

# COMESA NEWS



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## COMESA Marks 30 Years of Regional Integration

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- COMESA Summit in Burundi
- Steps Towards Establishing the First Continental Cloud Ecosystem in Africa



# Editorial



## Reflection on COMESA's Three Decades

As we commemorate 30 years since our transformation from the Preferential Trade Area in December 2004, it is essential to reflect on how far we have come. Over the past three decades, COMESA has established itself as the leading economic bloc for trade development and

investment, leveraging a robust suite of trade facilitation instruments. Our institutions have grown beyond the bloc, earning continental and global recognition with top ratings. Intra-COMESA trade, though modest, has significantly increased—from US\$1.5 billion in 2000, when the Free Trade Area was established, to US\$14 billion today. This growth underscores the bloc's pivotal role in fostering economic collaboration and sustainable development. Programs such as the Simplified Trade Regime have empowered thousands of small-scale cross-border traders, while ongoing efforts to address Non-Tariff Barriers and modernize border infrastructure have enhanced trade efficiency and global competitiveness. Beyond trade, COMESA's impact extends to financial and legal integration. The establishment of 12 specialized institutions and a regional court highlights our commitment to strengthening Africa's economic landscape and bolstering investor confidence.

However, challenges remain. The slow pace of signing and ratifying essential legal instruments continues to hinder the full realization of regional integration benefits. To unlock COMESA's full potential, it is imperative that Member States accelerate the implementation of these instruments.

The progress achieved over the years would not have been possible without strategic partnerships with, among others, the European Union, African Development Bank, the World Bank and our sister Regional Economic Communities, led by the African Union. Looking ahead, a renewed commitment to cooperation and trade will be key to shaping a resilient and prosperous future for Africa, Growing Together for Prosperity!

*Mwangi G*

## 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  
Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute  
COMESA Federation of Women in Business

### 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

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L-R: Hon. Rhodine Sikumba, Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya, SG. Chileshe Kapwepwe and Amb. Erastus Mwencha

# COMESA Marks 30 Years of Regional Integration

## Celebrating Milestones and Charting the Future

COMESA celebrated its 30th anniversary together with the 45th Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Lusaka, Zambia, on Thursday, 28 November 2024. The commemorative events underscored the organization's remarkable achievements and its forward-looking vision for fostering regional integration and economic growth.

Zambia's Vice President, Mutale Nalumango, presided over the Council of Ministers meeting, while Burundi's Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry & Tourism, H.E. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, the current Chairperson of the COMESA Council, led the anniversary celebrations.

The festivities began on 27 November

2024 with a panel discussion featuring heads of 12 COMESA specialized institutions alongside former Secretaries General—Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya—and the current Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

**“This milestone signifies COMESA’s relevance, endurance, and commitment to fostering the regional integration agenda to contribute towards the development of the Africa we want,”**  
**Mutale Nalumango**

Addressing the Council, Vice President Nalumango acknowledged COMESA's significant progress in advancing regional integration and economic development. She emphasized the importance of further efforts in value addition and underscored the critical role of frameworks for trade facilitation, digital transformation and gender inclusion in driving shared goals.

Key milestones highlighted include the development of innovative trade facilitation tools such as the regional customs guarantee scheme and the yellow card system, which have set benchmarks across the continent.

Over the last 30 years, intra-COMESA trade has steadily grown, reaching \$14

*Continued to page 3*



30 YEARS OF  
COMESA IMPACT



## REGIONAL LAUNCH OF PILOT IMPLEMENTATION OF COMESA ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN (E-CO)

**E-CO TO FACILITATE SECURE INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE UNDER  
COMESA FREE TRADE AREA (FTA)**

- ✓ Simple and Secure
- ✓ Online Application Process
- ✓ Online Issuance Process
- ✓ Online Exchange of Documents
- ✓ Online Verification of Certificate of origin



<https://eco.comesa.int>



 Lusaka, Zambia

 Funded by the  
European Union

 27th November 2024

# COMESA Launches Electronic Certificate of Origin

The COMESA Secretariat has unveiled the pilot phase of the COMESA Certificate of Origin (e-CO), a digital alternative to the traditional manual certificates often plagued by bureaucratic and security challenges. This initiative underscores COMESA's commitment to leveraging technology for trade facilitation.

The e-CO platform offers a streamlined, secure and fully online process for applying, issuing, exchanging, and verifying certificates of origin. Supported by the European Union through the EDF 11 Trade Facilitation Programme, the concept was approved by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2014 as a key tool for boosting trade across the region.

The launch of the e-CO was officiated by Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, Chairperson of the COMESA Council of Ministers and Burundi's Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry & Tourism, during COMESA's 30th-anniversary celebrations

in Lusaka, Zambia, on November 27, 2024. Ms. Nijimbere commended the Secretariat for its technical and financial support to Member States, made possible through partnerships with development partners like the European Union.

To prepare for the implementation, COMESA conducted training sessions on the e-CO system and Rules of Origin for 405 public and private sector officials from Eswatini, Malawi, and Zambia. These include representatives from customs authorities, traders, exporters, importers, and trade associations.

"As we celebrate 30 years of COMESA's impact, I am honored to launch this transformative digital tool," Ms. Nijimbere remarked. She highlighted the successful development of national e-CO systems in Eswatini, Malawi, and Zambia as part of the pilot phase. Eswatini, notably, became the first Member State to launch its e-CO system on November 7, 2024.

COMESA has also provided essential ICT equipment, such as servers, laptops, and software, to facilitate the system's operation in Member States. Ms. Nijimbere urged other nations, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe, to expedite their system integrations, as they are already in advanced stages.



Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere



# COMESA Marks 30 Years..



L-R: COMESA Secretary-General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Zambia's Vice President, Mutale Nalumango and Burundi's Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry, and Tourism, Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere (far right)

EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area, which came into effect in July 2024. Madam Nalumango emphasized the need for innovative solutions, cross-border policy harmonization and strengthened partnerships to ensure a prosperous future for the region.



COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, highlighted ongoing efforts to enhance efficiency in cross-border trade through automation of customs operations, digitalization of procedures, and improved coordination among border agencies. She also noted initiatives aimed at strengthening regional agri-food systems, reducing post-harvest losses, ensuring food safety, and fostering agricultural commodity exchanges.



Zambia's Vice President, Mutale Nalumango

Looking to the future, Vice President Nalumango called for a greater focus on climate-resilient technologies and strategies to combat the adverse effects of climate change, including droughts, floods, and extreme weather patterns. She stressed the need for solutions to safeguard food security, promote socio-economic stability, and create jobs, especially for the region's youth.

"This milestone signifies COMESA's relevance, endurance, and commitment to fostering the regional integration agenda to contribute towards the development of the Africa we want," she stated.

She also commended the progress made in operationalizing the COMESA-

Ms. Petra Gasporova, Deputy Head of Delegation for the EU Zambia Office, reaffirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to supporting COMESA. She lauded the operationalization of the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement as a pivotal achievement and underscored COMESA's vital role in driving Africa's integration agenda.

As COMESA celebrates 30 years of progress, the focus remains on leveraging past successes to address emerging challenges. The organization continues to prioritize its mission of creating a prosperous, integrated and sustainable Africa while maintaining its position as a leading force in regional economic development.

*Continued from page 1*

billion. Additionally, the combined GDP of Member States has expanded from \$90 billion in 1994 to an impressive \$1.13 trillion in 2024, representing one-third of Africa's total GDP.

# Burundi, DR Congo Launch Implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime



*Burundi's Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry, and Tourism, Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere and DRC's Minister of Foreign Trade, H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya signing the implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime*

Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed and launched the implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) at their joint border of Gatumba-Kavimvira, on 30 October 2024.

Burundi Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry and Tourism Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere and DR Congo Minister of Foreign Trade H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya presided over the ceremony which marked the onset of robust small scale cross border trade amongst the two COMESA states.

The STR programme was initiated by COMESA to help increase trade by small-scale cross-border traders dealing in small quantities of goods. The programme aims at simplifying clearing procedures as well as reducing the cost of trading. This is by making it possible for the small-scale cross-border traders' goods to benefit from the removal of

customs duty (COMESA Preferential treatment) if those goods are on the Common Lists.

The two countries are among the eight countries which are benefiting from the implementation of the STR at border posts.

The commencement of the implementation of the STR by the two States is part of the activities being supported by the World Bank-funded Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Project for the Great Lakes Region of Eastern Africa, through COMESA.

Dr Mohammed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, congratulated the two countries, noting that small-scale traders who cross the borders with small consignment of goods are critical in fulfilling consumer demands across

various borders.

The event was attended by government officials from the two countries, local leaders, representatives of the World Bank and COMESA staff including Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman.



*Dr Mohammed Kadah*





Uganda Minister of State for ICT Hon. Joyce Nabbosa Ssebugwawo (4th right seated) with delegates participating at the high-level meeting on Africa Cloud Ecosystem project

## Steps Towards Establishing the First Continental Cloud Ecosystem in Africa

The first phase of the Africa Cloud Ecosystem (ACE) project, a groundbreaking initiative to create a reliable network of standard data centres across the African continent, has successfully concluded.

Funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) through the NEPAD-IPPF Special Fund, the project aims to provide affordable, reliable, and secure cloud services to critical sectors such as education, healthcare, government, agriculture, and the broader economy.

As part of the first phase, a comprehensive pre-investment study was conducted, analysing the market potential in 11 selected COMESA Member States. The selection criteria included ICT capabilities and each country's potential contribution to the project. The countries evaluated were the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

To disseminate the study's findings, a two-day high-level meeting was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, on 2 - 3 December 2024. This event reviewed and validated the pre-investment study report

and determined the host country for the ACE headquarters. The meeting had participation from Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and ICT experts representing the 11 nations.

Speaking at the opening session, Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of programs, emphasized the transformative potential of the ACE project. He described it as a cornerstone for developing a robust Africa-wide cloud ecosystem.

"We must harness all efforts to bridge the digital divide, catch up with the rest of the world, and ensure the well-being and prosperity of our people in this era of the 4th Industrial Revolution," Dr. Kadah stated.

The project seeks to address critical challenges, including inadequate ICT infrastructure, high costs of cloud hosting services, latency issues from accessing cloud services outside the continent, and the lack of power supply required to sustain local data centres.

AfDB Task Manager Mr. Omar Elmi Samatar highlighted the strategic importance of local data processing, noting that Africa currently accounts for

just 1% of the global data market.

"Without localizing data, we cannot talk about data sovereignty," he said.

The pre-investment study, conducted by CERFODES, a leading Africa-based, African-led, international consulting firm, involved field visits to national data centres and the collection of vital information to evaluate the project's feasibility. With the conclusion of this phase in December 2024, the ACE project now prepares for its second phase.

The upcoming phase will focus on implementing the structures recommended in the study across identified member states. This includes establishing operational frameworks, recruiting necessary staff, and adopting relevant legal instruments. These steps will lay the groundwork for the operationalization of the Africa Cloud Ecosystem, pending further funding mobilized by the African Development Bank.

The ACE project represents a significant leap towards modernizing Africa's ICT landscape, ensuring the continent can actively participate in and benefit from the global digital economy.



Dr Christopher Onyango

## Trade Policy Tools: the New Face of NTBs

The importance of eliminating non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) cannot be over emphasized, especially with the steady reduction of tariffs over the years. Besides, there is established evidence that NTBs are the main obstacles to free trade in the continent and beyond.

Trade experts in the COMESA region have therefore continued to monitor progress regarding the establishment of a sustainable framework for addressing NTBs. Recently, at the 4th COMESA Regional NTB Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 1 - 4 October, it was noted that most governments have reverted to imposition of measures that by and large restrict the free movement of goods and services.

These are undoubtedly NTBs disguised as trade policy tools to protect domestic economies. Resultantly, such measures disproportionately account for increasing portions of protectionist interventions.

As noted by the Director of Trade and Customs at COMESA, Dr Christopher Onyango during the meeting, the prevalence of reported and unreported

NTBs, most of which Member States have justified as measures necessary to regulate trade, have partly been responsible for the constrained levels of intra-regional trade.

"Hence the need for the establishment of the Regional NTBs Forum which would ensure effective implementation of the COMESA FTA trade regime," he said.

Through the COMESA Free Trade Area, intra-COMESA exports and imports reached US\$ 14,071 billion (7.5% of global exports) and US\$ 13,693 (5.2% of global imports), respectively in 2023. However, previous studies indicate the region has the potential to realize 100 billion intra-COMESA trade.

The NTB Forum is thus part of the institutional framework provided under the COMESA Regulations on NTBs Elimination, which is a legal instrument to administer elimination of NTBs across the bloc.

So far, COMESA has been working with trading partners in tackling NTBs and boosting trade facilitation. This is done

through collaboration with National Monitoring Committees and National Focal Points and with trading partners to identify specific NTBs that hinder bilateral or regional trade. This is in addition to harmonizing regulations, standards, and procedures across borders and encouraging the use of new innovations such as the Online System and the SMS tool.

Over the years COMESA has been doing well in reporting and resolution of NTBs, however in the last two years the figures for reported NTBs have declined drastically with only two out of the 16 outstanding (20%) NTBs reported in the period January – September 2024.

The type of most prevalent NTBs in COMESA has shifted from Rules of Origin to Additional Taxes and Other Charges and Transit issues. The biggest concerns now remain the un-reported NTBs, especially those related to standards and SPS measures.



# COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin Launched in Eswatini

Eswatini is the first COMESA Member State to launch a Pilot Implementation of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (E-CO). This transformative development is poised to be a game-changer in trade facilitation that will offer the customs authorities, a more robust system of certification verification, allowing for better control over goods entering and leaving respective countries.

The Certificates of Origin are issued to exporters within the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) to confer preferential treatment to goods originating from an FTA Member State. The eCO initiative is implemented by the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme funded by the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

COMESA e-CO will benefit both businesses and customs authorities including reduction in processing times and lower costs, enabling goods to move across borders more efficiently.

Eswatini Acting Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Hon Mangoba Khumalo and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, symbolically launched the e-CO at the Eswatini Revenue Services (ERS) offices on 7th November 2024 in the presence of Ambassador Designate and Head of the EU Delegation, Eswatini, Mr Karsten Mecklenburg.

During the launch, Kapwepwe also handed over 17 laptops to the ERS for use in the execution of the system.

Speaking during the ceremony the Acting Minister stated that the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin resonates well with the country's vision for the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap, which is "To transform Eswatini into a one-stop, paperless and climate-smart seamless trade hub with digitalized processes".

The COMESA e-CO replaces the traditional, paper-based Certificate of Origin, which the Minister said has served the Country well over the years.



*Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (2nd right) handing over laptops to the Acting Commissioner General, Eswatini Revenue Service, Mr. Gugu Mahlinza, during the launch of the COMESA e-CO in Eswatini*

"However, in today's digital age, the demand for a faster, more secure, and reliable system has grown exponentially. The eCO is designed to meet these demands by providing a digital platform that simplifies the certification process, minimizes paperwork, and reduces the time needed for verification and approval," Hon. Mangoba said.

Secretary General said a fully operational eCO will unlock new economic opportunities, including reduction of processing and clearance costs and time by removing manual operations and bureaucracy of administrators.

ECO will increase efficiency and transparency through the real-time tracking, monitoring of processes and certificates and enhancing security through the digital signature and secure data exchange, and improved compliance with national and regional legal requirements. She added that there will also be increased government revenue by reducing the forgery of certificates and improving volume of trade.

"Our vision is clear: a COMESA region where trade and investment flows freely, efficiently, and securely. While we congratulate Eswatini for its achievements, we also call upon other Member States to embrace the full implementation of the

COMESA electronic certificate of origin as soon as possible."

She stressed that the introduction of the eCO not only emphasizes COMESA's commitment to regional integration and trade facilitation but also aligns with global trends towards paperless trade systems.

Ambassador Mecklenburg, said the implementation of the COMESA eCO is a small part of a long-standing cooperation and partnership between the European Union (EU) and COMESA, built on a shared vision on regional integration and connectivity, dismantling barriers to regional trade, to increase policy coherence and to stimulate sustainable economic growth and development.

"By adopting this technology, we are supporting our businesses to become more competitive in the international market, while also addressing issues of fraud and authenticity verification that can sometimes arise with paper documents," he said.

Besides, Eswatini, the other two Member States which are ready to pilot the eCO are Malawi and Zambia. COMESA is expected to launch the regional eCO during the forthcoming Council of Ministers' meeting on 28 November 2024 in Lusaka, Zambia.



COMESA Central Bank Governors' Bureau meeting in Eswatini

## Regional States Urged to Embrace the Regional Payments and Settlement System

Central Banks in COMESA Member States have been called upon to utilize Regional Payments and Settlement System (REPSS) for intra-COMESA transactions, owing to its potential to enhance regional trade. The REPSS was designed to enable importers and exporters in COMESA Member States to settle and receive payment for goods and services through an efficient and cost-effective platform. Currently, only nine apex banks are active on the platform.

Addressing the 44th Meeting of the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks in Ezulwini, Eswatini, on November 6, 2024, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said REPSS has high potential to spur regional development.

"The collaborative approach being taken will ensure that REPSS significantly contributes to the expansion of intra-COMESA trade, and I urge all member central banks to expeditiously use REPSS for payment of their intra-COMESA transactions," she said.

The Governors meeting was convened

to among others, review and endorse the financial plans of the COMESA's Clearing House (CCH) which implements the REPSS, and the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI).

The Secretary General noted that ongoing negotiations in critical service sectors such as finance, transport, and energy are critical in overcoming trade barriers and accelerating regional trade and investment. However, she also acknowledged the challenges faced by the region, including geopolitical tensions, climate issues, and a global cost-of-living crisis that threaten economic stability and integration efforts.

"These disruptions are straining regional economies, leading to persistent issues such as global supply chain disturbances and rising inflation," she said and stressed the importance of incorporating these risks into monetary policy frameworks and supporting sustainable development initiatives to mitigate adverse effects.

Further she said: "Despite significant advancements in regional integration, with intra-COMESA trade rising from \$1.5

billion in 2000 to \$14 billion in 2023, it still represents only 7% of the region's total trade. To address this, I wish to reiterate the crucial roles of the CMI and CCH in achieving financial integration objectives."

Governor of the Central Bank of Eswatini and Chairperson of the Committee, Dr. Phil Mnisi, emphasized the central banks' vital role in economic convergence and policy coordination. He acknowledged the challenges in harmonizing monetary policies, stressing the need for a resilient financial ecosystem that benefits all member states. He expressed concern over the low participation in REPSS.

Mnisi highlighted the necessity for modernized payment systems and financial inclusion to adapt to evolving economic landscapes. He urged all central banks to leverage REPSS to enhance trade within the region.

He informed the meeting about an imminent upgrade to REPSS, including mandatory migration to the ISO 20022 standard, aimed at improving interoperability with other regional payment systems.





## COMESA Rules of Origin Under Review

COMESA, in partnership with the EU-World Customs Organization Rules of Origin Africa Programme, is reviewing COMESA Rules of Origin to make them more advanced, responsive, and business-friendly in light of regional and global developments.

Several initiatives have been introduced under the European Union Development Fund (EDF 11) Trade Facilitation Programme to support this effort. One significant advancement is the automation of the Certificate of Origin issuance system by COMESA.

Following this, the organization plans to develop and launch the Customs Automation Regional Support Centre and the Regional Connectivity Platform, aimed at improving data exchange and information sharing.

These updates were presented during the 10th meeting of the COMESA Heads of Customs, which was held virtually on October 10, 2024. The discussions emphasized the importance of fully

embracing digital solutions to expedite the clearance of goods across borders.

“Digitalization is a global agenda, and it is incumbent on us as Customs Officials to embrace this new agenda, including its advanced digital tools, big data, cloud computing, machine learning and ultimately artificial intelligence,” said Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, in a statement delivered by Dr. Christopher Onyango, Director of Trade and Customs.

Dr. Kadah further stressed the importance of keeping pace with digital developments in customs operations, particularly for valuation, tariff classification, and non-intrusive inspection systems that rely on pattern recognition and advanced imagery for object identification.

Currently, information sharing and data exchange among COMESA customs administrations are still in their early stages. However, there is tremendous potential for collaboration, pooling

.....  
**“Digitalization is a global agenda, and it is incumbent on us as Customs Officials to embrace this new agenda, including its advanced digital tools, big data, cloud computing, machine learning and ultimately artificial intelligence,” Dr. Mohamed Kadah**

information resources, and enhancing enforcement systems. The meeting concluded that trade facilitation can thrive through collective efforts to leverage modern tools, data mining, and AI for risk management and other critical processes.



Ms Beatrice Hamusonde

## Users of the African Women Networking Platform Rises to 700,000

In the last one year (2024), the number of users on the 50 Million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP) has grown from 520,000 to 700,000 to date, marking an increment of approximately 34 percent.

This was disclosed during a virtual meeting of National Focal Points for 50MAWSP on 22 October 2024, called to review progress on the implementation of the initiative in the COMESA Member States and East African Community (EAC) Partner States.

It was attended by focal points from Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia.

Opening the meeting, COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs Ms Beatrice Hamusonde said the forum was an important platform for Member and Partner states to share experiences with regard to what has worked, what can be improved and what challenges prevail and possible solutions to address the challenges.

During their 2023 meeting, the focal points requested the 50MAWSP to

provide capacity building for women entrepreneurs which resulted in multistakeholder dialogues for women and youth in business. The dialogues which are supported by funding from the European Union under the EDF Programme have benefited hundreds of women and youth entrepreneurs in DR Congo, Kenya, Madagascar and Mauritius by sensitizing them about various regional trade instruments as well as the women in business digital platform.

Since then, the focal points have promoted various platform activities, including the African Women Entrepreneurs Capacity Building Boot camp which provided skilling to 1,000 women in business and enriched the resources of the platform while contributing to its continued growth.

"The women and youth of Africa continue to endorse the platform as a valuable tool for accessing some of the resources they need for their businesses," Hamusonde noted.

On her part, EAC's Principal Gender and Community Development Officer Ms Generose Minani thanked COMESA for keeping the platform running smoothly.

She challenged the national focal points to use the meeting to strategize on improving the 50MAWSP initiative.

The meeting urged the national focal points to explore opportunities for increased promotion of the platform while focal points were briefed about upcoming platform feature enhancements which will make the platform more user-friendly and improve its content and networking functionality.

The 50 Million African Women Speak platform is a women's economic empowerment initiative which is jointly implemented by COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS. It addresses the business information needs of women entrepreneurs and provides information resources on starting and growing a business, market access, access to finance, business training and financial literacy, among others.

It also boasts a social networking component which allows women to network with one another in real-time, showcase their goods and services and to learn from each other. The African Development Bank funded the 50MAWSP first phase.



# COMESA Heads of State Convene in Burundi for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Summit



*President Evariste Ndayishimiye (R) receives instruments of power from President Hakainde Hichilema*

COMESA Heads of State and Governments conducted their 23rd Summit in Bujumbura, Burundi on 31 October 2024, where President Evariste Ndayishimiye took over as Chair of the regional bloc.

Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema handed over COMESA's instruments of power to President Ndayishimiye who will preside over the 21 member- state regional trade bloc for the next one year. President William Ruto of Kenya took the Vice Chair. This ushered a new Bureau comprising Burundi as Chair, Kenya as Vice Chair and Zambia as the Rapporteur.

The Summit was themed 'Accelerating Regional Integration, through the development of regional value chains in climate resilient agriculture, mining and tourism'.

During the one-day event, the Heads of State and representatives received the State of Integration Report from COMESA's Secretary General Chileshe

Mpundu Kapwepwe. Her report highlighted key developments recorded in the past one year since the last Summit. Among them are facilitating intra-regional trade such as customs border management, simplified clearance procedures and digitization of trading instruments.

She also highlighted progress on the regional food balance sheet which, she said, has expanded. Subsequently,

the region is expected to benefit from a newly launched programme of connecting 100 million people to clean energy over the next seven years. Heads of State and Governments and Plenipotentiaries in attendance addressed the Summit including the host President Ndayishimiye, President Ruto, President Hichilema, President Felix Antoine Tshisekedi, (DR Congo) and President Andry Nirina Rajoelina, (Madagascar).



## “Join the COMESA Free Trade Area” – Leaders urge Member States



COMESA Heads of State called on Member States that have not joined the COMESA Free Trade Area to take necessary steps to do so. They noted that despite the increase of intra-COMESA exports by 40% from US\$ 10 billion in 2020 to US\$ 14 billion in 2023, the figures remained low compared to trade with the rest of the world. Currently, COMESA FTA remains at 16.

The leaders encouraged the Secretariat to continue the trade liberalization initiatives including digitization of

various trade instruments such as the Electronic Certificate of Origin, Electronic Cargo Tracking System, Online Non-Tariff Barriers System, National Single Windows, and other digital Trade Facilitation instruments to increase the efficiency and reduce the costs of trade. They also urged Member States to support the roll out of the COMESA digital retail payment platform being championed by COMESA for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to reduce the costs of cross-border transactions.

The leaders called on the Secretariat and Member States to examine all possible avenues of support to tourism investment and development and to develop frameworks that encourage joint management of shared tourism resources and to develop a strategy for marketing the COMESA region as a single tourist destination to avoid negative competitive practices.





Ministers of Foreign Affairs and COMESA Secretariat Executive Management

## Regional Security in Focus as Foreign Affairs Ministers Meet

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of COMESA Member States conducted their one-day meeting in Bujumbura, Tuesday, 29 October 2024 with peace and security issues in focus.

Setting the tone of the meeting, Zambia's Defence Minister, Hon. Ambrose Lufuma, said despite achievements recorded in the status of peace, security, and stability during the past one, the region still faces some peace and security challenges.

Hon Lufuma who represented the outgoing chair of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Mulambe Haimbe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zambia, cited increased number of countries that have conducted national multistakeholder consultations on the COMESA Structural Vulnerability Assessment which has risen to ten.

The number of countries that have volunteered for the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment has increased to three and peaceful elections have been held in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Egypt, DR Congo, Comoros, Rwanda and Tunisia.

"Despite this progress and achievements,

our region still faces some peace and security challenges," Hon Lufuma said.

"The conflict in Sudan is still on going with serious humanitarian crisis. The same is with the situation in Eastern DR Congo and Libya."

Climate change also featured prominently in the meeting as a major challenge that the region continues to face. Specifically, the devastating drought facing the southern Africa region was identified as having serious ramifications on agriculture, power and water supply, which has had a spillover effect on the economy.

This meeting was held ahead of the 23rd COMESA Heads of State and Governments Summit set for 31st October 2024 where Zambia handed over the Chair of the COMESA Authority to Burundi.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe highlighted key interventions in place including the enhancement of early warning capabilities, addressing the root causes of conflicts, supporting conflict prevention and management, countering

violent extremism and terrorism, combating money laundering and financing of terrorism, contributing to post-conflict reconstruction and development.

The in-coming Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Hon Albert Shingiro of Burundi pledged his government's commitment to enhancing peace, security and stability in the region.

He said the country will work will all Member States during Burundis' tenure to advance ideals of regional integration with peace being vital for any trade and development to occur.

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**"The conflict in Sudan is still on going with serious humanitarian crisis. The same is with the situation in Eastern DR Congo and Libya."**



*Ministers of Justice and Attorney's General Meeting in Lusaka*

## Slow Domestication of COMESA Legal Instruments Concerning

**Ministers and AGs urged to support speeding up the process**

The slow pace of signing and ratifying COMESA's legal instruments has hindered progress in advancing the region's integration agenda. This delay prevents Member States from realizing the full benefits embedded in these instruments, which remain ineffective until ratified.

Addressing the 27th Meeting of COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General in Lusaka on 21 November 2024, Zambia's Minister of Justice, Hon. Princess Kasune, highlighted this issue. She noted that COMESA has adopted numerous legal instruments and protocols over the years, but many remain undomesticated at the national level.

A key example is the COMESA Protocol on Free Movement, which has been open for signatures and ratifications for over 20 years without significant progress.

"I would like to personally call upon all COMESA Member States to ensure that legal instruments and decisions requiring domestication or ratification at the national level are prioritized and fully implemented," Minister Kasune urged.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe echoed similar concerns, emphasizing the need for swift action to overcome delays in the domestication process. She announced that legal experts from the COMESA Secretariat would conduct country visits to identify and address challenges faced by Member States.

"Immediately after the conclusion of this meeting, the Legal and Corporate Affairs Division will engage Member States through country visits to promote the domestication of COMESA's legal instruments," she stated.

The Secretary General also called on Ministers and Attorneys General to support the Secretariat's efforts and provide guidance on accelerating the implementation of these instruments.

The meeting agenda included the review and approval of legal instruments for key COMESA institutions such as the COMESA Court of Justice, the COMESA Competition Commission, and the COMESA Regional Investment Agency.

Justice Lombe Chibesakunda, Judge-President of the COMESA Court

of Justice, highlighted the Court's achievements during her address. Over the past decade, the Court has developed and revised several legal instruments to enhance its operational efficiency. These include Rules of Procedure, Arbitration Rules, Financial Rules and Procedures, Procurement Procedure Manual (2022) and Resource Mobilization and Communication Strategies.

"As the tenure of the current Judges concludes in June 2025, this is the last meeting I will attend as Judge-President. I am proud that, with your support, the Court has achieved significant milestones," Justice Chibesakunda remarked.

The meeting underscored the urgent need for Member States to take ownership of COMESA's integration agenda by speeding up the domestication and ratification of legal instruments. Ministers and Attorneys General were encouraged to champion these efforts within their respective countries to unlock the full potential of regional integration.





*President Evariste Ndayishimiye addressing the Summit.*

## Free Visas to Burundi for COMESA Citizens

In a deliberate move to promote the free movement of persons, labour and services, the new chair of COMESA, President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi announced that his government will grant free visa entries to COMESA member states citizens on short-term visits to the country.

The move contributes to the implementation of COMESA protocol on gradual elimination / waiver of visa requirements. It will support the promotion of service sectors in fostering production, employment generation and foreign direct investment.

Heads of State in attendance and delegates warmly received the announcement as a positive move towards actualisation of COMESA's key protocol on the free movement of people.

Experts have long called for Member States to sign and implement the Protocol on Free Movement as it will help enhance trade and development in the region. The issue of visa requirements involving the application process and the fees have been cited as a barrier to deepening levels of intra-COMESA trade and development.

In their Communique, the Heads of State urged Member States to facilitate the movement of persons, labour and services across the region including visa requirements and to pursue mutual recognition of qualifications to foster intra-regional labour mobility.

## Simplified Trade Regime Mainstreamed in National Policies

The 45th COMESA Council of Ministers has decided that all Member States should mainstream the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) in domestic trade policies and regulatory frameworks for continuity and sustainability.

The meeting was informed that the Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee (TTFSC) had considered the report of the Second Policy Dialogue meeting on the implementation of the COMESA STR that was held on 6-7 August 2024 in Kenya. The objective of the Dialogue was to discuss the policy and technical aspects of the STR implementation and propose policy recommendations.

The TTFSC noted a policy paper on the STR which focused on the background of the STR, its genesis, progress on issues raised at the first Policy Dialogue, issues for discussion, challenges in the implementation of the STR as well as recommendations for enhancing it. The Dialogue also considered issues on Gender in Cross Border Trade and the COMESA Regulations on the Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Small-Scale Cross Border Traders.



Hon. Rhodine Sikumba (6th left) SG Chileshe Kapwepwe (5th left), Chairperson of IC Ms. Christine Niragira (6th right) and other delegates at the IC meeting

## Reflections on 30 years Milestones as COMESA Intergovernmental Committee Meets

The 45th COMESA Intergovernmental Committee (IC) meeting was held in Lusaka, Zambia on 25 November 2024, comprising of Permanent and Principal Secretaries from the coordinating Ministries of the 21 Member States.

For two days delegates reviewed the implementation of COMESA's regional integration programmes for the past year and the 2025 work programme. Progress made in the past 30 years of COMESA's existence was in focus as the bloc marked the anniversary on 8 December 2024.

Addressing the delegates during the official opening ceremony, Zambia's Minister of Commerce, Trade, and Industry Hon. Chipoka Mulenga said meaningful change has been recorded in the region over the past years as the bloc has continued to grow stronger.

"Indeed, as we mark 30 years of regional integration, our achievements cannot be insignificant. The COMESA that is today is not what it was 30 years

ago in terms of development," he said. "Our countries are more vibrant, with increased cross-border trade, improved infrastructure and industrial activities and an overall positive trend in socio-economic development."

He was represented by the Minister of Tourism Hon. Rhodine Sikumba. Outlining the COMESA's milestones in the implementation of the Free Trade Area regime, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said intra-COMESA export trade is now at US\$14 billion.

She highlighted the benefits of embracing the automation and digitisation of customs procedures and clearances which has resulted in reduced clearance times at border points for both passenger and goods. In addition, the Simplified Trade Regime is now being implemented in eight countries namely Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Other programmes under

implementation include the Support to Air Transport Sector (SATSD), the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) and the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment for the ICT Sector (EGEE-ICT) programme among many others.

Madam Kapwepwe also commended COMESA's co-operating partners particularly the European Union, the World Bank, African Development Bank, Afrexim Bank, UN Trade and Development Organisation (UNCTAD) and the World Customs Organisation for supporting the integration through various sector initiatives.

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**"Our countries are more vibrant, with increased cross-border trade, improved infrastructure and industrial activities and an overall positive trend in socio-economic development." Hon. Chipoka Mulenga**





L-R: Moderator Dr Dennis Matanda, Secretary-General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Amb. Erastus Mwencha and Sindiso Ngwenya

## Fireside Chat with COMESA Secretaries-General

In a historic gathering, two former Secretaries-General of COMESA joined the incumbent in a captivating fireside chat to celebrate 30 years of the organization's impactful journey. The event, held on November 27, 2024, in Lusaka, Zambia, was a key highlight of COMESA's 30th anniversary celebrations.

Ambassador Erastus Mwencha, the 4th Secretary-General, and Sindiso Ngwenya, the 5th, joined the current Secretary-General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, for this reflective and forward-looking discussion.

Moderated by Dr. Dennis Matanda, a recognized expert in regional integration, the discussion reflected COMESA's evolution from the Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa to its present status as a regional economic powerhouse.

The audience included high-level dignitaries such as ministers, permanent

secretaries, technical officials, and COMESA staff.

Burundi's Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry & Tourism, H.E. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, the current Chairperson of the COMESA Council, presided over the high-level panel discussions and appreciated the transformative impact the organization has had on the region.

**“By publicizing  
our programs and  
achievements, we can  
inspire confidence in  
our vision of regional  
integration and  
attract partnerships  
beyond Africa.”  
Erastus Mwencha**

Amb. Mwencha shared insights into the organization's formative years, highlighting the challenges of harmonizing diverse economies and fostering cooperation among Member States.

“When I assumed office, COMESA was still finding its footing. Through concerted efforts in policy coordination and infrastructure development, we witnessed the birth of a more connected region,” he remarked, underscoring the importance of perseverance and collaboration in building regional unity.

Amb. Mwencha emphasized the critical role of visibility in strengthening COMESA's influence.

“In today's interconnected world, it's vital that COMESA's successes are globally recognized,” he said. “By publicizing our programs and achievements, we can inspire confidence in our vision

Continued to page 17



the importance of innovation, digital engagement, and deeper integration across critical sectors such as trade, infrastructure, and finance. They called for sustained efforts to adapt to emerging global trends while addressing regional priorities.

“As COMESA gears up for the next 30 years, we must continue to evolve,” they agreed. “Strengthening our role as a regional powerhouse is essential for advancing Africa’s broader development goals.”

of regional integration and attract partnerships beyond Africa.”

He championed efforts to enhance COMESA and its institutions presence on global platforms, leveraging modern media to showcase its achievements and programs, a point further stressed by Sindiso Ngwenya.

Mr Ngwenya also reflected on the strides made in fostering intra-regional trade and building economic partnerships, key pillars of COMESA’s mandate.

SG Kapwepwe expressed gratitude to

her predecessors, acknowledging their contributions to shaping COMESA’s trajectory.

“I am deeply honoured to have you here to share your experiences,” she said. “Your guidance and insights will inspire us as we work to fulfil the vision of COMESA’s founding fathers.”

Ms Kapwepwe affirmed her commitment to leveraging their wisdom to navigate the current and future challenges facing the organization.

Looking ahead, the trio underscored

The fireside chat served as a powerful reminder of the collective vision that has driven COMESA’s success. It highlighted the enduring commitment of its leaders to fostering economic integration, enhancing regional connectivity, and promoting prosperity across Member States.

As the organization reflects on its remarkable 30-year journey, it stands poised to build on its legacy, embracing innovation and collaboration to shape a brighter future for the region.





L-R: Moderator Dr Matanda, Dr Willard Mwemba, Ms Hope Murera, Mr Manuel Moses, Prof. Oliver Saasa, Ms Jedidah Ndebele and Dr Lucas Njoroge.

## COMESA's Institutional Impact and Resilience in Shaping Africa's Economic Landscape

The resilience of financial institutions and their pivotal role in shaping Africa's economic landscape took center stage in a panel discussion marking the 30th Anniversary of COMESA. The session offered valuable insights into how financial intermediaries can channel global capital to meet the region's needs, while also emphasizing the regulatory frameworks essential for fostering long-term growth.

The panel featured leaders from key COMESA institutions, including Prof. Oliver Saasa from the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) Group, Mr. Manuel Moses, CEO of Africa Trade and Insurance Development (ATIDI), and Ms. Hope Murera, CEO of COMESA Reinsurance Company (ZEP-RE).

Other CEOs included Ms. Jedidah Ndebele of the COMESA Clearing House, Dr. Willard Mwemba of the COMESA Competition Commission and Dr. Lucas Njoroge of the COMESA Monetary Institute.

Guided by three key questions, the discussion delved into how institutions are responding to evolving challenges and contributing to sustainable economic growth across the continent. The panelists reflected on the substantial progress made by COMESA and its affiliated institutions over the past three decades, underscoring their expanding footprint across Africa.

Prof. Saasa highlighted the crucial role of robust financial services in promoting regional cooperation, especially in connecting global capital with local markets.

He emphasized the need to leverage technology and digital platforms to enhance financial inclusion and stimulate growth, particularly in underserved areas.

"By focusing on innovative financial products tailored to the diverse needs of our member states, we can strengthen economic resilience and deepen regional integration," Prof. Saasa remarked.

Mr. Moses discussed the role of institutions like ATIDI in linking African businesses to international markets, stressing that a collaborative approach between financial institutions and policymakers is key to scaling Africa's trade both within and outside the continent.

Ms. Murera underscored the significance of policy consistency and well-defined regulatory frameworks in building investor confidence and ensuring economic stability. She also noted that during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the responsiveness of member states in providing financial and regulatory support plays a critical role in recovery.

"In times of crisis, the ability of Member States to act swiftly with financial and regulatory backing can significantly accelerate recovery," Murera said.

She also called for greater collaboration in risk management, particularly in sectors such as insurance and

*Continued to page 21*



*Members of the Programme Steering Committee for EGEE-ICT meeting in Lusaka, Zambia*

## Enhancing ICT Governance in Africa

The fifth meeting of the Programme Steering Committee (PSC) for the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in ICT (EGEE-ICT) was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia, on October 3, 2024. This two-day event aimed to strengthen ICT governance and foster a conducive environment for digital development across Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean regions.

The meeting brought together representatives from Member States, Regional Economic Communities—including the East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)—as well as various ICT associations like ARICEA, CRASA, EACO, SATA, and SAPOA. Officials from the Zambian Government and the European Union Delegation, which funds the programme, attended.

Opening the meeting Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary-General in Charge of Programmes, underscored the pivotal role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in driving development and regional integration.

In his statement presented by Dr. Bernard Dzawanda, Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, Amb. Kadah highlighted COMESA's strategic commitment to digital transformation, emphasizing the importance of establishing an enabling environment, advancing policy and regulatory frameworks, improving digital infrastructure, and addressing cybersecurity.

He further stressed the significance of affordable ICT services, noting their potential to spur economic growth, reduce poverty, enhance governance, and promote environmental sustainability. ICT, he added, is key in addressing pressing challenges such as climate

vulnerability, gender inequality, and health emergencies.

However, Africa remains behind the global average in internet usage. According to the International Telecommunication Union's 2023 report, only 37% of Africa's population uses the internet, compared to the global average of 67%. Ambassador Kadah pointed out that only 25% of Africans have access to the internet, compared to 57% globally.

"Deliberate efforts are needed to make ICT services more affordable and accessible to all," Ambassador Kadah emphasized.

The EGEE-ICT programme is in its fifth year of implementation.



# COMESA's Institutional Impact...



## Driving Trade, Investment, and Regional Integration in Africa

For over 30 years, COMESA has been at the forefront of driving trade, investment, and regional integration in Africa, playing a pivotal role in the realization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

This informed the topic of discussion at the 30th Anniversary that focused on COMESA programs and interventions aimed at enhancing trade, strengthening value chains, and contributing to the AfCFTA, all while advancing the broader objectives of Agenda 2063.

The panel featured several key experts, including Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programs, and Dr. Dev Haman, Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance. They were joined by five chief executives from COMESA institutions: Mr. Teddy Soobramanien (COMESA Business Council), Dr. John Mukuka (Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa - ACTESA), Mr. Nicholas Mudungwe (African Leather and Leather Products Institute - ALLPI),

Mr. Miti Chikakula (COMESA Federation of Women in Business - COMFWB), and Ms. Heba Salama (COMESA Regional Investment Agency – COMESARIA).

Their discussions explored how COMESA is shaping Africa's economic future and the steps needed to strengthen its role as a catalyst for sustainable development. The conversation began with a focus on the most significant interventions COMESA has made to promote trade and investment across the region.

Dr. Kadah highlighted several key initiatives, such as trade facilitation programs that streamline customs procedures and improve the ease of doing business.

"Our programs aim to reduce trade barriers, enhance infrastructure, and equip Member States with the tools to compete in global market," he said. He also emphasized COMESA's efforts to harmonize trade policies and promote regional infrastructure projects as essential drivers of economic integration.

reinsurance, to help businesses mitigate unforeseen shocks.

Ms. Ndebele emphasized the importance of ensuring timely liquidity and facilitating trade finance mechanisms to guarantee the smooth flow of goods and services across borders.

Dr. Njoroge spoke about the potential benefits of implementing a regional monetary policy framework, which could help mitigate economic volatility and foster a stable investment environment.

"We need to create an environment that minimizes economic shocks and builds resilience. A unified monetary policy is crucial to enhancing the predictability of our markets," Dr. Njoroge explained.

Dr. Mwemba addressed the importance of strengthening competition policies to eliminate trade barriers, encourage innovation, and protect consumer welfare. He stressed that enhancing competition across sectors would lead to greater diversification and higher value-added exports, which are essential for the continent's economic advancement.

"By enhancing competition across sectors, African economies can achieve greater diversification and higher value-added exports," Dr. Mwemba noted.

The discussion concluded with the recognition that institutions like TDB, ZEP-RE, and the COMESA Clearing House are evolving to foster a more conducive regulatory environment and financial ecosystem. Their combined efforts will play a vital role in shaping the trajectory of Africa's economic future.

## Driving Trade, Investment...



L-R: Ms Heba Salama, Dr Mohamed Kadah, Dr Dev Haman, Mr Nicholas Mudungwe, Mr. Teddy Soobramanien, Dr John Mukuka and Mr Chikakula Miti

Dr. Mukuka stressed the importance of agricultural value chains in regional trade. Through ACTESA, COMESA has played a significant role in advancing the agricultural sector, promoting trade in agricultural commodities across Member States and boosting food security while creating jobs.

Mr. Soobramanien emphasized the need for stronger collaboration with other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union (AU).

"We have learned from each other's experiences in promoting intra-Africa trade, and we continue to adopt successful practices from other regions, including the effective implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063," he stated.

The panel agreed that fostering stronger inter-REC relationships is essential to addressing Africa's development challenges, including the need for improved trade infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and investment in innovation.

Dr. Haman underscored the role of

AfCFTA as a key vehicle for regional integration. He noted that it allows for the creation of a single market, reducing trade barriers and opening up opportunities for intra-African investment. "We are contributing to AfCFTA's implementation by promoting tariff reductions, eliminating non-tariff barriers and facilitating the movement of goods and services across the continent," he said.

Mr. Miti highlighted the importance of gender inclusion in trade and economic policies. He pointed out that COMESA's efforts to integrate women into value chains in key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services align with the inclusive growth and sustainable development goals of Agenda 2063.

Ms. Salama spoke about the need for robust infrastructure development to support both AfCFTA and Agenda 2063. She stressed that COMESA's investment in cross-border infrastructure, including roads, ports, and energy, is vital to ensuring that the benefits of AfCFTA are felt by all African economies, especially landlocked countries.

Mr. Mudungwe called for greater focus

on leather production as a means to achieve competitive pricing in the sector. He noted Africa's vast potential in leather and its capacity to export to global markets.

"I used to buy a pair of shoes from Italy for \$200, but now I buy the same pair for \$20. When you can buy shoes at that price, you can buy more and share the savings with your relatives," he remarked.

The discussion underscored the importance of aligning regional efforts with continental initiatives, particularly in relation to AfCFTA and Agenda 2063.

**"We have learned from each other's experiences in promoting intra-Africa trade, and we continue to adopt successful practices from other regions, including the effective implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063," Dr John Mukuka**





## Business Community's Forum Conducted in Bujumbura

Over 400 representatives from the private sector, small-scale traders, women entrepreneurs, policymakers, and civil society organizations from across the COMESA region gathered in Bujumbura, Burundi, for the 17th COMESA Business Forum.

This annual event, organized by the COMESA Business Council (CBC) in collaboration with the Government of Burundi and supported by the European Union's 11th Development Fund, serves as a key platform for promoting regional economic integration.

The forum, which spanned two days, centered on the theme: "Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate-Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism."

Opening the Forum, Burundi's Prime Minister, H.E. Gervais Ndirakobuca,

emphasized the need for unified efforts to strengthen intra-regional trade and drive economic growth. He reaffirmed Burundi's commitment to economic integration by encouraging Member States to actively implement various COMESA initiatives.

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, highlighted the importance of addressing trade barriers and fostering regional cooperation. She noted that COMESA has significant potential to expand intra-regional trade, with the opportunity to match or even exceed the achievements of other Regional Economic Communities.

CBC President, Mr. James Chimwaza, also addressed the delegates, urging them to propose concrete measures to overcome challenges faced by Member States. He emphasized the importance of climate-resilient agriculture, strengthening mining value chains, and

growing the tourism sector as areas for targeted development.

"By fostering collaboration and innovation, we aim to strengthen our regional integration efforts and build a more resilient and prosperous COMESA," he stated.

The Forum preceded the 23rd COMESA Heads of State and Governments Summit, which took place on October 31st in Bujumbura.

**"By fostering collaboration and innovation, we aim to strengthen our regional integration efforts and build a more resilient and prosperous COMESA," Mr. James Chimwaza**

## Media Awarded for Promoting the COMESA Agenda



*L-R: COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe, Presidents HE Evariste Ndiyishimiye, HE William Ruto, HE Hakainde Hichilema and journalists Abdel Baulacky, Leonidas Nintereste, Trynness Mbale and Jacob Ochieng*

Four journalists from Burundi, Kenya, Mauritius and Zambia have been recognised and awarded for their contributions to COMESA's regional integration programmes through publishing well researched articles. They were Mr Leonidas Ninteretse of Burundi, Mr Jacob Walter Ochieng from Kenya, Mr Abdel Baulacky of Mauritius and Ms Trynness Tembo from Zambia.

Leonidas's radio programme demonstrated the importance of transport infrastructure, energy infrastructure and Information and communication technologies infrastructure in competition.

Jacob focused on a COMESA initiative to remove barriers to cross border trade to help Kenya and Ethiopia expand business opportunities.

Abdel's television programme was

about COMESA initiatives to develop the regional transport infrastructure in the aviation and maritime sectors while Trynness wrote on the barriers to regional trade and how the one stop border post as a trade facilitation initiative is helping to address this challenge.

All the winners were presented with a monetary prize of USD 2,000 each and sponsored to attend the 23rd COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Governments in Bujumbura.







COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (in white) congratulates one of the winners of the COMESA @30 Golf Tournament flanked by Mr. Crusiva Hichikumba

## Countdown to the 23rd COMESA Summit and 30th Anniversary Celebrations

As preparations intensified for the 23rd COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government in Bujumbura, Burundi, scheduled for October 31, 2024, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives from COMESA Member States based in Lusaka were updated on the event's progress.

On September 27, 2024, COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, briefed the diplomats on key highlights of the Summit and urged them to liaise with their respective capitals to confirm attendance. Their participation would be crucial to ensuring the success of the Summit and its associated activities.

The briefing also covered plans for celebrating the 30th anniversary of COMESA's transformation from the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) in 1994. To mark this milestone, the COMESA Secretariat had planned a series of events, including sports tournaments and corporate social responsibility initiatives, culminating in a gala dinner on

November 27, 2024.

The Summit would witness the transfer of leadership from Zambia's President, Hakainde Hichilema, to Burundi's President, Evariste Ndayishimiye. This transition would also lead to a new Bureau, comprising Burundi, Eswatini and Zambia.

The theme for the 2024 summit was "Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism". In addition to the leadership handover, the Summit would focus on strengthening regional cooperation and development. Discussions would address decisions made during the 44th Meeting of the Council of Ministers, assess resolutions on peace and security, and review the progress of COMESA's Mid-Term Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.

Key regional issues, such as the conflicts in the region, as well as terrorism and

the impacts of climate change, would be at the forefront of discussions. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs would explore strategies to strengthen COMESA's peace and security initiatives, with a focus on conflict prevention and involving civil society.

The Summit was preceded by the 17th COMESA Business Forum, a high-level platform bringing together public and private sector stakeholders to discuss solutions for driving economic growth and investment across member states. The forum aims to promote intra-African trade, establish cross-border value chains, and foster discussions among policymakers, experts, and industrialists to position the region as a competitive player in global trade.

"This forum will promote intra-African trade, establish cross-border value chains, and facilitate discussions among experts, policymakers, and industrialists, ultimately aiming to transform the region into a competitive player in global trade," emphasized Ms Kapwepwe.

The forum focused on enhancing value chains in agriculture, mining and tourism. Representatives from COMESA institutions, including the Trade and Development Bank, ZEP-RE (PTA Reinsurance Company), the African Leather and Leather Products Institute, and the COMESA Federation of Women in Business will feature on high-level ministerial discussions and expert panels. These sessions will explore strategies and support mechanisms for fostering regional business growth.

Recommendations from the forum formed the COMESA Business Declaration. Running parallel to the Business Forum was a COMESA trade exhibition, showcasing high-quality African products and services. This exhibition offered global traders and service providers a platform to learn, sample, source and purchase African goods.



*Delegates at the 17th Meeting of the technical working group on Rules of Origin in Chisamba*

## 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 in 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, Amb. 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, 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, 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.





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 "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," Mr. Phesheya Dube

## 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 24 – 26 September 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 Dube. "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.



COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe, TDB President Tadesse Admassu and UNECA Executive Secretary Claver Gatete after the signing ceremony at the TBD office in Bujumbura

## COMESA and UNECA Sign MoU

On the sidelines of the 2024 Summit, COMESA and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a general framework of cooperation in different areas that include industry and agriculture development, policy development and advocacy, capacity building and technical assistance, gender data statistics and research, economic empowerment and women's leadership.

Other areas are digital inclusion and technology, sustainable development and climate change, networks and partnerships, statistics and education and health among others.

Speaking in Bujumbura, Burundi during a brief ceremony, Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe described the occasion as timely. She said the region was at the stage of encouraging the development of the industrial sector to be able to move from exporting raw materials to finished products. She described the MoU as part of the African solution to African challenges.

"I believe we have a shared vision...I believe we all want to see our Member States grow intra-COMESA and Intra-African Trade. We have signed all the frameworks, removed NTBs and created linkages as countries...but if we do not address the productive capacity side of things, we will remain at low levels of intra-trade," Ms Kapwepwe pointed out.

She called for capacity building as a way of helping the Member States and described the MoU as a structure which should be used for inclusive action and implementation.

UNECA Executive Director Claver Gatete said his organisation was ready to assist in domestic resource mobilisation to fully support the MoU which is expected to unlock COMESA and Africa's potential. He commended COMESA for recording growth in trade over the years but said more can be done to reach higher levels.

He also urged African financial institutions such as the Trade and Development bank to prioritise investing in African projects and programmes especially now that the African Continental Free Trade Area has taken effect.

"We as ECA know where the money is and we are ready to top up on whatever you have and work with COMESA and the partnership through the tripartite is so critical...we need to focus...we are extremely happy that we can partner with you on this journey making sure we can measure the progress as we move forward," Mr Gatete added.

Both leaders called for the inclusion of women, youths and Small and Medium Entrepreneurs as the region develops and grows its value chains.

## New Bench for the COMESA Court of Justice

The COMESA Court of Justice is set to have a new bench of 12 judges with effect from June 2025. The incoming judges were nominated by Member States following a call for nominations for candidates issued earlier this year. Subsequently, the COMESA Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General, seating as an Electoral College during their 27th meeting in Lusaka, Zambia on 21 November 2024 conducted an election of judges.

The meeting elected the following to the Appellate Division of the Court: Justice Marvin Mwanamwambwa (Zambia) as Judge President-elect, Justice Onephore Baroreraho (Burundi), Justice Monica Mugenyi (Uganda), Justice Masauko Msungama (Malawi) and Justice Ms Salohy Randrianarisoa (Madagascar).

The Meeting also elected the following to the First Instance Division: Justice Aggrey Muchelule (Kenya) - Principal Judge-elect, Justice Dr. Ahmed Mohamed (Egypt), Justice Mazwendoda Mavuso (Eswatini), Justice Ah Foon Chui Yew Cheong (Mauritius), Justice Samia Cecile Bella Andre (Seychelles), Justice Ibrahim Osman Briema Hamid (Sudan) and Justice Lavender Makoni (Zimbabwe).

The names of the Judges elect will be submitted to the COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Government for appointment and subsequent swearing-in. The current bench led by Justice Lombe Chibesakunda, was appointed in March 2015 and took office on 6 June 2015. Its tenure will come to an end on 5 June 2025.





## Celebrating Milestones and Future Aspirations

In celebration of its 30th anniversary, COMESA hosted a spectacular Golf Tournament at the Lusaka Golf Club on October 11, 2024. The event drew 128 participants, creating an exciting atmosphere filled with camaraderie and competition, as players came together to honor COMESA's remarkable journey in advancing regional integration. The winning team was awarded solar equipment, a meaningful nod to COMESA's enduring commitment to sustainable development and climate action.

During the prize-giving ceremony, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe reflected on COMESA's tremendous growth over the years, evolving from the Preferential Trade Area to a thriving Common Market. She emphasized how the tournament provided a special opportunity to unite key stakeholders who have played an integral part in the organization's path to success.

"This event symbolizes COMESA's unwavering dedication to building strong partnerships with regional and international partners, all in the pursuit



of economic growth and sustainable development," said Secretary General Kapwepwe. She added that proceeds from the tournament would support cancer treatment and care at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, as well as a regional tree-planting initiative, further underscoring COMESA's community-driven focus.

Zambia's Minister of Commerce and Trade, Hon. Chipoka Mulenga, also praised COMESA's instrumental role in fostering trade, investment, and job creation across Member States. Represented by Permanent Secretary

for Investment and Industrialization Mr. Crusiva Hichikumba, the Minister acknowledged the organization's impact on food security and economic resilience, noting that "This anniversary is a shining testament to the resilience, unity, and shared vision of our member countries."

The COMESA@30 Golf Tournament was not just a celebration of past accomplishments, but a forward-looking event, marking a renewed commitment to collaboration and progress in the years ahead. With each milestone, COMESA continues to lead the way in shaping a prosperous future for the region.

## COMESA Validates Policy Framework to Transform Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

The COMESA Policy Framework and Reform Strategy (PFRS) has been validated, marking a significant step toward the sustainable growth and enhancement of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the COMESA region. The PFRS was officially validated during a meeting held in Kampala on 25 September 2024.

The validation meeting brought together Directors of Fisheries from 18 COMESA Member States, including Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Eswatini, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles.

This regional framework aims to guide and advance fisheries and aquaculture development, addressing critical challenges while promoting sustainable practices.

Participants also included representatives from two regional fisheries bodies—the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation (LVFO) and the Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA). Prominent civil society organizations such as the African Women Fish Network (AWFISHNET), which supports women in fisheries and aquaculture across the continent, and the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association (UFPEA), representing industrial fish processors in Uganda, were also present.

Mr. Omanyi Paul, the Commissioner for Fisheries Quality Assurance and Safety in Uganda's Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, officially opened the meeting on behalf of the Minister. He emphasized the timeliness of the reform strategy, highlighting lessons learned from two fish export bans imposed on Uganda due to non-compliance with market requirements. He encouraged other member states to use these insights and the PFRS to develop robust national policies, expressing gratitude to COMESA for hosting this high-level meeting in Uganda and reaffirming the support of H.E. the President of Uganda for COMESA's initiatives.

Ms. Providence Mavubi, Director of Industry and Agriculture at the COMESA Secretariat, remarked on the significance of the newly developed PFRS in advancing fisheries and aquaculture across the region. She called on Member States to align their national policies with this regional framework and expressed appreciation for AU-IBAR's support, urging continued collaboration to aid COMESA member states in this alignment.

Ms. Hellen Guebama, representing the AU-IBAR Director, underscored the importance of the continental PFRS as a strategic guide for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. She commended COMESA for aligning its policy framework with the continental strategy

and encouraged member states to do the same.

The meeting, facilitated by technical teams from the COMESA Secretariat and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), successfully concluded with the validation of the PFRS.

This validated PFRS serves as a comprehensive blueprint designed to transform the fisheries and aquaculture sectors across the COMESA region. It aims to address existing challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and promote sustainable practices to ensure the long-term viability and prosperity of these sectors. Fisheries and aquaculture are vital to the region's socioeconomic and environmental well-being, contributing to food security, livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation.

Additionally, the framework provides sector leaders with necessary policy direction, reforms, and strategies that can be tailored at the national level to enhance sector management and development.

The meeting received support from AU-IBAR under the EU-funded FishGov 2 project, with partners pledging ongoing assistance to the COMESA region to ensure the successful implementation of the PFRS.





## Regional Trade Promotion Strategy Framework Adopted

The 45th COMESA Council of Ministers has endorsed the Regional Trade Promotion Strategy Framework, validated in December 2023 in Bujumbura, Burundi. This framework focuses on enhancing

trade across Member States through targeted interventions.

The key recommendations of the Strategy include raising awareness and

conducting trade promotion activities, identifying value chains of products based on their analysis, augmented by market survey on products and strengthening the effectiveness of the NTB monitoring and elimination mechanism.

Other areas in the strategy include enhancing market information and sensitization through digital systems, strengthening regional transport and trade facilitation and logistics, fast tracking development of a Simplified Trade Regime (STR) for trade in services to facilitate trade promotion of services that COMESA Member States would wish to trade under services STR and facilitating Mutual Recognition Agreements for liberalized professional services among others.

## Framework for Conducting Horticulture Production Surveys Developed

COMESA Secretariat through the Statistics Unit has developed a framework for conducting production surveys in the horticulture sector. The framework was developed in close consultation with Member States and funded by the European Union Development Fund (EDF11) through the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

The Framework will respond to demands by policymakers for statistics in the horticulture value chain.

At the 15th COMESA Committee Meeting on Statistical Matters Meeting held virtually on 14 – 15 October, the Framework was presented to the delegates for review and adjustments were made before it was adopted.

Head of the Statistics Unit at COMESA Secretariat Mr Themba Munalula said the Framework will now be presented

to the COMESA Intergovernmental Committee Meeting for adoption.

Prior to this development, a Technical Working Group comprising of relevant COMESA departments, institutions and representatives from 14 Member States namely Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Somalia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe met on 14th February 2024 and provided content for further adjustment of the Framework to cover all key areas.

Mr. Munalula revealed that this was a crucial step in the consultative process, aimed at gathering valuable insights from stakeholders for the completion of a comprehensive framework of horticulture production surveys.

Other key steps have been conducted such as a capacity building and validation workshop held on 15 – 19 April 2024 and a virtual dissemination event held on 30

July 2024.

The main objective of the dissemination was to comprehensively communicate the data requirements for horticulture production surveys to stakeholders as well as garner their support to fulfill these data needs. The event was attended by relevant COMESA divisions, institutions, Member States and development partners.

The COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan Productive Pillar places a strong emphasis on the establishment of value chains. Among these is the horticulture value chain. However, agricultural surveys in most Member states are focused on major cereals and legumes. As such little or no data exists on the extent of horticultural production. From a conceptual perspective, the surveys in Member states would have to be augmented with a specific methodology for capturing horticultural production.



## Regional Women Economic Empowerment Strategy

COMESA Secretariat held a consultative meeting on 25 October to discuss the draft Regional Women Economic Empowerment Strategy (RWEES) with Member States. The meeting sought to ensure Member States' contribution to the development of the strategy as well as alignment with the needs, priorities, and unique challenges faced in the advancement of women's economic empowerment in the region.

The strategy which is a work in progress is being developed with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility' support. 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 Secretariat organized the virtual consultative meeting in collaboration with ICR with participation of Member States which included Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tunisia and Zambia. COMESA

institutions which were represented included the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) and the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB).

COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah opened the meeting and observed that the consultative process was crucial in shaping a strategy that addresses the unique challenges women face in accessing and benefiting from economic opportunities across the COMESA region and beyond.

"We believe that gender equality and economic empowerment of women are critical factors to sustainable development and serve as cornerstones for inclusive national and regional development policies and programs," Amb. Dr. Kadah remarked.

"Women's economic empowerment is not only a matter of social justice, but also a proven catalyst for broader economic growth and development. In the COMESA region, where women make up a significant portion of the workforce, particularly in agriculture, trade, and small enterprises, it is imperative that we create an enabling environment where

women can thrive, innovate, fully realize their economic potential, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable economic growth of their families, communities, countries, and our region at large," he added.

The Assistant Secretary General thanked the Investment Climate Reform Facility (ICRF) for its partnership with COMESA on women economic empowerment. In addition to the development of the strategy, the ICR Facility has supported activities including capacity building of national statistical institutions on gender statistics to enhance the availability of gender data and knowledge for evidence-based policy making and programming.

It has also supported Public-Private Dialogues (PPD) on gender responsive frameworks in selected borders, and the development of resource materials for women in business which will be disseminated through the 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform (50MAWSP).

The consultative process to develop the strategy is an ongoing exercise which will involve member states, COMESA institutions, and the Secretariat.





*Professor Derek Johnson (3rd right) Ms Providence Mavubi (2nd right) and COMESA and DFM colleagues*

## COMESA, University of Manitoba to Collaborate on Fisheries Initiative

In an effort to strengthen food systems and bolster climate resilience, COMESA is set to be the focal point for the Small Fish Food Systems Project—a multi-donor, multi-year, and multi-country initiative focused on expanding sustainable fisheries in Africa, particularly within the Great Lakes region.

On October 11, 2024, the COMESA Secretariat welcomed a delegation from the Dry Fish Matters (DFM) project, headed by Professor Derek Johnson of the University of Manitoba, Canada. This meeting aimed to establish a collaborative framework to replicate the successes of the DFM project in the COMESA region.

Given COMESA's extensive experience in governance and its strong connections with member states and fisheries sector stakeholders, particularly within the Blue Economy framework, the organization is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in this partnership.

The meeting was facilitated by COMESA's

Industry and Agriculture Division alongside the Resource Mobilization and International Cooperation Unit. During the discussions, both teams identified multiple avenues for collaboration, marking a significant step toward formalizing their partnership. COMESA plans to leverage its institutional capacity and regional influence to mobilize resources and coordinate stakeholders across the region.

In her welcoming remarks, Director of Industry, Ms. Providence Mavubi, emphasized that this partnership reflects a forward-looking approach to addressing key regional challenges such as food and nutrition security, gender equity in the fisheries sector, and climate resilience.

"This collaboration will not only support research into critical challenges facing our fisheries sector but also bring impactful projects to the region," said Ms. Mavubi. "Through the new Small Fish Climate Change (SFCC) project, we aim to tackle pressing issues,

including climate change, using a value-chain approach. We are committed to sustainable development that benefits our member states and strengthens resilience."

Professor Johnson shared optimism about the partnership's potential in Africa, noting the DFM project's success in other regions. "Our experience with the DFM project has shown that small fish can make a big difference in improving livelihoods, food security, and nutrition, especially for vulnerable populations," he stated. "We look forward to working with COMESA to extend these impacts across the Great Lakes region in Africa."

The Small Fish Food Systems Project, with its climate-resilient SFCC component, represents a promising collaboration poised to address critical fisheries sector challenges while fostering sustainable development and climate adaptability across Africa.



Left: IOM Regional Director for Southern Africa Mr Frantz Samuel Celestin confers with SG Chileshe Kapwepwe after presenting his Letter of Credence as Special Representative to COMESA.

## IOM, COMESA Collaboration has Advanced Integration

Collaboration between the international Organization for Migration and COMESA has advanced the implementation of regional integration in general and small-scale trade in particular in the COMESA Agenda on Migration.

Through the collaboration, COMESA has been able to develop a trade facilitation training programme tailored for small scale cross border trade. Additionally, IOM has supported the COMESA Migration Dialogue, which is convened every two years to discuss current global migration trends to enhance the COMESA Migration Agenda.

More recently, IOM provided resources for the first joint meeting of COMESA ministers responsible for immigration and labour, actualising the multi-agency approach to the implementation of the Migration Agenda.

These were part of the reflections that featured during the presentation of credentials by the IOM's Regional Director for Southern Africa Mr Frantz Samuel Celestin to COMESA Secretary General (SG), Chileshe Kapwepwe on 18 November 2024.

The SG appreciated the IOM expertise, specifically in labour and skills mobility, which she noted would continue to enrich COMESA's efforts towards achieving an improved mobility of citizens in the region.

"With the implementation of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement, there is going to be an increased movement of skilled and semi-skilled labour, along with factors of production, in the Tripartite region," she noted.

COMESA and IOM also signed a new Memorandum of Understanding in April 2023 to strengthen their cooperative working relationship in different areas of common interest covering border management in the context of regional integration, integrating migration and mobility into the trade agenda, migrant protection within supply chains, recruitment and value chains.

Mr Celestin reiterated the IOM's commitment to addressing migration challenges in the region, adding that saving and protecting lives is a core objective of the organisation. He urged

COMESA to address effects of climate change as they have an adverse effect on migration.

"IOM aims to offer displaced individuals pathways to rebuild their lives, reducing their dependency on aid while helping them envision a future beyond displacement," he said.

He called for collective efforts to reshape the narrative around migration, highlighting its potential to foster innovation and resilience across borders.

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**"With the implementation of the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement, there is going to be an increased movement of skilled and semi-skilled labour, along with factors of production, in the Tripartite region," Chileshe Kapwepwe**





*Participants at the 3rd Intergenerational Dialogue in Kampala Uganda*

## Enhancing Youth Participation in Peacebuilding and Governance

In November 2024, more than 150 Youths from the Eastern African region and beyond engaged in impactful conversations with policy makers, academicians and civil society organisations during the 3rd Intergenerational Dialogue held in Kampala, Uganda.

The three-day event from 12 – 14 November marked a significant milestone in the ongoing effort to enhance youth participation in key sectors of society that directly affect their well-being.

With the theme: 'From Learning to Leading: Education as a Catalyst for the Advancement of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda' the participants discussions brought out causes of young people being left out and proposals were made on how this situation could be improved.

The theme was in recognition of 2024 being designated as the 'Year of Education in Africa' and appreciating the unique opportunity for the African Union and COMESA to galvanise Member States, youths and partners towards achieving education targets for youth and to rethink educational models and skills development necessary for addressing youth-oriented peace and security issues.

Speaking when he officially opened the

Dialogue, Rt. Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda, former Prime Minister of Uganda and member of the COMESA Committee of Elders, inspired the young attendees to be catalysts for the change they wish to see.

"I am happy to see that as COMESA marks its 30 years anniversary this year, it has continued to build capacity for the young people who make up over 70 percent of its over 600m people," Hon. Rugunda said.

He described the Dialogue as mutually beneficial for both the young and older generation while urging them to avoid vices that promote division and strife in the Member States.

He encouraged the youth to use the latest technologies such as AI to gain more knowledge and develop solutions in value addition in order to move Africa from exporting raw materials, deepen intra-Africa trade and re-negotiation better terms of trade with the developed world.

COMESA's Conflict Early Warning Expert Mr Raymond Kitevu reiterated the organisation's commitment to create a platform for the youth, policy makers and civil society organisations to interact more often and address matters that affect young people.

At the end of the Dialogue, an Outcome Document was developed to solidify partnerships and align with existing education, peace and security strategies and plans.

Other Speakers included Dr Shako Kijala who represented the partners, Ms Angel Mbutia Chairperson of the COMESA Youth Advisory Panel (COMYAP) and Mr Jacob Eyeru from the National Youth Council of Uganda.

To close the Dialogue, Uganda's Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs Hon. Dr Balaam Barugahara addressed the participants and called for quality education that equips youths with necessary skills in governance, technology, entrepreneurship and conflict resolutions as essential to sustainable peace in the region.

He added that inclusive education is key to lasting peace and Uganda is committed to addressing all inequalities that affect youth and women.

The 3rd IGD was hosted by COMESA in partnership with Save the Children, International IDEA, the Horn of Africa Youth Network, the Institute of Security Studies, the Africa Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes and the Country Structural Vulnerability Assessment and Resilience programme.

## Eswatini & Zambia Investment Promotion Agencies Visit COMESA Secretariat



*Joint Eswatini - Zambia investment promotion delegation visiting COMESA Secretariat*

A delegation from the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA) and the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) visited the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka on November 14, 2024, to explore opportunities for collaboration in advancing their mandates. The delegation met with the Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah.

The EIPA delegation was led by Board Chairperson Theo Hlophe, while ZDA was represented by its Director of Corporate Strategy, Mr. Innocent Melu.

The visit, initiated by EIPA, aimed to gain a deeper understanding of COMESA's programmes and explore potential support mechanisms. It is also aligned with EIPA's vision to position itself as a leading and impactful Investment Promotion Agency (IPA).

Welcoming the delegations, Dr. Kadah emphasized that investment promotion is a core mandate of COMESA, as the regional bloc strives to deliver tangible

benefits to its Member States. EIPA CEO Mr. Sibani Mngomezulu outlined key challenges faced by IPAs, including inadequate resources and high staff turnover, which demand continuous capacity building. He also highlighted EIPA's strategic priorities, such as developing agricultural value chains, implementing a digital strategy, and enhancing staff capacity.

Both COMESA and the visiting IPAs agreed to collaborate on initiatives

to boost investments across the region. Among the proposed areas of cooperation were organizing an investment roadshow focused on the beef industry and supporting the implementation of the COMESA Investment Agreement.

This partnership underscores a shared commitment to fostering economic growth and development within the COMESA region.







*Delegates at the 3rd Programme Steering Committee meeting of the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD)*

## Aviation Experts Gather for Key Meeting on SATSD Programme

Aviation experts convened on 5 December 2024 in Lusaka for the 3rd Programme Steering Committee (PSC) meeting of the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) Programme. The meeting, which followed a two-day session of the Technical Working Group (TWG), focused on addressing the progress of the €8 million programme funded by the European Union.

The SATSD programme, which was signed in December 2020, covers 29 member states across COMESA, EAC, IGAD, IOC, and SADC. It is seen as a key initiative in advancing Africa's Agenda 2063 and achieving the goal of a Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), a flagship project of the African Union (AU) essential for regional integration.

In his opening remarks, COMESA Assistant Secretary General Dr. Mohammed Kadah expressed concern over the slow pace of programme implementation, calling for a

reassessment of the strategy to ensure measurable outcomes.

"The pace of programme implementation has been less than desired, and it is now imperative to reassess our strategy to deliver results. This is especially critical as we need to demonstrate value for money in anticipation of the requested for a no-cost extension," Dr. Kadah stated via a virtual speech.

The programme, which was originally slated for completion by the end of this month, has faced delays, with only 40% of the budget absorbed so far. Key performance indicators remain at baseline levels, with several planned interventions still pending.

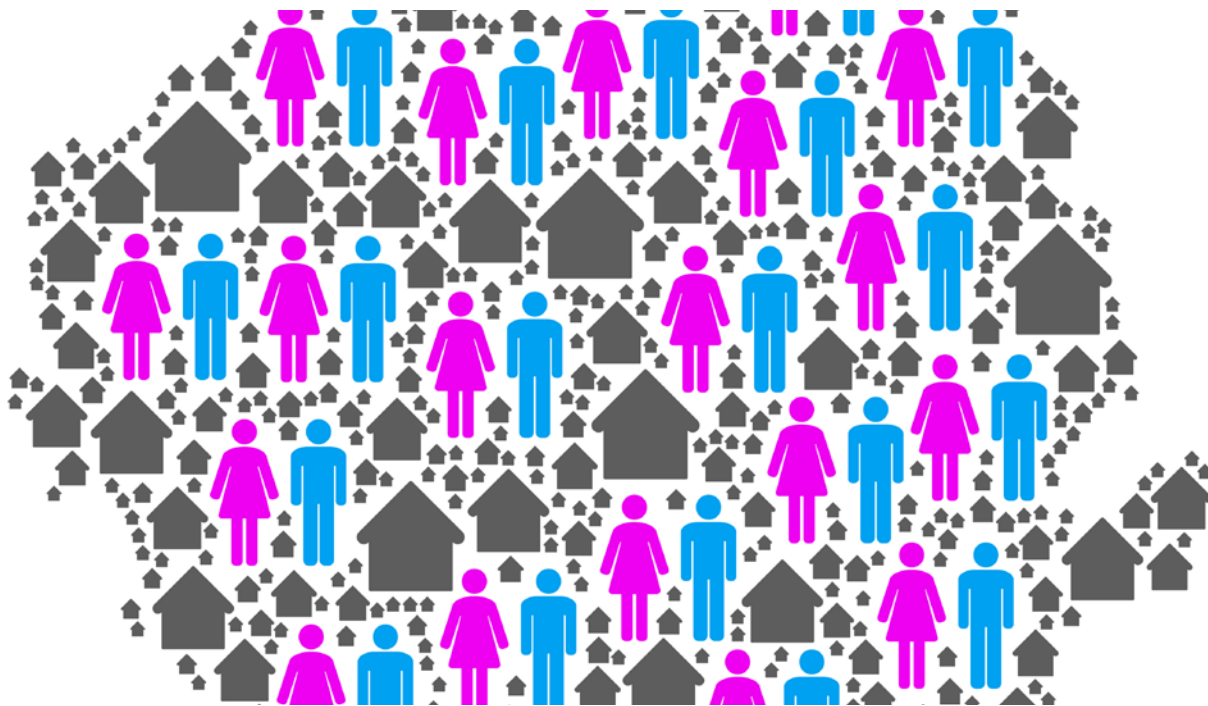
Mr Massimo Bonannini, Head of Infrastructure at the European Union Delegation to Zambia and COMESA, voiced concern over the lack of progress. He emphasized that the programme, which has yet to be fully implemented, is unlikely to meet its targets within the

original timeframe.

"The EU is currently evaluating the possibility of extending the programme by two years, as the one-year extension proposed by the project steering committee will not be sufficient to achieve the expected results," Bonannini explained.

The SATSD programme is a critical component of Africa's air transport sector development, aiming to reduce barriers to regional air connectivity and foster economic integration across the continent.

As the EU considers an extension, all eyes are now on the programme's ability to overcome its current challenges and deliver the outcomes necessary to support Africa's ambitious transport and economic goals.



## COMESA Hosts Gender Sensitization Workshop in Tunisia

On December 4, 2024, the COMESA Secretariat held a gender sensitization workshop in Tunis, Tunisia which brought together stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as civil society groups, to disseminate COMESA's gender-focused policies and tools.

The workshop aimed to familiarize participants with key instruments, including the COMESA Gender Policy, the Gender Policy Implementation Action Plan, the Gender Planning Guidelines, Checklists, and Indicators, and the COMESA Social Charter.

During the opening session, Mr. Mohamed Dhaoui expressed gratitude to COMESA for organizing the event and highlighted its significance. Similarly,

COMESA's Director for Gender, Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, emphasized the importance of ensuring these policies are well-understood and adopted across Member States.

"As the COMESA Secretariat, we are committed to ensuring that these policies are embraced by the citizens of Member States. This workshop's goal is to strengthen the implementation of the COMESA Gender Policy Framework through gender mainstreaming and women empowerment initiatives," Mrs. Hamusonde stated.

The workshop delved into the Gender Planning Guidelines, a critical tool for identifying gender gaps and proposing interventions. The guidelines assist

in conceptualizing, designing, and implementing gender-responsive programs and projects across three levels: the COMESA Secretariat, COMESA institutions, and Member States.

Participants explored ways to analyze specific programs and projects, identify gender issues, propose targeted interventions, and measure results using tailored indicators. The tool also supports situational analyses to address the diverse needs, interests, and concerns of women, men, girls, and boys in different contexts.

To date, the COMESA Gender Division has conducted similar workshops in Uganda, Burundi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Djibouti, Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, Eswatini, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and now Tunisia. These initiatives have deepened engagement with Member States, especially those previously unfamiliar with COMESA's gender frameworks.

The workshops are supported through the RECAMP initiative under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

**"As the COMESA Secretariat, we are committed to ensuring that these policies are embraced by the citizens of Member States. This workshop's goal is to strengthen the implementation of the COMESA Gender Policy Framework through gender mainstreaming and women empowerment initiatives," Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde.**





## Tunisia's Women and Youth Empowered on Regional Trade Opportunities

COMESA Secretariat, in collaboration with the Tunisian government, hosted a multistakeholder dialogue in Tunis on December 3, 2024, to engage women and youth in business. The dialogue aimed to enhance their capacity to participate in regional trade by exposing them to available trade facilitation tools.

The event was opened by Mr. Mohamed Dhaoui, Director for Women Affairs at the Ministry for Women, Family, Children & Seniors. Other notable speakers included Mrs. Leila Belkhiria Jaber, President of the National Chamber of Women in Business; Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs; and Mr. Lazher Bennour, Director General of Economic and Commercial Cooperation at the Ministry of Trade and Export Development.

"Tunisia recognizes women as key partners in national development. Empowering women through financial inclusion and other initiatives remains a priority," Mr. Dhaoui said. He acknowledged persistent challenges and

encouraged participants to exchange knowledge on opportunities and obstacles.

Mrs. Leila Belkhiria Jaber underscored the transformative potential of women's entrepreneurship. "Investing in women's businesses creates a ripple effect of positive change that extends beyond individual success stories," she noted.

The dialogue focused on raising awareness of COMESA's objectives and initiatives, including its gender frameworks and the Women in Business Digital Platform. These tools enable Member State citizens to leverage opportunities within the region.

The session featured an interactive discussion where participants asked questions about COMESA. About 100 individuals attended, 80 of whom were women and youth from public and private sector institutions.

Since its inception in 2023, the multistakeholder dialogues have been

held in Mauritius, DR Congo, Kenya, and Madagascar. These events serve as key platforms to expose women and youth in business to COMESA's trade facilitation tools, market opportunities, and EU-supported initiatives that benefit women. The dialogues are supported through the Institutional Capacity Building Programme (ICBP) under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

**"Tunisia recognizes women as key partners in national development. Empowering women through financial inclusion and other initiatives remains a priority," Mr. Mohamed Dhaoui**



## Domestication of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations in Tunisia

The COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations, which aim to enhance regional integration and seed trade, came into effect in May 2014. To date, ten COMESA Member States—Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Malawi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—have successfully domesticated these regulations.

To extend these benefits, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), a specialized agency of COMESA, has launched a sensitization program targeting member states yet to adopt the regulations.

As part of this initiative, ACTESA conducted a sensitization workshop in Tunisia from 5th – 6th December 2024, focusing on raising awareness on COMESA-aligned national seed laws and regulations. The event was a key step in Tunisia's phased approach to finalizing the COMESA Seed Harmonization Implementation Plan (COMSHIP). The event brought together diverse seed industry stakeholders to discuss the domestication process and chart a path forward.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Naima Mahfoudhi, General Director of Plant Health under Tunisia's Ministry of Agriculture, emphasized the importance of seed trade harmonization for boosting regional trade and advancing agricultural transformation. She highlighted the role of harmonized regulations

in increasing seed production, improving access for smallholder farmers, and driving inclusive economic growth in the COMESA region.

Echoing her sentiments, Mr. Lazhen Benmaul, General Director of Cooperation, Economic, and Trade under Tunisia's Ministry of Trade and Export Development, underscored the alignment's potential to enhance food security and economic resilience.

"Climate change has deeply impacted Tunisia's agriculture sector, as it has across the region. By harmonizing our national seed regulations with COMESA's, we have an opportunity to strengthen our competitiveness in the regional agricultural value chain," he said.

Dr. John Mukuka, ACTESA's Chief Executive Officer, represented by Agribusiness and Policy Advisor John Chambamakasa, elaborated on the critical role of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations. He noted that only 20% of the 90 million smallholder farmers in the COMESA region currently access quality, improved seeds—a shortfall that contributes to food insecurity for about 130 million people.

"The regional seed market remains fragmented into small, isolated national markets, with each country operating its own seed policies and regulations. This fragmentation imposes high costs and delays on seed companies, ultimately slowing the delivery of quality seeds to farmers.

The COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations address these challenges by creating a unified regulatory framework," he explained.

Dr. Mukuka further highlighted COMESA's commitment to implementing these regulations through initiatives like COMSHIP, which aim to foster seamless integration of national and regional seed markets.

The workshop brought together representatives from Tunisia's Ministry of Agriculture, National Seed Authorities, Plant Protection Organizations, National Seed Trade Associations (NSTAs), research organizations, seed companies, and NGOs.

The event was supported by the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) and funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF 11). It marked a significant milestone in ACTESA's ongoing sensitization efforts, following similar workshops held earlier in Eswatini and Ethiopia in July and August 2024, respectively.

COMSHIP serves as a key mechanism for strengthening seed production, improving reliability, and promoting seed trade. It also aims to enhance the competitiveness of the seed industry in the Southern and Eastern African region, ensuring a robust and sustainable agricultural future for COMESA Member States.





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