverage carbon markets to accelerate needed sectoral transitions and transformations to be aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement and countries’ NDCs, while also helping achieve economic and social development objectives.

They included Mr Axel van Trotsenburg, Senior Managing Director at the World Bank, H.E. Christopher Coye, Minister of State, Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Netherlands, Ms Damilola Ogunbiyi Special Representative of the UN

Secretary-General, Mr Thomas Birr Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer from E.ON SE, an international energy company and Dr. Kadah.

The COMESA ASGP called for enhanced access to financial resources, highlighting the critical need for support systems that enable these projects to thrive, including the private sector.

He highlighted the importance of establishing robust methodologies, institutions and regulations to facilitate the successful development of carbon projects adding that there was a need for effective registries for carbon credit measurement and verification.

Dr Kadah stated that while the challenges of energy access and sustainable development in Eastern and Southern Africa are formidable, initiatives like ASCENT present a promising pathway toward innovation and structural transformation.

The theme of the panel discussion was “Unlocking Potential: Carbon Markets as a Catalyst for low Carbon Transition and Sectoral Transformation”.



COMESA, AKADEMIYA2063 Sign MOU to Support Agri-food System Transformation

COMESA and AKADEMIYA2063 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in July 2024, to support evidence-based policy and program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) aimed at transforming agri-food systems in the COMESA region.

AKADEMIYA2063 Executive Chairperson, Dr. Ousmane Badiane and COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the MoU virtually on 19 July 2024.

Under the partnership, the two organizations will bolster their collaboration in support of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) by strengthening technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States for review, dialogue, M&E, and mutual learning.

COMESA and AKADEMIYA2063 will leverage data, innovative research, and tools to promote food security and nutrition, address the effects of climate change, and enhance market competitiveness and agricultural trade in the region.

"AKADEMIYA2063 is eager to partner

with COMESA in supporting agri-food system transformation in eastern and southern Africa through data, analytics, and capacity strengthening," said Dr. Ousmane Badiane, AKADEMIYA2063's Executive Chairperson.

"Signing of the MOU formalizes our ongoing collaboration in support of the CAADP implementation agenda and will expand it to new heights as we work together to tackle emerging topics of strategic importance to the region."

Ms. Kapwepwe noted that data-driven decision-making for agri-food systems transformation is crucial for the COMESA region, particularly in the face of climate change. She cited the frequent droughts and floods that have severely impacted agricultural production, food security, and livelihoods in the Member States.

"This partnership between COMESA and AKADEMIYA2063 will contribute to efficient and effective development and implementation of the Regional Food Balance Sheet, a platform to provide real-time and forward-looking data to inform evidence-based food security and trade policies as well as business and investment decisions that can spur regional trade and investment in agri-food systems," said the Secretary

General.

Key components of the partnership framework include promoting mutual accountability in the COMESA region by supporting agriculture Joint Sector Reviews at the country and regional levels and the continental CAADP Biennial Review. It will also strengthen technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States for evidence-based policy planning, implementation, and M&E.

Further, the two organizations will organize joint events at the country and regional levels and conduct joint fundraising for research, capacity building, and outreach.

AKADEMIYA2063 is a pan-African non-profit research organization with headquarters in Kigali, Rwanda and a regional office in Dakar, Senegal. Its overall mission is to create, across Africa and led from its headquarters in Rwanda, state-of-the-art technical capacities to support the efforts by the Member States of the African Union to achieve the key goals of Agenda 2063 of transforming national economies to boost economic growth and prosperity.



COMESA, IISD Sign MOU to Support Sustainable Development in Eastern and Southern Africa

COMESA and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to co-operate in areas of common interest in pursuing their respective mandates and strategic objectives of contribution towards sustainable economic growth and development.

Under the partnership, the two organizations will bolster their collaboration in support of responsible and sustainable agriculture and industry investments by strengthening technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States.

Issued on 23 August 2024, the MoU coverage focuses on responsible investment in agriculture and food systems, policy to attract sustainable investment. It also addresses sustainable production, consumption and trade of agri-food products and sustainable industrialization through research and development and climate change support.

These efforts are guided by the Medium-

Term Strategy Plan (2021-2025) for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic (2019-2023) and the IISD Strategic Plan (2020 – 2025).

Vice President, Global Strategies and Managing Director, Europe Natalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder, and COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the MoU on behalf of their respective organizations.

"This MoU represents a critical step forward in our shared commitment to fostering sustainable development in the region. By combining our expertise and resources, we will strengthen the capacities of COMESA Member States, ensuring that investments in agriculture and industry are not only responsible but also sustainable," said Europe Natalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder.

COMESA and IISD will leverage on innovate research, analysis, knowledge sharing and technical assistance to promote food security, responsible agriculture investments. This partnership between COMESA and IISD will contribute to efficient and effective

development and implementation of COMESA programmes that will enhance regional trade and investment in agri-food systems.

"This partnership is poised to contribute significantly to the efficient and effective development and implementation of COMESA programmes, which will, in turn, enhance regional trade and investment in agri-food systems," Kapwepwe stated adding that "By working together, we can achieve our shared vision of a more sustainable future for the region. This MoU is just the beginning of what I believe will be a fruitful and impactful partnership," concluded Kapwepwe.

Further, the two organizations will provide technical assistance, capacity building and sensitization workshop to COMESA Member States.

IISD is an independent think tank that champions solutions to the planet's greatest sustainability challenges.

Civil Aviation Authority Seeks Collaboration with COMESA



Delegates from the Civil Aviation Authority of Zambia with COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics Dr. Bernard Dzawanda (middle)

The Zambian Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is seeking collaboration with COMESA to bolster the aviation sector through enhanced economic regulation and support to the Zambia Air Services Training Institute (ZASTI). This initiative underscores the CAA's commitment to elevating aviation standards and ensuring sustainable growth within the sector.

This collaborative effort was highlighted during a meeting on July 26, 2024, when the Aviation Authority Board Chairperson, Dr. Patrick Nkhoma, led a high-level delegation to the COMESA Secretariat. The delegation met with the Director of Infrastructure and Logistics Dr. Bernard Dzawanda to discuss potential areas of cooperation. This strategic dialogue aims to harness COMESA's extensive network and resources to drive improvements in Zambia's aviation infrastructure and training capabilities.

The Board Chairperson, Dr. Patrick Nkhoma pointed out that the meeting was a dream come true for the aviation sector in Zambia adding that there was renewed hope for the success of the sector especially that CAA shall work with COMESA.

"This meeting is like a dream come true because with what I have seen in the COMESA treaty reminds me of exactly

what we should have done years back when the Zambia Airways was folding. Had we done what I have seen, we shouldn't have let the National Carrier to die," Dr Nkhoma said.

The delegation comprised prominent figures from the aviation industry, showcasing the depth of expertise and leadership within Zambia's aviation sector. Among the delegation were Mr. Llyod Chembo, a Board Member of the CAA; Captain Derrick Luembe, the Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority and Eng. Nathan Kaluba, the Director of Aerodrome Safety & Standards.

Their combined experience and strategic insights are pivotal in navigating the complexities of the aviation industry and implementing robust regulatory frameworks.

Public Relations Manager Mrs. Sepisoimba also joined the delegation, underscoring the importance of effective communication and stakeholder engagement in advancing the CAA's objectives. The inclusion of Capt. Masiye Phiri, the Acting Vice Principal of ZASTI, and Eng. Frank B. Kafwari, Head of Training at ZASTI, highlighted the critical role of training and capacity building in the aviation sector.

Their involvement signaled a focused effort to enhance the training programs at ZASTI, ensuring that Zambia produces well-trained aviation professionals capable of meeting international standards.

Director of Infrastructure and Logistics at the Secretariat, Dr. Benard Dzawanda said COMESA represented a significant step towards fostering regional cooperation and leveraging shared resources for mutual benefit. Dr. Dzawanda said by aligning with COMESA, the CAA shall tap into a broader support system that can facilitate economic regulation, improve safety standards, and enhance overall operational efficiency within Zambia's aviation sector.

"The collaboration between the Zambian Civil Aviation Authority and COMESA marks a promising development in the pursuit of a more robust and competitive aviation industry in Zambia," said Dr. Dzawanda further calling on the CAA board to speed up formally putting in a request for the Secretariat's action.

The focus on economic regulation and training support is expected to yield long-term benefits, contributing to the sector's resilience and capacity to adapt to global aviation trends.



Participants at the regional networking and mentoring meeting for women in the pharmaceutical sector

Kigali Hosts Regional Networking and Mentoring Meeting to Drive Gender Equality

A regional networking and mentoring meeting for women in the pharmaceutical sector took place in Kigali, Rwanda, from August 27 to 28, 2024. The gathering offered women in the pharmaceutical industry across the COMESA region and beyond a valuable platform to network and collaborate.

The meeting focused on leveraging existing policies, such as the COMESA Gender Policy and the COMESA Social Charter, to create more opportunities for women in the sector. It also aimed to align regional initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those that emphasize gender equality, decent work, and economic growth.

Participants from the 15 COMESA Member States involved in a three-year, Africa Development Bank-funded project attended the workshop. The project aims to bolster the pharmaceutical industry through enhanced capacities of regional regulatory bodies, quality control systems, and research institutions, ensuring the effective manufacturing of safe and high-quality pharmaceutical products.

In her opening remarks, Guest of Honour, Madam Martine Umuhoza, Deputy Director General of the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority, highlighted the importance of collaboration and networking among women in the pharmaceutical sector.

“Our goal for the next two days is to improve networking, mentorship, and leadership opportunities for women in the pharmaceutical industry across the 21 Member States, with a focus on advancing gender equality in this crucial sector,” she stated.

Despite progress in economic integration, Madam Umuhoza noted that significant gender disparities persist, which hinder the sector’s ability to innovate and address diverse needs. She emphasized that the meeting was a critical step toward overcoming these challenges.

Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA Secretariat reiterated the organisation’s commitment to health and well-being, citing the Health Framework that provides strategic direction to Member States in addressing health priorities

and challenges. However, she also pointed out the lack of comprehensive data on gender participation in the pharmaceutical industry, despite the growing presence of women.

According to the COMESA Gender Policy of 2016, women’s participation in intra-regional trade and investment remains suboptimal, despite the region’s progress in economic integration.

Mrs. Hamusonde, speaking at the event, underscored the importance of women’s participation at all levels of the pharmaceutical sector, from research and development to leadership.

“This meeting is more than just a discussion; it is an action-oriented forum where we will explore the challenges, identify opportunities, and develop concrete strategies to enhance the participation of women in the pharmaceutical sector,” she concluded.

The COMESA Support towards Regional Pharmaceutical Sector Development project continues to play a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the pharmaceutical industry in the region.



Delegates attending the Validation Workshop for the Framework Report on Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) in Kigali, Rwanda

Validation Workshop to Strengthen Energy Regulations Conducted in Kigali

Energy experts from across the COMESA region met in Kigali, Rwanda, from July 30 to 31, 2024, for a validation workshop aimed at harmonizing regulatory frameworks for improved electricity regulation. This initiative, funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB), sought to bolster the sustainability of the energy sector across COMESA.

The workshop's focus was on validating crucial documents such as the Framework Report on Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) and the Regulatory and Utility Key Performance Indicators (UKPI) for COMESA.

Speaking to the delegates during the opening ceremony, Director General of the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), Mr. Everyste Rugigana emphasized the importance of the workshop, stating, "The validation of these frameworks is essential for fostering a harmonized regulatory environment that will stimulate investment and ensure the reliability of electricity supply in the region."

He added that RURA plays a vital role in ensuring that Rwanda's energy

sector operates under clear regulatory guidelines, promoting transparency and efficiency.

The AfDB's Rwanda Country Director, Madam Aissa Toure Sarr, asserted that an integrated power market is crucial for shaping Africa's energy transition pathway. She highlighted the need for sustainable and cost-effective exploitation of diverse energy resources, especially renewable energy, across the continent.

"While the Bank continues to finance key power interconnectors, we also recognize the importance of policy, regulatory, and institutional frameworks," she added.

Dr. Mohamedain Seif Elnasr, CEO of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), noted the varying progress among COMESA members in terms of regulatory environments.

"Some countries have developed unbundled electricity market structures with autonomous regulators and active independent power producers (IPPs), which reduces market risks and encourages investment," he explained.

He further pointed out that COMESA has successfully developed and implemented several energy regulatory guidelines aimed at harmonizing energy policies among its Member States. "These guidelines are vital for improving efficiency and attracting investment in the energy sector," Dr. Elnasr stated.

COMESA's vision includes reducing barriers to renewable energy development by improving the enabling policy and regulatory environment across Member States. "Our aim is to establish uniform, transparent, and enforceable regulatory frameworks that facilitate energy exchanges among COMESA members," he concluded.

Additionally, COMESA is partnering with the World Bank to enhance energy access for 100 million people and support the deployment of renewable energy. Ongoing programs include the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) and the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation in Eastern and Southern Africa Multi-Phase Programmatic Approach (ASCENT MPA), which aim to bolster regional energy initiatives.



ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr John Mukuka, with the Tanzania Horticulture Association (TAHA) Executive Director, Jacqueline Mkindi exchange MoU following the official launch of the CEHA National Chapter, Arusha, Tanzania.

COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator Programme Launched in Tanzania

The COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) is positioned to accelerate intra- regional trade through effective coordination of value chain development programs, facilitate access to finance, enable research and development of the Horticulture Industry as the programme is launched in the 5th country Tanzania.

CEHA will achieve this through leveraging comparative advantage, facilitating infrastructure development, access to markets and technology for maximum impact in the eastern and southern Africa region.

This was disclosed at a colorful event where the CEHA National Chapter for Tanzania hosted by the Tanzania Horticultural Association (TAHA) was unveiled in Arusha, on 12 September 2024.

Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) Chief Executive Officer, Dr John Mukuka, highlighted that CEHA is crucial to coordinating private sector-led investments into production, processing clusters, and facilitating policy and standard improvements to stimulate trade in market access.

Dr Mukuka reiterated CEHA's commitment to unlocking new pathways

to economic empowerment and gender equality for women, farmers, and young people in the vegetable industry in COMESA and EAC.

"We recognize the critical role of women in the horticulture value chain, and we will facilitate the modernization of the sector across the region by ensuring the enhancement of women and young people's access to resources, knowledge and market opportunities" he stated.

TAHA Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Jacqueline Mkindi, underscored the importance of regional partnerships in fostering the Horticulture agenda of supporting horticulture export strategies and fostering exchange programs among member countries towards building a critical mass of players in the horticulture sector.

She called for the prioritisation of cross-cutting issues and development of a smart resource mobilization strategy to tackle some of the challenges being faced.

"Tanzania is strong at facilitating compliance with market standards, Uganda is good at Organic Certification, Ethiopia and Kenya are great at logistics. So let us see how we can build a basket of such strengths and create a mechanism to allow the private sector to

get access and benefit from that basket as one region instead of operating in silos," she noted.

GIZ Deputy programme Manager, Mr. Max Middeke stressed the relevance of the Horticulture sector in contributing to the agricultural Gross Domestic Product, enhancing food security and employment creation.

He re-echoed the need to strengthen the regional horticulture sector through CEHA and strategic initiatives that enhance regional competitiveness, drive inclusive growth, and improve livelihoods in East and Southern Africa.

Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa Country Director for Tanzania, Vianey Rweyendela, underlined the importance of the CEHA programme in contributing to inclusive growth of the Horticulture sector and intra- regional trade.

The launch of the CEHA National Chapter of Tanzania, hosted by Tanzania Horticultural Association also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACTESA and TAHA, demonstrating 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.

The launch brought together key high-level players from the horticulture industry, public and private sector stakeholder, government officials, and development partners, all committed towards harnessing the vast potential of the horticulture sector within its region.

Spearheaded by the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA-COMESA), the USD 4bn CEHA programme seeks to enhance sustainable development in the sector, focusing on potatoes, avocados, and onions as the priority value chains based on their production capacity and economic growth potential.

Tanzania is the 5th target country to launch its National Chapter, following similar launches of National Chapters in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia.



Representatives from the SMEs, COMESA Secretariat, CBC and Netherlands during their mission

COMESA Launches Horticulture Trade Mission to the European Union

Representatives of 11 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe undertook a horticulture engagement mission to the European Union on 15 – 22 September 2024.

The mission was meant to increase the competitiveness and market access of the SMEs in horticulture, exploring market opportunities through active participation in value chains and facilitating networking opportunities for COMESA horticulture producers.

It was supported by the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF 11). It will enable the SMEs to establish business matchmaking platforms between COMESA producers and Dutch partners and other value chain actors within the EU.

Chief Executive Officer of the COMESA Business Council, Mr. Teddy Soobramanien, who led the delegation, highlighted Dutch market's significance, with the Netherlands accounting for 28% of COMESA's horticulture exports and global imports valued at €10.6 billion.

EDF Programme Manager at COMESA Secretariat Ms Mshuka Kamwela,

pointed out that the EU was COMESA's top export market in 2022, accounting for 44% of exports, up from 41% in 2021, and also served as the leading source of imports for the region.

Ms Kamwela, who accompanied the delegation emphasized the critical role of the RECAMP programme in addressing key challenges, such as limited access to information, business linkages, and regional policies for value chain development.

"This mission aligns with COMESA's ongoing efforts to promote regional integration through trade facilitation, boosting economic growth and cooperation," she said.

Apart from enhancing competitiveness for SMEs in the horticulture sector through exposure to supply chains in the EU and promoting knowledge exchange on best practices in horticulture, the mission is focused on connecting SMEs in the COMESA region with major players in the EU horticulture value chain, such as Fresh Produce Centre and Svensson.

The COMESA enterprises engaged in B2B meetings, with Dutch enterprises within the horticulture value chain, fruit and vegetable cultivation, flower production, logistics, packaging, crop protection, and import processes.

This will strengthen partnerships and identify business opportunities within the horticulture value chain while enhancing trade, fostering collaboration, and integrating SMEs from the COMESA region into global value chains.

Speaking on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, Business Expert Mr Arno Rhode expressed their gratitude for the mission, highlighting that it provided invaluable opportunities to create meaningful business linkages, strengthen ties within the global horticulture value chain and opened new opportunities for collaboration within the international horticulture value chain.

Other members of the delegation included the COMESA RECAMP Team Leader and Market Access Expert Mr. Nsangwa Ngwira and Mr. Hopewell Musundire CBC Business Development Officer.

The 10 SMEs represented in the mission were Cooperative Taratra of Madagascar, Quality Farm Foods of Zambia, the Ethiopian Exporters Association, Kwithu Kitchen of Malawi, Lingflora Farm Pvt. Ltd of Zimbabwe, Horticultural Exporters Association of Uganda- Hortexa, Jana Agriculture and Naturesta Investments of Egypt, Nisela Farms of Eswatini, OTF Export Limited of Mauritius and Fresh Produce Limited of Kenya.



Impact of Emerging Risks on Financial Stability

Financial stability is increasingly being tested by emerging Cyber, Fintech and Climate Change risks. These come amidst increased technological innovations in the financial sector to provide financial services efficiently, especially to the financially excluded.

Moreover, the entry of non-financial firms into the financial space is increasing competition in the financial sector, reducing the market share of financial institutions and introducing viability risks.

In response, the COMESA Monetary Institute has embarked on a capacity building initiative to help the regional apex banks navigate through the risks by organizing trainings. The latest was on 29 July – 2 August 2024 conducted virtually, themed: “Impact of Fintech, Cyber and Climate Change Risks on Financial Stability.”

Eighty delegates from 10 COMESA member countries’ Central Banks, namely Burundi, Comoros, Egypt, Eswatini,

Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended. COMESA Cleaning House was also represented.

In his address, the Director of CMI, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, observed that the gains in enhanced financial inclusion have predisposed financial services providers to fraud and cyber-attacks.

“This has increasingly exposed consumers of financial services to fraud and predatory services, undermining their income growth and ability to meet their financial obligations,” he noted.

At the same time, climate change has increased physical and transition risks, and financial institutions are increasingly being held accountable for the consequences of their financial intermediation activities on the environment.

The main motivation for conducting the training, the Director noted, was to impact knowledge required to provide

advice on the formulation of financial sector policies to mitigate and enhance the resilience of the financial system, given its vulnerability to these emerging risks.

At the training, participants were equipped with the necessary tools and skills to assess the impact that Fintech, Cyber and Climate Change Risks have on financial system stability.

Ultimately, the aim is to enhance their capacities to undertake stress tests on financial systems stability due to these risks. It will inform mitigation measures that could dampen the effect these risks would have on the financial system.



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