



30 YEARS OF
COMESA IMPACT



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the European Union



COMESA

Trade Facilitation Programme

SUPPORTED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Establishing a conducive trade environment to enhance intra-regional trade

A red and white Scania Dreamliner truck is driving on a paved road that stretches into the distance. The truck is a semi-trailer unit with a white trailer and a red cab. The cab has "SCANIA" and "DREAMLINER" written on it. The trailer has "NEW" written on its side. The road is flanked by dry, hilly terrain with sparse vegetation and a few trees. In the background, another truck is visible on the road. The sky is overcast.

Increase intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services by reducing the costs/delays of imports/exports at specific border posts.

Overview

The Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) was launched in 2018 as a transformative €48.3 million programme funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund. Implemented by the COMESA Secretariat in partnership with selected Member States, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the programme supported COMESA's aim under the Market Integration Pillar to be a single trade and investment area in which tariffs, non-tariff barriers (NTB's) and other impediments to the movement of goods, services, capital and people are removed while trade in goods and services from the region will have achieved global market competitiveness.

Objective

To increase intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services by reducing the costs/delays of imports/exports at specific border posts through the reduction of NTBs across the borders, the implementation of the COMESA Digital FTA, World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, the improvement of the Coordinated Border Management (CBM), and the liberalisation of the trade in services and movement of persons

The TFP was structured around four clustered result areas as follows:

- **Implementation of CBM:** to increase intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services by reducing the costs/delays of imports/exports at specific border posts.
- **Deepening trade liberalization within the COMESA FTA:** support Member States to participate



in the COMESA FTA, reduction of NTBs, liberalization of the trade in services and movement of persons. and capacity building for implementation of SPS/TBT systems

- **Trade Facilitation:** capacity building for the implementation of the COMESA Digital FTA, WTO TFA and automated trade support systems
- **Trade negotiations:** negotiations on liberalization of the trade in services and movement of persons and regional coordination on Tripartite Free Trade Area and African Continental Free Trade Area negotiations

Achievements and Impact

The TFP has delivered tangible results across Member States, notably improving the trading environment for cross-border trade and addressing regulatory and operational impediments. The details of selected key achievements and related impact appear below:

- (a) Trained over 500 NTB's National Monitoring Committee members and Focal Points on the COMESA NTB Elimination Mechanism which has facilitated resolution of reported NTB's.
- (b) Supported Member States in the implementation of WTO TFA Measures and provided capacity-building support to for the development of Seychelles' AEO implementation strategy, and a Review of Madagascar's Single Window strategy and the formulation of a National Trade Facilitation Strategy.

- (c) Developed COMESA Regional Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) Programme
- (d) Developed 10 Regional training manuals on Rules of Origin and other Trade Facilitation and Customs Management subjects.
- (e) Developed COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (eCO) system and Integrated COMESA e-CO with national systems in Malawi, Zambia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. Launched the COMESA e-CO Pilot implementation at regional level with Malawi, Zambia, and Eswatini in the margins of policy organs meeting held in Zambia, on 27th November 2024.
- (f) Developed Regional Trade Information Portal to provide access to regulatory information and to comply with the transparency provisions of the WTO TFA, COMESA has developed a Regional Trade Information Portal: **URL:** www.tradeportal.comesa.int
- (g) Trained 120 officials from 15 Member States and the COMESA Secretariat in both English and French languages on functional (6 rounds) and technical (3 rounds) aspects of ASYCUDAWorld.
- (h) Supported Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to implement border upgrade projects that comprised primarily of review and updating of legislative frameworks, procurement of ICT equipment and facilitation of connectivity of systems of border agencies and capacity building of border post stakeholders on trade facilitation issues.



Installed baggage scanner at Mchinji border, Malawi

- (i) Member States trained in Food Safety Risk Assessment, resulting in the development of a draft harmonization framework that addresses regulatory divergences and leverages convergences in food safety measures (FAO).
- (j) Strengthened the COMESA Food Safety Laboratory Network by identifying 10 Reference Laboratories (2 for Animal Health, 5 for Food Safety, 3 for Plant Health) and 12 Satellite Laboratories (1 for Animal Health, 6 for Food Safety, 5 for Plant Health), pending designation.
- (k) E-Learning course developed for Pest Risk Analysis (PRA); Phytosanitary inspection; Phytosanitary Export Certification System; Surveillance and reporting obligations; Developed Guidelines for Drafting National Regulation on Electronic Phytosanitary Certification; Developed Model Regulations on Electronic Phytosanitary Certification
- (l) Procured metrology equipment in mass; volume; temperature and dimensional for 16 NMIs/LMOs.
- (m) Supported Member States to negotiate on the seven priority service sectors of financial, tourism, transport and communication, energy, business related services and construction services.
- (n) Developed an Online Platform for Trade in Services with support from Afreximbank to facilitate virtual and physical negotiations. Conducted two training workshops and launched the platform at the 43rd Council meeting in 2023.



(o) COMESA Trade Promotion Strategy developed and adopted by Council in November 2024

Sustained Impact and Lessons Learned

The support provided under 11 EDF TFP has established a platform for improving the trade environment in the region. Key lessons are that implementation of trade facilitation measures, resolution of non-tariff barriers and scaling up of trade promotion efforts are key interventions to grow the levels on intra-regional trade. Another cardinal lesson is the importance of participation of private stakeholders in the design and implementation of trade facilitation programmes and the critical need for continued coordination among stakeholders to enhance implementation and sustainability. Also, of great importance and value is the leveraging of automation and advances in digital systems to maximize operational efficiency improvements at border crossings and along trade Corridors.

Looking Ahead: Building on the momentum

COMESA is exploring new partnerships to sustain the programme's legacy. Future priorities include:

- **Enhanced Efficiency of Operations on COMESA Transit Corridors and Border Posts**
- *Customs Reform and Modernisation.*
- *Infrastructure and Systems Development.*
- **Reduction of NTBs and Promotion of Regional Trade**
- *NTBs, Trade Barriers and SPS and TBT systems.*



Nakonde/Tunduma border Smart Gate system controlling the traffic of trucks





- *Regional Trade Promotion.*
- **Operationalization of the Digital Free Trade Area (FTA) Instruments**
- *Establishment and roll out of Digital Trade Platforms.*
- *Customs Automation and Interconnectivity.*

THE SMALL-SCALE CROSS BORDER TRADE INITIATIVE(SSCBTI)

Small-scale cross border traders in the COMESA region face challenges which push them into informality and prevent them from growing their businesses. These challenges include:-

1. **High transaction costs and delays at the borders.** These include high fees and duties, unpredictable and complex regulations, heavy and centralised documentation requirements, as well as strict immigration laws.
2. **Corruption, insecurity and gender-based harassment.** These include bribery and arbitrary application of existing rules (“rent seeking” behaviours) and harassment (especially for women traders), as well as the



overall weak law enforcement environment which often prevails at border posts.

- 3. Poor basic infrastructures and facilities.** There is a lack of specific basic infrastructure at the border to cater for the needs of small-scale trade resulting from lack of access of electricity, transport, storage and telecommunications making these places very chaotic and unsafe.
- 4. Weak traders' associations.** The Cross-Border Traders Associations (CBTAs) that are to be representatives of small-scale traders are either non-existent or badly equipped to deal with the challenges that confront traders.
- 5. Lack of (gender disaggregated) data on cross-border trade flows.** The lack of systematic data collection and management affects the proper monitoring and understanding of the phenomenon by governments, traders' associations, regional organisations and cooperating partners which then hampers informed policymaking at national and regional level.

EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT TO SSCBTI

The Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI) is a €15 million programme funded by the European Union (EU) under the 11th EDF. Its rationale is to respond to the challenges outlined above.

The SSCBTI was signed on 8th May 2018 between COMESA and the EU in Chipata, Zambia, for







- (e) Adequate and gender sensitive basic border infrastructures for small-scale traders are built/upgraded at selected border areas.

Key Stakeholders

The primary target group and main beneficiary of the project were the cross-border traders (especially women traders) who cross regularly the borders in the COMESA/tripartite region to sell and buy goods. The project was to provide them a safer, healthier and more transparent border environment for their trade operations.

The COMESA Secretariat was responsible for overall coordination, management and implementation of the programme while the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) implemented some activities under the supervision of the COMESA Secretariat.

National governments (Customs and Revenue Authorities, Ministries of Trade and other authorities) and local/border authorities (including Joint Border Committees) in targeted border areas were at the forefront to domesticate and implement some components of the programme.

National trade/business associations such as the Cross-Border Traders Associations (CBTAs) and similar associations (such as women in business associations for instance) played an important role in terms of advocacy, sensitisation, mediation/dialogue with border officials, monitoring of small-scale trade flows.

Achievements

The SSCBTI recorded several achievements that include:

- a. Improvements in the Simplified Trade Regime by placing eight (8) Trade Information Desk Officers at the borders to assist traders and facilitating negotiating additional products to the Common Lists; Malawi and Zambia added 46 products, Malawi and Zimbabwe added 32 products while Zambia and Zimbabwe added 25 products. This has increased the range of products tradeable under the STR.
- b. Did the exploratory work on developing simplified procedures for small scale cross border services traders to access services. This is pioneering work as not simplified procedures are for trade in goods and not for services.
- c. Undertaking the preparatory work for deployment of the Green Pass by working on the mini-lab for dried fish at Luangwa, Zambia; training fish traders and developing guidelines for risk-based regulations and self-regulation; and preparing for roll out of the Green Pass to Chirundu and Mwami/Mchinji borders.
- d. Deployed the Migration Information and Data Analysis System at Mchinji border, Malawi, which is facilitating safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration.
- e. Trained 779 small scale traders and border officials on trade facilitation instruments and the rights and obligations of traders and border officials. Over 60% of those traders trained were female.
- f. Building the capacity of Cross Border Traders Associations in governance and advocacy and establishing the Cross Border Traders Network for Eastern and Southern Africa (CBT-NESA) as a forum for the associations



Handover of various trade facilitation equipment to border agencies at Mwami/Mchunji border



COMESA, EU, Government officials and local leaders at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of the border market in Chipata.

to share experiences. Three Strategic Plans for the CBTAs of Malawi, Zimbabwe and for CBT-NESA were developed while two CBTA constitutions for Malawi and for the CBT-NESA were reviewed.

- g. Collection and analysis of informal cross border trade data at Chirundu, Mwami/ Mchinji, Nakonde/ Tunduma, Kasumbalesa (Zambia), and Moyale (Kenya) borders and publishing the information on the COMSTAT Portal.



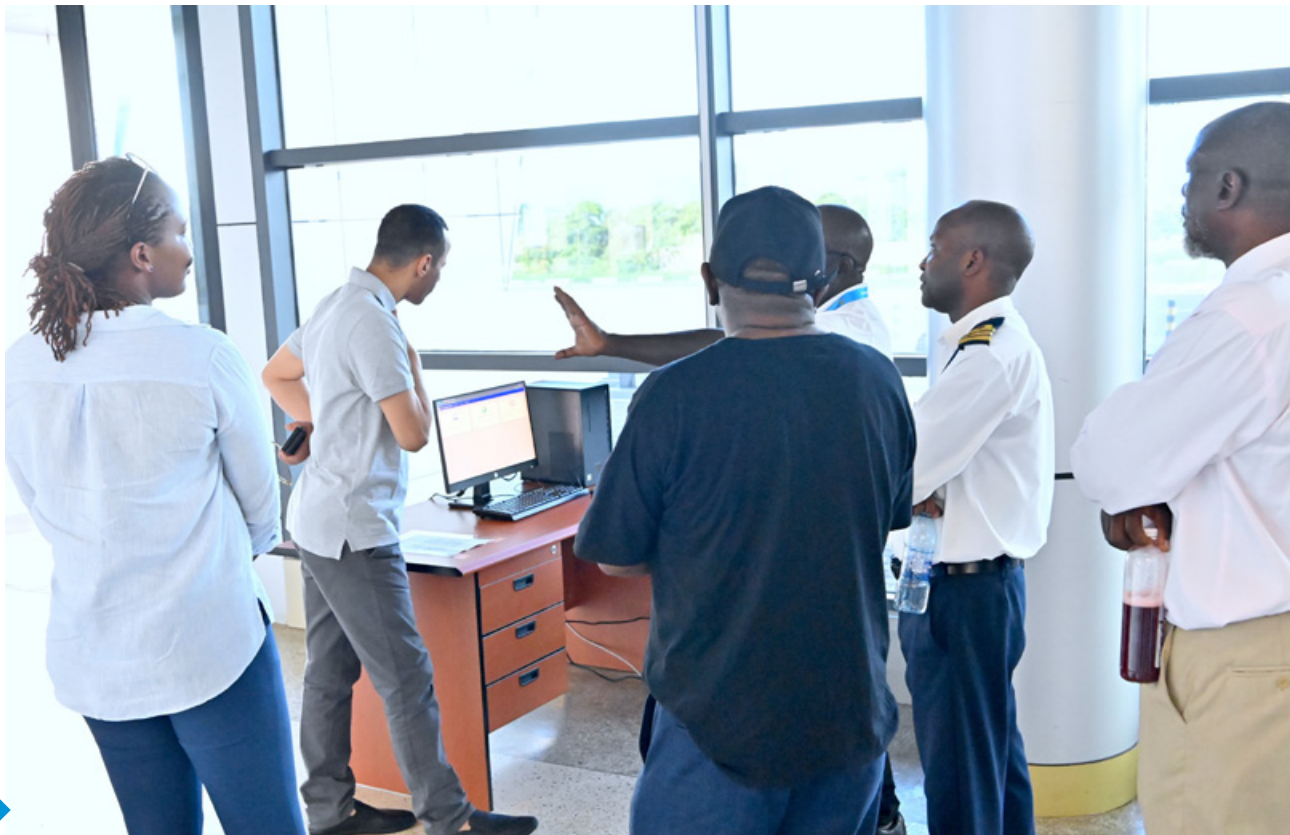
- h. Commencing construction of traders' markets at Tunduma, Tanzania; Chirundu, Zimbabwe; and Chipata(Mwami), Zambia; as well as a walkway at Kasumbalesa, Zambia

Given that small-scale traders still need facilitation to sustain livelihoods through trading across borders and they still face challenges when undertaking transactions, it is important that continued support be given to sustain and build on the achievements made under the SSCBTI. The COMESA Secretariat is actively engaging the Donor Community and national governments on future technical and financial support in this area.



Mwami cross border market construction completed in Chipata, Zambia





Tour of the Mwami border by COMESA ASG-P, Staff and EU Representative



The Regional Enterprise Competitive and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP)

The Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) was a four-year regional initiative worth 8.8 million Euros funded under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). Initiated in January 2020 to complete in June 2025, RECAMP sought to improve the competitiveness of private sector enterprises and promote regional economic integration.

RECAMP was coordinated through the Industry and Agriculture Division of COMESA Secretariat and is implemented with support from COMESA institutions namely; COMESA Business Council (CBC), COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA), Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), Alliance for Commodity Trade for East and Southern Africa (ACTESA), Gender and Social Affairs division and Statistics Unit.

Objectives

RECAMP seeks to increase private sector participation in the COMESA region by enhancing their participation in regional and global value chains, with a focus on three priority sectors: **agro-processing, horticulture, and leather and leather products**, and is structured around two strategic result areas:

Result Area 1 is dedicated to boosting the competitiveness and market access of MSMEs and firms within the three focus value chains: agro-processing, horticulture, and leather and leather products; while

Result Area 2 is focused on enhancing the overall business environment by fostering enabling conditions for



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



enterprise development, facilitating cross-border trade, and strengthening public-private dialogue platforms to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Within these two result areas, RECAMP aims to achieve the following:

- Improve the competitiveness of MSMEs and firms across selected value chains.
- Enhance access to markets, both regionally and internationally.
- Foster inclusive participation, particularly of women and youth led enterprises.
- Develop and strengthen regional value chains, with emphasis on agro-processing, horticulture, and leather.
- Promote a conducive business environment through public-private dialogue and investment facilitation and support to policy development and policy reforms aimed at enhancing the business environment.

KEY SUCCESSES AND IMPACTS

Market Access and Digital Platforms

The following are some of the notable successes of RECAMP:

The programme has supported the COMESA Business Council to enhance the COMESA BizNet digital platform while



COMESA sponsored market access, business linkages events for horticulture SMEs to the EU region, in Netherlands



building capacity for SMEs across the focus value chains in market intelligence platforms to enable them to participate effectively in continental and global trade. The following are some of the notable key achievements:

- Over 577 SMEs have been trained on digital marketing platforms (BizNet, Africa Trade Observatory (ATO), and Trade Map).
- Chambers of Commerce across the region are capacitated with over 1800 enterprises onboarded to BizNet, with 90 SMEs onboarded in Zimbabwe in 2024.
- Enterprises have been exposed to international markets through participation in EU-COMESA trade missions focused on building the capacity of SMEs in EU export requirements and the establishment of B2B linkages.

Capacity Building and Business Linkages

- The programme has trained over 1,035 MSMEs across 21 member states on internationalization, branding, e-commerce, logistics, and supply chain management through capacity building programme coordinated by COMFWB through RECAMP Support.
- Further 44 women-led MSMEs have been supported to showcase their products in regional and international trade fairs, while SMEs from 11 member states have been supported with direct business linkages with EU markets in horticulture.
- Programme supports public-private dialogues and B2B forums and has facilitated local sourcing and exposure to technology through dedicated capacity building programmes in Leather and leather

products and direct financial support under the Technical Assistance Facilities in 9 Member States.

Value Chain Strengthening

- Development of regional hides and skins traceability systems to enhance market access with capacity building support provided through the Africa Leather and Leather Products institute
- Supported and developed the 2025-2026 COMESA Leather Value Chain Strategy through technical and financial support to the Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute.
- Supported the development and roll out of Eco-friendly leather certification systems introduced in 14 member states to enhance market access.
- Supported the development and roll out of the COMESA Seed Information System (COMSIS). This has led to the seed variety catalogue expansion from 90 to 113 seed varieties.
- 4 regional public-private dialogues conducted in key value chains (fish, livestock, etc.).

The RECAMP has also supported initiatives aimed at increased market access with the following interventions and results:

Food Safety and Quality Standards

Implementation of the Global Markets Program (GMaP) under GFSI with:

- 1,139 SMEs were GAP assessed under the RECAMP Global Markets Programme leading to



- 238 SMEs onboarded
- 20 companies now able to pursue GFSI certification.

Technical Assistance Facility (TAF)

- 9 Member States were awarded TAF grants; Rwanda completed implementation while others are expected to be fully completed by May 2025.
- Projects supported vocational training, equipment acquisition, cross-border trade facilitation, and SME capacity building.
- State-of-the-art leather studio designed and developed in Zimbabwe

Policy and Regional Integration

- Launch of the COMESA Investment Community of Practice and COMESA Investment Map profiling 300 opportunities.
- Deployment of Investor Tracking Systems (ITS) in 5 countries and training of 204 officials.
- Revised COMESA Common Investment Area (CCIA) agreement validated by 19 MS.
- COMESA Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) updated and adopted by 16 MS.
- Seed Harmonization Regulations domesticated by 10 MS.

Frameworks for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Parks (IPs) validated and supported in 8 MS.

LESSONS LEARNT

1. Targeted capacity building is key to MSME growth.

RECAP Tailored training and mentorship significantly improved the ability of MSMEs to meet market requirements, adopt digital tools, and develop bankable business models.

2. Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) enhances policy responsiveness.

RECAP structured engagement between governments and private sector stakeholders led to a better understanding of barriers to business and enabled the co-creation of policy reforms. These platforms fostered trust, transparency, and ownership of regional integration processes.

3. Digital Platforms accelerate market access

The support towards the expansion of platforms like BizNet, and the training of SMEs in market intelligence tools, such as the ATO, demonstrated that digital solutions are a cost-effective way to connect businesses to regional and international markets and will be key in the participation of our member states in the AfCFTA, especially for SMEs with limited physical reach.

4. Regional Value Chain Development Requires Coordination

RECAP's support for agro-processing, horticulture, and leather showed that regional value chain development must



be underpinned by coordinated investment, traceability systems, and harmonized standards to improve and sustain market access. RECAP's success depended on full support from our COMESA member states.

5. Technical Assistance Facilities are effective when paired with strong local ownership.

The TAF model proved useful in supporting member states to implement context-specific interventions to enhance market access and improve regional integration. However, timely delivery, local coordination, and integration into national programmes were critical for sustainability and full impact realization.

7. Harmonization of Standards and Certification Systems is Foundational for Trade.

Efforts to align seed regulations and introduce eco-friendly leather certification demonstrated that harmonized regulatory frameworks are essential for unlocking regional trade opportunities and enhancing market access.



Technical support meeting to Djibouti for sub delegated interventions.



The COMESA Secretariat Stands at the Zambia and Egypt International Trade Fairs

About COMESA

COMESA is a Regional Economic Community established in 1994. It brings together 21 African Member States with a population of over 600 million people into a cooperative framework for sustainable economic growth and prosperity through regional integration.



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051
Lusaka Zambia



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



facebook.com/ComesaSecretariat/



[@comesa_HQ](https://twitter.com/comesa_HQ)



[Comesasecretariat](https://www.linkedin.com/company/comesasecretariat)

About the EU:

Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Zambia & COMESA.

email: delegation-zambia-press@eeas.europa.eu

Tel. +260 97 000 70 92

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