

## COMESA Unveils Leather Value Chain Strategy



L-R: Former COMESA Secretary General Erastus Mwencha, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and Dr. Juma Mukhwana unveiling the strategy

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), through the Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), has launched the 2025–2029 Regional Leather Value Chain Strategy—a transformative initiative aimed at shifting the region from being a raw material exporter to a competitive manufacturer of finished leather products.

Funded by the European Union under the 11th EDF COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), the strategy is aligned with both COMESA’s Industrialization Policy and the goals of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It focuses on key pillars including access to finance, policy enhancement, sustainable production, trade promotion, and industry clustering.

The successful implementation of this strategy will rely heavily on coordinated efforts among governments, the private sector, development partners, and regional institutions.

The official launch took place in Nairobi, Kenya on March 28, 2025, drawing a wide range of stakeholders from across the leather industry. Keynote addresses were delivered by COMESA Secretary General

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**“This strategy aims to create jobs, increase value addition, and reduce our reliance on imports by fully utilizing the 42 million hides and skins produced in the region each year,” Dr. Juma Mukhwana**

Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and Dr. Juma Mukhwana, Principal Secretary of the State Department of Industry in Kenya’s Ministry of Investment, Trade, and Industry. Kapwepwe emphasized the strategy’s goal of reversing the region’s dependence on raw material exports.

“The strategy seeks to unlock the potential of the regional leather sector,” she stated.

“Member States must adopt procurement policies that prioritize locally produced leather footwear, especially for uniformed service personnel. This will help create a guaranteed market for local manufacturers and stimulate private sector investment in leather processing and manufacturing.” Despite an annual demand of approximately 544 million pairs of footwear, the COMESA region remains heavily import-dependent, with imports valued at around USD 1.1 billion

# COMESA, AMDA, and World Bank Convene the 8th Mini Grid Action Learning Event



Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe (R) with Zambia's Minister of Energy, Hon. Makocho Chikote (2nd right) and World Bank Country Manager, Achim Fock (3rd right) during the opening ceremony of the 8th Mini grid action learning event in Lusaka

Distributed renewable energy solutions, such as mini grids, are essential for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, which aims for universal access to electricity by 2030.

To bridge the energy access gap, approximately 39 million people will need to be electrified with mini grids between 2024 and 2030. Despite advancements in mini-grid technology, which has connected around 48 million people as of 2022, several challenges remain. These include a lack of affordable financing, insufficient regulation, and inadequate focus on demand stimulation.

As a way of bridging the gap, COMESA, in collaboration with the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), the Africa Minigrad Development Association (AMDA), the Government of Zambia hosted the 8th Mini Grid Action Learning Event from April 1 to 3, 2025, in Lusaka, Zambia.

The three-day event gathered stakeholders from the mini-grid sector, including governments, developers, financiers, partners, and industry associations, to accelerate mini-grid deployment and address the challenges associated with

energy access and provide networking opportunities with leading players in the sector.

The conference was officially opened by Zambia's Minister of Energy, Hon. Makocho Chikote. COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and the World Bank Country Manager Achim Fock who also addressed the delegates.

Minister Chikote highlighted the significant progress in electricity access in Zambia, stating, "Access to electricity in Zambia has increased from 30% in 2017 to nearly 50% currently, with half of the population connected to the grid. The remaining half still requires new energy solutions."

"Our target is to have at least 200 solar mini-grids operational by 2030, ensuring that every rural district in Zambia has access to clean, affordable, and reliable

electricity," Hon Chikote stated.

Zambia currently relies on hydropower for 80% of its electricity generation, but recent droughts have shown the limitations of this energy source. Solar home systems and mini grids have the potential to reach 8.5 million Zambians currently without electricity. However, developers are facing technical and financial obstacles.

World Bank Country Manager Achim Fock indicated that the Bank is partnering with the African Development Bank and other partners on Mission 300, an ambitious initiative to connect 300 million people to electricity in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030 and accelerate development and poverty reduction.

"Energy access changes people's lives. It improves health and quality of life and

➡ page 4

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**"For the COMESA region, this capacity building is being delivered through the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF), the Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern and Southern Africa (IDEA), and the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) programmes," Chileshe Kapwepwe**



# COMESA Unveils Leather Strategy...



Delegates at the the Launch of the Leather Value Chain Strategy in Nairobi, Kenya

per year.

Dr. Mukhwana echoed the call for regional integration, urging Member States to strengthen trade ties, remove internal trade barriers, and focus on value addition.

“This strategy aims to create jobs, increase value addition, and reduce our reliance on imports by fully utilizing the 42 million hides and skins produced in the region each year,” he noted.

The livestock sector is a major economic driver in COMESA, supporting millions of livelihoods. The region accounts for approximately 11% of the world’s cattle population, 12% of sheep, and 18% of goats. As a global supplier of raw leather materials, COMESA contributes over 42 million hides and skins annually, which represents 34.3% of Africa’s total production. However, much of this potential remains untapped due to limited processing infrastructure and restricted market access.

ALLPI, a specialized COMESA institution, plays a central role in developing the leather sector. It works closely with ten Member States—Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Zambia,



Top: Panelist of the leather dialogue prior to the launch  
Bottom: Secretary General interviews with members of the media



and Zimbabwe—and has also extended consultancy services to additional countries, including Djibouti, Eswatini, Madagascar,

Egypt, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

**Event Photos:** <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjC76a2>

## \$25 Million Project Preparation Facility Earmarked to Accelerate Clean Energy Investments Across Africa



ASCENT Programme Coordinator Dr. Malama Chileshe speaking during the 8th Mini grid event in Lusaka, Zambia

The Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Programme has earmarked \$25 million for the establishment of a Project Preparation Facility (PPF) aimed at supporting governments and private sector players in developing bankable, investment-ready energy projects through a demand-driven approach.

Speaking at the 8th Mini Grid Action Learning Event, held in Lusaka from 1-3 April 2025, ASCENT Programme Coordinator Dr. Malama Chileshe highlighted that the PPF will provide crucial assistance to national agencies in designing and implementing energy access initiatives.

In addition to national-level support, the facility will promote cross-border energy solutions, helping identify and facilitate regional projects such as grid interconnections, on-grid and distributed renewable energy systems, and clean cooking technologies—particularly in border regions where energy access remains limited.

“The PPF will be instrumental in accelerating access to finance by reducing the time needed to reach financial close,” said Dr. Malama. “It will also equip companies with tools and market intelligence to expand into new markets,

enhance business performance, and build a pipeline of investable businesses with strong returns and tangible impact.”

The PPF will make publicly available a range of resources, including: geospatial planning platforms, country briefs tailored for digital renewable energy and clean cooking ventures, matchmaking services linking suppliers and distributors in high-potential markets and a roster of technical experts to provide direct advisory support. In addition, ASCENT will offer grants for project preparation and business development services, particularly for activities not covered by the expert roster—such as software integration or hiring key personnel essential for unlocking investments.

The initiative is a key component of the \$50 million Regional Energy Access Acceleration Platform being implemented by COMESA, which supports all participating countries under the ASCENT Multiphase Programmatic Approach. “We will also provide technical assistance through expert advisory services or technical assistance grants,” Dr. Malama added. “Early-stage companies will receive targeted support through industry associations and other PPF-supported programs.”

The expected outcomes of the PPF include at least 30 companies reaching financial close, over 200 companies supported in their journey toward investment-readiness and widespread access to technical and business support through the expert roster and technical assistance grants. In addition to the PPF, COMESA is also establishing an Advisory Support Facility (ASF), which will deliver public sector-focused advisory services. The ASF will address key policy and regulatory issues in areas such as electrification, clean cooking, digitalization, and climate and carbon finance.

## COMESA, AMDA, and World Bank convene 8th mini-grid....

helps create jobs and livelihoods that lift people out of poverty,” said Mr. Fock.

Secretary General Kapwepwe emphasized the need to strengthen government capacity, helping governments establish clear policies for enabling private sector participation in mini grid development.

“For the COMESA region, this capacity building is being delivered through the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF), the Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern and Southern Africa (IDEA), and the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) programmes,” she said.

Ms. Kapwepwe also addressed the high transaction costs incurred by private sector investors due to due diligence for single mini grid sites.

“To remove this barrier, I would like to encourage governments to design regulations that allow private sector investors to bid for portfolios of mini grid sites and for governments to give private sector investors extended license durations to improve mini grid bankability,” she stated.

She further encouraged governments to ensure that permit and license durations align with private sector investors’ financing agreements, typically 10 to 25 years, to increase mini grid project viability.

She added that through the ASCENT Program, COMESA will be able to provide targeted technical assistance to energy access activities in general and specifically to mini grids, as well as to both the public and private sectors.



# COMESA - EU Council of Africa Confer on Integration Programmes



*Africa Working Party from the Council of the European Union with COMESA team*

On Friday 4 April 2025, a team representing the Africa Working Party from the Council of the European Union (COAFR) held productive discussions with management at COMESA Secretariat on various regional integration programmes currently being implemented in the 21 Member States.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe who led the COMESA team emphasised the significance of these discussions at a critical time when the

region was navigating the evolving development landscape. She underscored the Africa Working Party's important role in shaping EU-Africa relations, particularly in defining the EU's policies, strategies and diplomatic engagement.

"We deeply appreciate the opportunity to meet, to discuss ways and means of strengthening our partnership and explore new avenues of cooperation to achieve our shared objectives," Ms Kapwepwe said.

Speaking at the same function, the EU Head of Delegation to Zambia and COMESA, H.E. Ambassador Karolina Stasiak, emphasized the enduring partnership between COMESA and the EU, both in the pursuit of integration, peace, and economic development. She affirmed the EU's support for COMESA's regional integration initiatives.

**Event Photos:** <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjC7HO2>



Burundi President Evariste Ndayishimiye (L), who is the current chairperson of COMESA receives COMESA Secretary Chileshe Kapwepwe on 27 March 2025 in Bujumbura. The SG was Burundi to brief the President on the COMESA work programme for the 2025 and related matters on regional integration. Looking on is the Minister for External Affairs and Development Cooperation Ambassador Albert Shingiro.

# New Strategy to Deepen Canada - COMESA Ties



Canadian High Commissioner to Zambia, Her Excellency Emily Burns presenting her credential to Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is set to deepen its partnership with Canada following the launch of Canada's Africa Strategy 2025, titled "A Partnership for Shared Prosperity and Security." This new strategy signals a significant step toward stronger economic collaboration, enhanced peace and security initiatives, and increased engagement with African diaspora communities in Canada.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe highlighted this development while receiving credentials from the Canadian High Commissioner to Zambia, Her Excellency Emily Burns, at COMESA Headquarters in Lusaka on April 2, 2025. The Africa Strategy 2025 reflects Canada's commitment to diversifying investments, improving supply chain resilience, and advancing global peace, security, and human rights.

Speaking on the partnership, Secretary General Kapwepwe emphasized the importance of strengthening economic

and national security ties, especially amid global economic and geopolitical uncertainties.

Ambassador Burns reaffirmed Canada's focus on economic diplomacy, aimed at fostering resilient trade and investment relations that benefit both Canada and Africa. She noted that, by the end of 2024, Canada had committed over USD 54 million to Africa to support key initiatives in peace and security, good governance, and trade enhancement.

"We are committed to strengthening the institutional capacity of Africa's regional economic blocs, particularly COMESA," Ambassador Burns stated. She announced the recent launch of a USD 9.7 million, five-year trade project designed to support small-scale cross-border trade.

This initiative will specifically aid the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) women and youth protocols, with a focus on COMESA member states, including Zambia, Mozambique, and

the Democratic Republic of Congo. Highlighting the growing trade ties between Canada and Africa, she noted that Canada's trade with the continent grew by 30% in 2024, reaching USD 15 billion.

"This growth positions Canada to further support businesses investing in Africa, particularly in sectors like mining, while ensuring local communities' benefit from these investments," she added.

With the launch of this strategy, Canada and COMESA are poised to build a stronger, more resilient economic partnership, driving sustainable growth and prosperity across the region.

**Event Photos:** <https://fiic.kr/s/aHBqjC7yxR>

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**"We are committed to strengthening the institutional capacity of Africa's regional economic blocs, particularly COMESA," Ambassador Emily Burns**



# COMESA Central Banks Embrace Data Science to Strengthen Financial Stability



*Regional Central Banks' staff attending CMI training in Nairobi, Kenya*

Regional central banks can significantly enhance their ability to assess risks, identify financial system vulnerabilities, and anticipate potential disruptions by leveraging advanced data analytics and statistical modeling.

To realize this potential, staff involved in the financial stability function within regional banks must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to apply data science techniques effectively. In recognition of this need among COMESA Member States' central banks, the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) organized a training workshop titled "Applications of Data Science for Analysis of Financial Stability". The training took place from 24–28 March 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The primary objective of the workshop was to empower participants with practical tools for monitoring systemic risks and making informed, data-driven decisions to safeguard financial stability.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, Director of CMI, emphasized the value of data science tools in helping COMESA central banks extract meaningful insights from diverse data sets. He noted that these tools can improve data handling, modeling, forecasting, and interpretation—particularly in assessing vulnerabilities that may threaten financial stability.

"The techniques can also support other tasks relevant to financial stability, including payment systems analysis, consumer risk

assessment, financial inclusion monitoring, and anti-money laundering efforts," Dr. Njoroge added.

Delegates from nine COMESA member states—Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia—participated in the training. The program featured hands-on exercises using programming languages commonly applied in data science and analytics. Participants also exchanged insights on their respective countries' experiences in applying data science to analyze financial stability, fostering a collaborative learning environment across the region.

# Deepening Cooperation with UNIDO



*Ms. Haidara Fatou (L) meets COMESA Secretary General*

A delegation from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), led by Ms. Haidara Fatou, Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director of Global Partnerships and External Relations, visited COMESA on 3 April 2025 for bilateral discussions.

The visit focused on deepening cooperation across ongoing initiatives, notably the €40 million Trade, Competitiveness, and Market Access Programme, funded by the European

Union under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and launched in July 2024.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe welcomed the delegation and highlighted key efforts, including the promotion of local pharmaceutical production and the development of a Green Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Strategy and Business Plan, supported by the AfDB-funded COMESA Towards

Regional Pharmaceutical Sector Development Project.

She reaffirmed COMESA's commitment to enhanced cooperation with UNIDO and thanked the organization for its continued technical and financial support in driving industrialization across the region.

Ms. Fatou echoed the importance of deeper collaboration to improve the region's economic landscape.

**Event Photos:** <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjC7KnM>

## COMESA- ASCENT Trains Staff on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Social Safeguards

Over 40 COMESA staff participated in a three-day training on the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) and the prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH), held in Lusaka from 26–28 March 2025.

Organized under the Accelerating Sustainable & Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Programme, the training aimed to equip participants with the skills to prevent, mitigate, and respond to SEAH and other forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), while enhancing awareness

of environmental and social standards.

Participants came from various COMESA divisions, including units implementing World Bank-funded projects such as the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project, the Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility, the Inclusive Digitalization Programme, and ASCENT.

Opening the session on behalf of the Director of Human Resource and Administration, Dr. Alick Mhizha emphasized

the importance of aligning with global best practices: "By training staff on the ESF and ESS, COMESA can better manage environmental and social risks, ultimately improving development outcomes and protecting communities and ecosystems."

The training is part of ASCENT's broader capacity-building initiative, reinforcing COMESA's commitment to creating safe, respectful environments throughout its project implementations.





COMESA staff and Zambia youth meeting to commemorate the national youth day

# COMESA's Youth engagement Forum

On Tuesday, April 1, 2025, COMESA hosted a youth engagement event at its secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia; a gathering that brought together young people from colleges, universities, volunteer groups, and youth-focused organizations in commemoration of Zambia's Youth Day.

The COMESA Youth Talk event served as a platform to engage young people on economic empowerment, trade facilitation, and leadership development. Through this initiative, COMESA reaffirmed its commitment to creating an enabling environment where youth can harness their skills, contribute to economic development, and drive sustainable growth across the region.

With a population of approximately 670 million, the COMESA region presents vast opportunities for market creation. However, its success depends on the active involvement of all stakeholders—especially the youth.

Welcoming the participants, COMESA

executives emphasized the transformative role of education in unlocking opportunities for young people.

COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe, highlighted the power of education in shaping futures:

"Education is what makes the difference between potential achievement and limitations," she stated, urging young people to pursue their aspirations with confidence, as self-belief is crucial for professional growth.

Dr. Dev Haman, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance, encouraged university students to take advantage of research opportunities through the COMESA Annual Research Forum. He also urged young entrepreneurs, particularly those in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), to explore support mechanisms available through the COMESA Business Council.

He stressed the importance of leveraging

platforms such as the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime, which facilitates trade for small-scale cross-border traders.

"We possess abundant resources, particularly critical minerals, which are exported and transformed into finished products abroad before being sold back to us," Dr. Haman noted. "By relinquishing these resources without value addition, we are actually surrendering employment opportunities for our people."

The event underscored the role of young people in shaping the future of the region's economy. By equipping them with the right knowledge, skills, and opportunities, COMESA aims to foster a generation of leaders who will drive Africa's economic transformation.



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