

New US Tariffs Expected to Impact Trade for Eight COMESA Countries

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Eight COMESA countries are expected to face significant trade challenges due to new reciprocal tariffs imposed by the United States government. According to a policy brief by COMESA's Division of Trade and Customs, the tariffs could lead to substantial reductions in trade volumes for affected countries in 2025, despite the U.S. not being a primary trading partner for the region.

The countries projected to endure the heaviest impacts include the Democratic Republic of Congo (11% US Tariff), Libya (31%), Madagascar (47%), Malawi (17%), Mauritius (40%), Tunisia (28%), Zambia (17%), and Zimbabwe (18%). The tariffs are expected to cause supply and demand shocks across these states, raising production costs and consumer prices in the U.S. and leading to a contraction in economic demand for exports from the COMESA region.

Key commodities such as Kenyan textiles

and Zambian copper may see inflated costs in U.S. markets, while imports from the U.S. will also become pricier. Trade data from 2019 to 2023 shows that COMESA's share of exports to the U.S. was 3-4%, and imports were at 4-5%.

Dr. Christopher Onyango, the Director of Trade and Customs, pointed out that the new tariffs undermine the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), established in 2000 to provide zero-tariff access to many African products. This raises fears of production cuts and job losses in African nations participating in AGOA, which currently includes 35 qualifying countries, 10 of which are COMESA members.

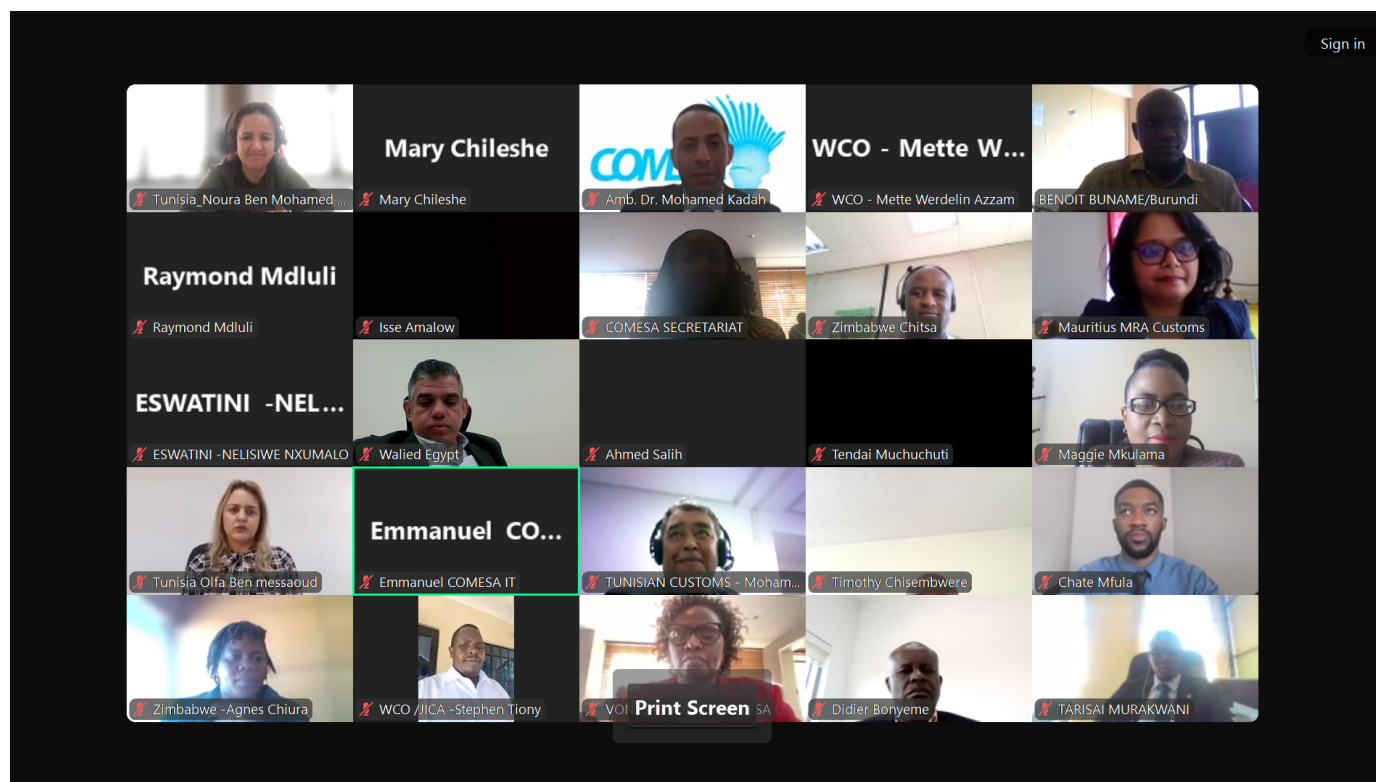
There are also rising concerns about retaliatory trade measures from major partners like China and the European Union, which could worsen the situation for COMESA countries, as they account for

24-40% of COMESA's exports and 9-13% of imports.

The policy brief recommends adopting a variable cooperative game strategy, urging open negotiations and binding agreements with other global partners like the EU, China, and India to mitigate trade disruptions. The African Union Commission is encouraged to engage with the U.S. on the implications of these tariff policies, while also calling for stronger intra-African trade through regional economic integration and infrastructure investments.

The COMESA Secretariat is committed to advocating member states' interests, aiming to bolster economic resilience and support sustainable industrial development across the region amidst these emerging trade challenges.

COMESA Holds Regional Workshop on Cumulation of Origin



A Joint COMESA – World Customs Organisation virtual regional workshop was held from Tuesday April 22 – 24 to review the application of Cumulation of Origin protocols between the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the COMESA Free Trade Area.

The three-day event enabled the experts examine cumulation provisions and consolidate all the issues (on cumulation) for further consideration by the COMESA Technical Working Group on Rules of Origin (COMESA TWG).

This emanated from the 18th meeting of the COMESA TWG on Rules of Origin held on 4 - 6 December 2024 which considered the proposed amendments to the COMESA Rules of Origin and agreed that the AfCFTA Secretariat should make a presentation on the proposal to extend the COMESA FTA cumulation provision to the AfCFTA on a reciprocal basis.

Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah opened the meeting and commended the WCO for their ongoing support under the European Union-WCO Rules of Origin Africa Programme.

He called for the need to rationalise the COMESA Rules of Origin to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness in fostering sustainable trade and development amid the emerging developments and new realities on the continent brought by the Tripartite Free Trade Area and the AfCFTA.

Dr Kadah pointed out that a mutual understanding on harmonizing rules of origin can address the challenges of overlapping trade agreements and enable industries across the continent to maximize their potential by tapping into wider ranges of regional/continental resources and markets.

"It is, therefore, imperative to identify pathways for collaboration and cooperation while considering the unique sensitivities and

needs of our Member States," Amb. Dr. Kadah stated.

The meeting was urged to keep the discussions rooted in the aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063 "The Africa We Want" as they explore the technical aspects of inter-REC cumulation of origin.

Recommendations from the workshop will be submitted to the 19th meeting of the TWG on Rules of Origin which is scheduled to be held on 13 - 16 May 2025 for consideration and further discussion.

Ms Mette Azam Lead Origin Expert, EU-WCO Rules of Origin African Programme spoke on behalf of the WCO and Mr Mohamed Ali, Director of Trade in Goods and Competition represented the AfCFTA Secretariat.



India and COMESA Reaffirm Relations

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Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe receiving the letter of credency from His Excellency Shri Alok Ranjan Jha

COMESA Secretariat and the Government of India have committed to strengthen relations by opening up new channels of trade, support and collaboration through a renewed Memorandum of Understanding replacing the one signed in 2003.

This move is expected to help boost trade levels between India and COMESA Member States which stood at US\$ 18 billion in 2023-2024, way below its true potential.

This came to light in Lusaka on Thursday 24 April when India's High Commissioner to Zambia His Excellency Shri Alok Ranjan Jha presented his Letter of Credence as Special Representative to COMESA.

Speaking on the partnership, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe emphasized the importance of strengthening India's longstanding partnership with the COMESA region and the African continent at large. "We deeply value the relationship we

have fostered over the years. As one of the major global actors, India has a rich history of economic innovation, democratic institutions and international cooperation." The Secretary General acknowledged India's support in the past pointing out that they supplied over 19% of COMESA's pharmaceutical imports during the COVID-19 pandemic and ranked as the third-largest import source in 2023.

She appreciated India's collaboration through initiatives like the India-Africa Forum Summit, South-South Cooperation frameworks, capacity-building programs, and investments in technology and healthcare.

The SG expressed eagerness to finalize a new agreement aimed at enhancing collaboration in various sectors, including information and communication technology (ICT), energy, science and technology, and productive integration. High Commissioner Jha commended COMESA for remaining committed

to addressing its Member States' structural and institutional weaknesses and promoting political stability, which is essential for sustained economic development.

He added that India views COMESA as a crucial institution for strengthening commercial ties and Indian corporate firms are encouraged to participate in infrastructure projects and establish manufacturing facilities for products like agricultural equipment, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and processed food for consumption within COMESA and other African states.

Special Representative Jha committed to enhance the India-COMESA engagement through various well-established channels such as the Indian chambers of commerce and industry or thematic mechanisms such as Joint Study Groups set up to examine specific aspects of the engagement.

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50MAWSP implementing RECs hold coordination meeting



COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) implementing the 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform met 24-25 April in Arusha, Tanzania to review progress of the initiative and make recommendations on how to take it forward.

The two-day meeting was the latest RECs coordination meeting where COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS executive management received a report on overall progress of implementation. The meeting also agreed to undertake a study for the 50MAWSP's long-term sustainability as well as key activities which the RECs will jointly implement in 2025. Stakeholders/users who were invited to the meeting were also able to provide feedback and recommendations on areas for improvement.

The EAC Secretary General Hon. Veronica Nduva opened the meeting and noted that the 50MAWS platform can help redress various unique challenges they face. "Women make up a significant portion of our small business sector but often encounter greater barriers to scaling and exporting. If we can remove these barriers, imagine what we could achieve—economically, socially, and

regionally.

"That is why women's economic empowerment is not an add-on. It is at the core of our development strategy. Studies globally show that when women are economically empowered, they reinvest more into families, health, and education. Empowering women is not only the right thing to do—it is the smart thing to do," the EAC Secretary General said.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman challenged women to make the most of the platform to transform their economic fortunes while urging the implementing partners to devise means to sustain the platform.

"Deliberating the future of this initiative is the reason we are here and I implore you to bring to the fore your best ideas on how to make this platform self-sustaining. I am pleased to report that COMESA has mobilized resources and commissioned a study that will culminate in the development of a 50 Million African Women Speak sustainability strategy," Dr Haman said.

Representing the Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, ECOWAS

head of delegation Ms Salimata Thiam voiced her institution's continued commitment to 50MAWSP, citing its critical role in supporting women economic empowerment.

"The ECOWAS Commission is fully committed to this dynamic platform. Concrete steps to honor our commitment under the agreement to co-finance the platform's operations have already been taken. And we will continue to work with all our partners to create a stronger digital ecosystem, serving the continent's women," she said.

Also present at the meeting were representatives of the East African Women in Business platform, as well as national focal points from various Member/Partner states of the three RECs.

Launched in 2019, the 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform has served more than 700,000 users to date, providing business information resources on starting and growing a business, access to markets, credit and training for women across 37 African countries. It is accessible via web at www.womenconnect.org



COMESA Pushes for Gender-Sensitive Trade Policies at Kasumbalesa Public-Private Dialogue

COMESA Secretariat, in collaboration with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility, organized a Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) workshop at the Kasumbalesa border between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zambia. This workshop marked the fourth and final edition of a series of dialogues aimed at economically empowering women and advocating gender-responsive trade policies throughout the region.

The series, which included workshops at the Busia, Chirundu, Mwami and Kasumbalesa borders, focused on enhancing women's active participation in regional economic activities by improving trade facilitation. By engaging both public and private stakeholders, the workshops aimed to raise awareness about gender-sensitive trade policies and promote the adoption of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR). Additionally, the dialogues emphasized advancing the COMESA Gender Policy and the Protection of Small Cross-Border Traders.

These dialogues were also designed to strengthen public-private partnerships by fostering cooperation between border authorities, government ministries, and women's business associations, thus creating a more inclusive environment for women traders. One of the key objectives was to address gender-based violence (GBV) in

cross-border trade, with discussions focusing on identifying risks and establishing effective prevention and response mechanisms. Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA, emphasized the significance of the workshop, stating:

"This workshop is part of the COMESA Gender Policy, which views gender equality as a key driver of economic development." She also highlighted that the workshop supports the implementation of COMESA's trade instruments, such as the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) and the Digital Trade Facilitation Program, noting: "These instruments are designed to make cross-border trade more accessible and efficient for all, including women and youth traders."

In her welcome speech, Ms Ruth Muchimba, a Customs Examiner at the Zambian Revenue Authority at Kasumbalesa, remarked: "We hope COMESA will push the agenda for implementing the STR and explore ways to empower all women. As we seek to improve trade facilitation, strengthen regulatory frameworks and unlock opportunities for SMEs, youth, and women entrepreneurs, it is crucial to enhance collaboration between policymakers and the private sector. A harmonized approach will not only reduce trade barriers but also create a more competitive and inclusive regional market."

Mr Numbi Kitwa, a representative from the Directorate General of Migration in the DRC, said: "Women are always at the heart of our activities, and they must not remain vulnerable. They must be fully integrated into the economy, including those involved in cross-border trade."

COMESA and the ICR Facility are committed to promoting gender equality through promotion of the implementation of gender-responsive trade facilitation instruments and addressing gender specific barriers to trade. This workshop represented a significant step toward fostering gender equality in trade and creating an inclusive economic environment for women across the COMESA region. Through ongoing dialogue and collaboration, COMESA continues to work towards empowering women and strengthening cross-border trade policies that promote equality and economic growth.

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.



The COMESA Secretariat Stand at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair 2025 in Bulawayo

COMESA at the 65th Zimbabwe International Trade Fair

To strengthen engagement and information sharing with stakeholders across the region, the COMESA Secretariat participated in the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair in Bulawayo from 21 – 26 April 2025, whose theme was "Industrialisation and Economic Integration: Strengthening Africa's Resilience."

The COMESA information booth was a bustling hub of activity, attracting visitors from the business community, academia, government and ordinary citizens. Attendees were eager to learn about COMESA programmes and gain insights into Zimbabwe's progress in regional integration initiatives.

Key topics of interest included how to access the COMESA market, deepen intra-COMESA trade, and promote the sustainability of the regional integration programmes.

The fair had different side events which included the Connect Africa Symposium – where COMESA participated on a panel discussion on Strengthening Regional Frameworks for Sustainable Development

and Economic Integration.

Trade Officer at COMESA Secretariat Ms Bonakele Ndzinisa represented the organisation on the panel and discussed in detail the different regional integration programmes while highlighting the Secretariat's role in coordinating policies for sustainable economic integration.

"For the COMESA region, trade is a vital driver of economic growth, income enhancement, and empowerment. We are committed to fostering these connections and facilitating continuous development within our member states," Ms Ndzinisa added.

Over the years, Zimbabwe has received assistance aimed at facilitating trade, which includes signing of the European Union funded sub-delegation agreement with the COMESA Secretariat for the upgrade of the Chirundu Border Post valued at €4,099,682. As a result of this collaboration, the Chirundu Border Post now boasts modernized ICT infrastructure, completed road carriageway markings, refurbished cold storage facilities, partitioned office spaces, and information

screens.

COMESA has also aided Zimbabwe in acquiring essential equipment to bolster both domestic and international trade.

This includes metrology tools, such as rapid testing kits and other measurement equipment, valued at approximately €227,526, provided through the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme. With these tools, Zimbabwe aims to improve cargo tracking, minimize revenue loss from transit fraud, enhance border security with CCTV systems, and reduce errors by border agencies and clearing agents, ultimately leading to faster clearance times.

Added to this is the support through the Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative and in the elimination of non-tariff barriers. Other staff servicing the ZITF 2025 included Mr Benjamin Masila Head of the Information Resources Unit Mr. Benjamin Masila and Muzinge Nampito from the Corporate Communications Unit.



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signing the Book of Condolences for the late Pope Francis at the Vatican Embassy (The Holy See) in Lusaka on Friday, April 25th, 2025.

COMESA Diary

Date	Activity	Venue
5 – 9 May	COMESA Week	Ethiopia
5 – 6 May	COMESA Institutions Awareness Forum	Addis Ababa
7 – 9 May	6 th COMFWB Trade Fair, Business Conference & Gala Dinner	Addis Ababa



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