

COMESA Ministers Chart Path for Sustainable Infrastructure Growth

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The 14th Meeting of Ministers responsible for Transport, Energy and ICT in Bujumbura

Ministers responsible for energy, transport, ICT and communications from the Common Market have endorsed a series of critical sectoral reports and action plans aimed at advancing sustainable infrastructure across the region.

The high-level meeting, hosted at the Royal Palace Hotel in Bujumbura on 27 June 2025, was officially opened by H.E. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, Burundi's Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry and Tourism, who also chairs the COMESA Council of Ministers.

She highlighted infrastructure as a key driver of inclusive growth, structural transformation, and peacebuilding.

"Infrastructure connects communities, fosters opportunity, and forms the backbone of regional integration," Nijimbere said, further urging Member States to prioritize impactful interventions, eliminate policy barriers, and transform infrastructure plans into measurable outcomes.

The Minister indicated that in 2020, the continent suffered an unprecedented contraction of -1.6% in

GDP, but however rebounded strongly, recording 6.9% growth in 2021. She added that with support from the African Development Bank (AfDB), the continent's GDP grew to average 3.8% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025, driven by expanding services and a recovering industrial base.

"Amidst this recovery, persistent and formidable threats continue to loom large. Climate volatility continues to challenge our agricultural systems and infrastructure; digital exclusion perpetuates disparities and stifles innovation; and energy insecurity remains a fundamental impediment to industrialization and human development," Hon. Nijimbere said.

The ministers reviewed sector-specific progress reports spanning road, rail, maritime, air transport, energy and ICT.

Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah emphasized the urgency of addressing infrastructure inefficiencies and closing funding gaps to boost regional competitiveness.

Dr. Kadah noted that significant initiatives under review include the Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility (RIFF) and the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access (ASCENT) programs which target investment in renewable energy, off-grid markets, and harmonized energy policies.

He stated that, in air transport, global passenger numbers have doubled from 4.5 billion in 2019 to 9.5 billion in 2024, despite Africa's share remaining low at just 2.2% of Revenue Passenger Kilometers.

"COMESA is advancing the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), with 38 countries—including nine from COMESA—now committed. A cooperation agreement signed with IATA in 2024 and rollout through the SATSD program mark key milestones," the Assistant Secretary General stated.

He informed the ministers that road transport continues to dominate freight movement, handling

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Officials ready for the task ahead

COMESA and AU Launch Technical Assistance to Malawi Electoral Body Ahead of Elections

COMESA in collaboration with the African Union and International IDEA have launched technical support to the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and other key electoral stakeholders as the country prepares for general elections scheduled for 16 September 2025. The deployment of the Technical Assistance Mission follows a recommendation from the joint AU-COMESA Pre-Elections Assessment Mission which was conducted in March 2025.

The first batch of the technical assistance included the training of MEC Senior Management and other key electoral stakeholders from 16-18 June 2025 on election risk identification and protecting elections against gender-based discrimination. The two back-to-back trainings are expected to lead to enhanced capacity of commissioners and senior staff of MEC including some key electoral stakeholders. The training attracted 50 participants drawn from MEC, Judiciary, the Police, Malawi Defense Forces, civil society organizations and other relevant government departments.

In addition to the above first batch of capacity

building activities, the AU-COMESA technical assistance will also focus on the thematic areas such as BRIDGE Modular Training on Gender & Inclusion, development and adoption of a risk management framework and policy, technical training and support on adoption of Electoral Risk Management Tool and Data Collection Hub and Training of Trainers for Logistics Management. Other areas will include Quality Control & Compliance Training and Election Monitoring Strategy.

MEC Chairperson Justice Annabel Mtalimanja expressed appreciation to AU, COMESA and International IDEA for the timely support, adding that it would be instrumental in strengthening the capacity of MEC and other key electoral stakeholders ahead of the elections.

Speaking on behalf of AU and COMESA, the COMESA Head of Governance, Peace and Security Dr. Oita Etyang underscored the commitment of both organizations in supporting the consolidation of democracy and good governance in Member States in line with the relevant respective normative

instruments.

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Regional Seed Certification and Labelling System Launched



ACTESA CEO Dr. John Mukuka (left), Director Plant Quarantine & Phytosanitary Services Dr Kenneth Msiska and Dr Nathan Phiri Acting Director Seed Control and Certification Institute launching the labels

COMESA, through its Specialised Agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), has launched the Regional Seed Certification and Labelling System in its efforts to combat counterfeit seed, improve access to quality and boost regional agricultural trade.

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr. John Mukuka was joined by Dr Kenneth Msiska, Director, Plant Quarantine and Phytosanitary Services in Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture to officially launch the system on 26 June 2025, at Ciela Resort in Lusaka, Zambia.

Dr Msiska highlighted that the COMESA regional labels are key in monitoring the transparent free movement of seeds within the COMESA region and crucial to ensuring increased seed production, reliability and competitiveness of the seed industry in the COMESA region.

Dr Mukuka on his part pointed out that the COMESA regional certificates and labels are poised to expedite the seed export and imports by the COMESA Member States, thereby facilitating the seamless flow of seeds in the region.

Delegation of the European Commission to Zambia representative Christiane Haziyo said the launch of the Regional Seed Certification and Labelling System was a strategic step toward unlocking regional seed trade, reducing costs for producers, and ensuring that the millions of smallholder farmers across COMESA have access to high-quality seed.

Partner organisations such as the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) called for continued engagement with seed companies to prioritise quality and compliance. Secretary General Yacouba Diallo reiterated his organization's commitment to work with ACTESA in ensuring that quality seeds are used.

The launch of the COMESA Regional Seed Certification and Labelling System is a milestone towards ensuring increased regional seed production and intra-agriculture trade in the region.

The programme is supported by the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECOMP), funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

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over 80% in the region and tools like the Yellow Card, Transit Bond and harmonized axle limits are helping to lower trade costs under the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme.

Despite rail's diminished share sitting at below 15%, Dr. Kadah said a new Rail Transport Master Plan, funded by the World Bank, is in development to rebuild regional networks. Lake and inland waterway transport, vital for landlocked countries, is being enhanced through projects like the VICMED Corridor and new RoRo terminals on Lake Tanganyika.

He highlighted significant strides in regional integration through collective ICT initiatives, notably the Africa Cloud Ecosystem (ACE) project—an African Development Bank-funded effort which proposes a secure, continent-wide cloud infrastructure with its head office in Zambia, a main data center in Kenya, and a disaster recovery site in Egypt.

Dr. Kadah added that collaborative actions like the rollout of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (eCO) in pilot Member States will modernize trade systems, and encouraged broader use of transformative platforms such as the 50 Million African Women Speak Platform, which continues to empower women economically and expand access to essential resources.

The ministers concluded with a strong call for unified strategies, accelerated reforms, and investment mobilization to unlock infrastructure-driven transformation across COMESA.

Seychelles Tax Officials Trained in Double Taxation Avoidance



Seychelles government officials with COMESA and ATAF staff

COMESA in collaboration with the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) conducted a two-day high-level Validation and Capacity Building Workshop on the Seychelles revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) framework. The event was supported under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

RECAMP Team Leader at COMESA Secretariat, Mr. Nsangwa Ngwira reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to strengthening the region's

investment climate by promoting harmonized, transparent, and investor friendly tax frameworks.

"This workshop marks a significant milestone in Seychelles' efforts to align its DTAA framework with regional and international best practices.

"It is part of a broader commitment under Chapter 26, Article 161 of the COMESA Treaty, which calls on Member States to conclude agreements for the avoidance of double taxation," Mr. Ngwira said.

The revised DTAA framework, developed with

technical support from ATAF, is designed to serve as a guiding tool for Seychelles' tax officials when negotiating and drafting bilateral or multilateral agreements. The workshop held on 23 June 2025 also focused on building the capacity of officials from the Ministry of Finance and the Revenue Commission, ensuring they are well-equipped to lead tax negotiations that promote equity, prevent tax evasion, and facilitate information exchange.

In her remarks, Mrs. Varsha Singh, Commissioner General of the Seychelles Revenue Commission, emphasized the significance of this reform for Seychelles' economic outlook.

"This revised DTAA framework is a major step forward in strengthening our ability to negotiate fair and effective tax agreements. It enables us to promote investment while protecting Seychelles' tax base. This collaboration reflects our shared goal of creating a modern, fair, and transparent tax system," She stated.

Speaking on behalf of ATAF, Mr. Emmanuel Eze noted that with the revised framework, Seychelles was now well-positioned to negotiate agreements that not only attract investment but also safeguard the country's fiscal interests.

COMESA Moves to Onboard More Member States to e-Certificate of Origin

More Member States will soon be using the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) system which was launched in November 2024. The e-CO is a modern digital tool expected to enhance and facilitate trade among the countries.

Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes (ASGP) Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah said the COMESA Secretariat is finalizing the integration of the e-CO with national e-CO Systems of Kenya, Seychelles and Ethiopia.

Further, the Secretariat is working with Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritius, Rwanda and Tunisia who have conducted their national situational assessments in preparation for the interfacing and implementation of the

COMESA e-CO.

The Assistant Secretary General was speaking on Thursday 26 June 2025 during the opening session of the Eleventh Meeting of the Heads of Customs Sub-Committee which was held virtually. This meeting was preceded by Customs Experts Meeting.

Ms Balness Sumani, Officer-in-Charge of the Trade and Customs Division read Dr. Kadah's statement.

The Assistant Secretary General noted that in addition to the e-CO, COMESA is exploring means of customs-to-customs electronic exchange of data, an electronic single window and other customs applications supported by the cutting-edge technologies such as

blockchain, big data and AI.

The meeting appreciated the important role played by Customs administrations in facilitating cross-border trade and transport flows in an efficient and secure manner that reduces Non- Tariff Barriers to trade and enhances the competitiveness of the region's products.

The meeting also discussed the draft 2026-2030 COMESA Customs and Trade Facilitation Work Programme, which will provide inputs in the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan 2026-2030 which is at an advanced stage of development.



Hon. Judith Ncube (in green) with Mrs Providence Mavubi, Mr Nicholas Mudungwe and Ms Mshuka Kamwela at the launch

Zimbabwe Leather Satellite Design Studio Launched

COMESA working with the Government of Zimbabwe and through the Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI) has launched the Zimbabwe Leather Satellite Studio stocked with over 150,000 Euros worth of equipment. This has been made possible through the Technical Assistant Facility (TAF) under the European Union Development Funded (11 EDF), Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

The studio, located in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is a flagship grassroots initiative designed to empower artisans in the leather sector with modern tools and skills. Equipped with the state-of-the-art machinery, it has the potential to evolve into a satellite centre of excellence for leather development across the COMESA region. The Zimbabwe TAF Project, is building on the achievements of the COMESA-EU funded Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM), and continues to strengthen Zimbabwe's leather value chain, an area prioritized under COMESA's industrialization agenda.

Bulawayo Metropolitan Province State Minister Hon. Judith Ncube attended the launch representing the Minister of Industry and Commerce, Hon. Mangaliso

Ndlovu. Director of Agriculture and Industry Mrs Providence Mavubi represented COMESA Secretariat.

Speaking on behalf of Hon. Ndlovu, Minister Ncube underscored the significance of the studio as a key initiative to enhance product quality, strengthen design innovation, and improve branding capabilities within Zimbabwe's leather industry. The Bulawayo studio aligns with the broader vision of the Regional Design Studio in Ethiopia, a flagship project endorsed by the COMESA Council of Ministers meeting held in Madagascar in 2016. "Footwear and leather product sectors are highly fashion-oriented and seasonal, emphasizing design and creative thinking. A dedicated design studio like this will serve as a hub to develop, and perfect new products and branding potential," Hon. Ndlovu said.

On her part, Mrs Mavubi urged the SMEs to utilize the modern studio, emphasizing their creativity, resilience and entrepreneurial spirit. She challenged them to promote Zimbabwe-branded leather products locally and globally, highlighting their quality and innovation.

"Zimbabwe has now acquired advanced equipment to bolster its leather traceability systems. This will enable local products to meet international standards and fetch higher

prices. With these systems and the newly established design studio, Zimbabwe is poised to gain a significant competitive edge," She added.

Speaking at the same event, EDF Programme Manager at COMESA Secretariat, Ms Mshuka Kamwela said the studio belongs to SMEs and entrepreneurs and therefore urged them to jealously guard and maintain the studio and ensure it is a sustainable hub of creativity and excellence.

In his remarks, ALLPI Executive Director, Mr Nicholas Mudungwe said the establishment of the Studio is a shining example of what targeted industrial policy can deliver. A product of partnership – between Zimbabwe, the EU through the RECAMP Programme, COMESA and ALLPI. "This Studio will support skills development, product innovation, and position Zimbabwe as a hub for creative and competitive leather goods in the region and beyond," Mr Mudungwe noted.

The launch of the Zimbabwe Leather Satellite Studio marks a transformative step toward revitalizing the country's leather industry and positioning it as a regional leader in value-added production.

COMESA Conducts Horticulture Engagement Mission to Germany



Participants of the mission to Germany

The COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the COMESA Business Council (CBC) undertook a horticulture engagement mission to Germany with representatives of eight Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Tunisia and Zimbabwe from 9-14 June 2025.

The mission is the second of its kind after a similar one to Netherlands in 2024. From the Netherlands mission, SMEs gained valuable insights on European market requirements, including standards, logistics, and certification needs. The SMEs established partnerships with Netherlands companies and received commitments from potential buyers to visit their farms for further engagement.

During a briefing session with the delegation, Director of Industry and Agriculture at COMESA Secretariat, Mrs Providence Mavubi, observed that Germany plays a critical role in the global agriculture sector, being one of the largest importers and exporters of consumer-oriented agricultural products worldwide and by far the most important European market for foreign producers.

She noted that these missions are meant to increase the competitiveness and market access of SMEs in the horticulture sector by exploring market opportunities through active participation in value chains, strengthening linkages with international buyers, and facilitating networking opportunities for COMESA horticulture producers. The mission was funded by the 11th European

Development Fund (EDF), Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), with the aim of enabling the SMEs to establish business matchmaking platforms between COMESA producers and German partners and other value chain actors within the EU.

EDF Programme Manager at COMESA Secretariat, Ms Mshuka Kamwela, described the mission as crucial for the region as Germany is the principal importer of horticultural products exports from Africa and the COMESA region.

She noted that in previous years, the EU accounted for between 40% and 55% of total COMESA horticulture exports—a reflection of the strong trade ties fostered under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). These agreements aim to improve the business environment for African entrepreneurs by supporting regional integration and addressing critical supply-side constraints.

Ms. Kamwela highlighted the important role of RECAMP in tackling persistent challenges facing SMEs, particularly limited access to market information, weak business linkages, and the lack of harmonized regional policies supporting value chain development.

"This mission aligns with COMESA's broader efforts to deepen regional integration through trade facilitation, thereby driving economic growth and strengthening cooperation across Member States," she said.

Mr Hopewell Musundire, the Business Development Manager at CBC described the mission as a great milestone in the development of the horticulture sector in COMESA, noting that it enhanced competitiveness for SMEs in the horticulture sector through exposure to supply chains in the EU, promoted knowledge exchange on best practices, and connected SMEs with major players in the EU horticulture value chain.

With a population of over 80 million, Germany is the largest European market for fresh fruits and vegetables, importing about 10.9 billion euros worth of fresh fruits and vegetables per year.

The entities on the mission were Wealth Resources of Egypt, Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association, National Potato Council of Kenya, Ministry of Agriculture Tunisia, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries, Velt of Madagascar, Conventions Management Company, Procitru Pvt Ltd and Avomac.

They expressed gratitude to the EU for its support which has significantly enhanced the competitive landscape and improved the business environment for SMEs across the COMESA region.



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