



## COMESA Unveils Leather Value Chain Strategy

### In this edition

- Final Scorecard as REAMP Programme Concludes
- COMESA Court Rules on Use of Safeguards
- COMESA Unveils Leather Value Chain Strategy

# Editorial



## COMESA's New Leather Strategy - Transforming the Region from Raw Material Exporter to Leather Manufacturing

The launch of the 2025–2029 Regional Leather Value Chain Strategy by COMESA, through ALLPI, marks a positive step towards revitalizing the continent's leather industry. Backed by the European Union's funding and aligned with both regional and continental policies, this initiative seeks to shift the focus from exporting raw hides and skins to producing finished leather goods that can compete globally.

By leveraging the region's abundant livestock resources COMESA aims to unlock the full potential of its leather sector, creating jobs, fostering industrialization, and reducing dependence on imports.

Key pillars such as access to finance, policy enhancement, sustainable production, and trade promotion are central to this vision. The emphasis on industry clustering and regional integration underscores the importance of coordinated efforts among governments, private actors, and development partners. We cannot wait to see the prioritizing of local procurement policies—like supplying leather for uniforms—which can stimulate demand and incentivize private sector investment.

The successful implementation of this strategy relies on regional collaboration, removal of trade barriers, and enhanced market access. Given the livestock sector's vital role in supporting millions of livelihoods across COMESA Member States, transforming raw material into finished leather products could serve as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth.

*Muzinge Nampito*

## 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

# CONTENTS

- 
- 2 COMESA Unveils Leather Value Chain Strategy
- 
- 3 COMESA - EU Council of Africa Confer on Integration Programmes
- 
- 4 Final Scorecard as RECAMP Programme Concludes
- 
- 6 COMESA-EU Partnership Shaping a Digital Future
- 
- 8 Support RECs to strengthen regional integration, COMESA urges G20
- 
- 11 Regional Seed Programme set to Boost DR Congo's Seed Trade & Food Security
- 
- 12 COMESA Women Celebrate International Women's Day
- 
- 14 Egypt, Turkey, France Ambassadors Accredited to COMESA
- 
- 16 First Compendium of Environment Statistics for Kenya Launched
- 
- 18 Eswatini joins Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units
- 
- 20 Gender-Responsive Trade Policies Initiative at Kenya/Uganda Border
- 
- 21 COMESA- ASCENT Trains Staff on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Social Safeguards
- 
- 23 COMESA Central Banks Embrace Data Science to Strengthen Financial Stability
- 

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L-R: Former COMESA Secretary General Erastus Mwencha, current Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and Dr. Juma Mukhwana Kenya's Principal Secretary at the State Department of Industry unveiling the strategy

## COMESA Unveils Leather Value Chain Strategy

On 28 March 2025, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), through the Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), launched the 2025–2029 Regional Leather Value Chain Strategy—a transformative initiative aimed at shifting the region from being a raw material exporter to a competitive manufacturer of finished leather products.

Funded by the European Union under the 11th EDF COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECOMP), the strategy is aligned with both COMESA's Industrialization Policy and the goals of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It focuses on key pillars including access to finance,

policy enhancement, sustainable production, trade promotion and industry clustering.

The successful implementation of this strategy will rely heavily on coordinated efforts among governments, the private sector, development partners and regional institutions. The official launch took place in Nairobi, Kenya, drawing a wide range of stakeholders from

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

across the leather industry. Keynote addresses were delivered by COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and Dr. Juma Mukhwana, Principal Secretary of the State Department of Industry in Kenya's Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry. SG Kapwepwe emphasized the strategy's goal of reversing the region's dependence on raw material exports.

“The strategy seeks to unlock the potential of the regional leather sector,” she stated. “Member States must adopt procurement policies that prioritize locally produced leather footwear, especially for uniformed service personnel. This will help create a guaranteed market for local manufacturers and stimulate

*Continued to page 3*



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

## **COMESA - EU Council of Africa Confer on Integration Programmes**

COMESA and the Africa Working Party from the Council of the European Union (COAFR) held productive discussions with management at COMESA Secretariat on various regional integration programmes currently being implemented in the 21 Member States.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe led the COMESA team in the 4 April 2025 meeting emphasizing the significance of these discussions at a critical time when the region was navigating the evolving development landscape. She underscored the Africa Working Party's important role in shaping EU-Africa relations, particularly in defining the EU's policies, strategies and diplomatic engagement. "We deeply appreciate the opportunity to meet, to discuss ways and means of strengthening our partnership and explore new avenues of cooperation to achieve our shared objectives," Ms Kapwepwe said.

Speaking at the same function, the EU Head of Delegation to Zambia

and COMESA, H.E. Ambassador Karolina Stasiak, emphasized the enduring partnership between COMESA and the EU, both in the pursuit of integration, peace and economic development. She affirmed the EU's support for COMESA's regional integration initiatives.



# COMESA Unveils ...



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



Top: A panel discussion on leather prior to the launch  
Bottom: Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe being interviewed



Continued from page 1

private sector investment in leather processing and manufacturing."

Despite an annual demand of approximately 544 million pairs of footwear, the COMESA region remains heavily import-dependent, with imports valued at around USD

1.1 billion per year. Dr. Mukhwana echoed the call for regional integration, urging Member States to strengthen trade ties, remove internal trade barriers and focus on value addition. "This strategy aims to create jobs, increase value addition, and reduce our reliance on imports

by fully utilizing the 42 million hides and skins produced in the region each year," he noted.

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

ALLPI, a specialized COMESA institution, plays a central role in developing the leather sector. It works closely with ten Member States—Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—and has also extended consultancy services to additional countries, including Djibouti, Eswatini, Madagascar, Egypt and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

.....

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

# Final Scorecard as RECAMP Programme Concludes



Delegates at the 5th RECAMP Programme Steering Committee meeting in Eswatini

The Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) has successfully concluded after a four-year implementation period. Funded by the 11th European Development Fund, the €8 million programme aimed to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the agro-processing, horticulture, and leather value chains across the COMESA region.

**“The RECAMP programme has demonstrated the power of regional cooperation and collaboration in promoting economic development and integration, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.” Amb Mohamed Kadah**

RECAMP's impact has been significant, with notable accomplishments including supporting over 500 SMEs to access new markets and improve competitiveness, implementing the leather value chains traceability systems in 14 Member States and facilitating the adoption of regional standards and harmonized regulatory frameworks in Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary (SPS) measures.

Further, RECAMP is credited with enhancing the capacity of business support organizations and trade promotion agencies including implementation of the investor tracking system and COMESA investment map. It has fostered regional integration through the promotion of intra-regional trade and investment through the COMESA investment map and investor tracking system

The final RECAMP scorecard was presented during the 5th Steering Committee Meeting held on 12-13

February 2025 in Mbabane, Eswatini. The meeting, chaired by COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, brought together government officials from 19 Member States alongside representatives from the European Union (EU) to COMESA and Zambia. Dr. Kadah commended the RECAMP team and its partners for their dedication and hard work over the past 4 years of implementation.

“The RECAMP programme has demonstrated the power of regional cooperation and collaboration in promoting economic development and integration, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.” He said.

He assured Member States that RECAMP's impact will be sustained through the commitment of regional governments and private sector stakeholders, who have pledged to integrate its activities



*Judges of the First Division of the COMESA Court sitting in Mauritius*

## COMESA Court Rules on the Use of Safeguard Measures

The COMESA court of Justice ruled on the 4th of February 2025, that safeguard measures cannot be used arbitrarily or as disguised trade barriers though they are important trade remedy measures under the COMESA Treaty aimed to protect domestic industries. The landmark decision was delivered during the court sitting in Mauritius by the First Instance Division (FID) of the Court in the case of Agiliss Ltd v The Republic of Mauritius and four others (Reference No.1 of 2019).

In its decision, the Court found that the Government of Mauritius violated the Treaty and the COMESA Regulations on Trade Remedy Measures, (the Regulations) in several key aspects. This included the failure to conduct a proper investigation, lack of stakeholder consultation and the breach of notification obligations under the Treaty and the Regulations. The landmark decision sets a precedent for future trade disputes.

In 2018, the Government of Mauritius, citing the surge of imports in the domestic edible oil industry, invoked Article 61 of the COMESA Treaty on safeguard measures and notified the COMESA Secretariat of its decision to impose a 10% customs duty on imported edible oils from COMESA Member States. The safeguard measure

was intended to protect the domestic industry.

Because this decision had not been communicated, Agiliss Ltd was aggrieved and engaged the Government in discussions but to no avail. Consequently, Agiliss Ltd filed the Reference before the COMESA Court of Justice, challenging the legality of the safeguard measure and seeking an order to prohibit the Government of Mauritius from imposing any customs duty or other non-tariff barriers on the import of edible oil into the Republic of Mauritius from the COMESA region.

The case involved the use of safeguard measures as a trade remedy within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Agiliss Ltd is a Mauritian company that imports basic commodities, including pre-packaged edible oils, from Egypt, another COMESA Member State, and had been remitted back to the FID by the Appellate Division (AD) of the COMESA Court for the hearing of the main Reference.

The AD overturned the decision earlier rendered by the FID declaring that it lacked jurisdiction because Agiliss Ltd had not exhausted local remedies pursuant to

Article 26 of the Treaty. The Appellate held that there were exceptional circumstances in Mauritius which relieved Agiliss Ltd from the need to comply with the rule on exhaustion of local remedies.

The Court emphasized that the notification of the safeguard measure should have been sent to the COMESA Secretary General and to all Member States, and not just to the Secretary General. The Court further highlighted that the process of imposing safeguard measures must comply with the Treaty and the Regulations from the very beginning.

The Court declared that the decision of the Government of Mauritius to impose the safeguard measure and all consequential steps taken thereafter were null and void. The Court further restrained the Government of Mauritius from implementing the safeguard measure and ordered it to bear half of the costs of the Reference.

This case sets a precedent for future trade disputes within COMESA and highlights the Court's crucial role in maintaining the rule of law and interpreting the Treaty and its subsidiary legislation.



Delegates at the technical scoping workshop for the Safe Digital Boost for Africa Programme held in Nairobi

## COMESA-EU Partnership Shaping a Digital Future

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) took a significant stride toward digital transformation with the successful conclusion of a three-day technical scoping workshop held from 4th -6th March 2025, in Nairobi, Kenya for the Safe Digital Boost for Africa (SDBA) Programme, bringing together key stakeholders to chart a course for digital advancement across the region.

Funded by the European Union (EU) under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the SDBA Programme aimed to revolutionise trade, digitalisation, and cybersecurity across Africa. The COMESA component will build on the achievements of the Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) programme, with a renewed focus on facilitating eCommerce and advancing e-Payments systems.

The program directly extends its ongoing efforts to harmonise legal and technical standards, enhance digital infrastructure, and support deployment of the COMESA

Digital Retail Payment Platform across eight pilot countries: Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Mauritius.

The Digital for Development (D4D) Hub facilitated the event, which featured robust participation from COMESA Ministries of Trade, public and private sector representatives, including Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), commercial banks, central banks, and FinTech companies.

Mr. Alfred Kombudo, the Principal Secretary of Kenya's State Department for Trade within the Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry, officially opened the workshop, emphasizing Kenya's commitment to digital transformation. "I wish to emphasize the importance of the Safe Digital Boost for Africa Programme which complements efforts by the Kenya Government to expand digital and physical infrastructure to enable citizens experience benefits from government services and participate in structured trading," he stated.

Ms. Mshuka Kamwela, Programme Manager for European Development Fund (EDF) at COMESA Secretariat, highlighted that the workshop marked the first step following the signing of the €10 million Financing Agreement between COMESA and the European Union. "This investment goes beyond financial support - it represents a transformative shift in how businesses and individuals conduct cross-border transactions," she noted.

Ms. Christiane Haziyo, Programme Manager for Regional Cooperation and Trade Facilitation at the EU Delegation to Zambia and COMESA, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the initiative. "With this programme, we are delivering on the EU flagship Global Gateway aiming to connect goods, people, and services around the world in a sustainable way," she said.

The outcomes of the workshop were several strategic recommendations on key multiple focus areas including on Legal Framework and Regulation, Technical Integration and Infrastructure, Financial Inclusion and Market Development, and on Consumer Protection and Trust

The significance of these initiatives for the region's economies cannot be overstated. For instance, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute an estimated 50% to 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and account for 50% to 60% of employment opportunities in the COMESA region, enhancing digital financial inclusion imperative for economic development.

Following the workshop, COMESA Secretariat and the European Union Delegation to Zambia and COMESA will work with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive implementation plan based on the recommendations.

# Final Scorecard...

*Continued from page 4*

into national development initiatives.

Dr. Kadah expressed appreciation to the EU for its continued support, particularly through the upcoming Africa Trade Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (ATCMAP), which aims to build on RECAMP's achievements. Ms. Cebile Nhlabatsi, Acting Principal Secretary of Eswatini's Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Trade, highlighted RECAMP's role in empowering SMEs and integrating them into regional and global value chains.

Meanwhile, EU Representative to Zambia and COMESA, Mr. Shimukunku Manchishi, reaffirmed the EU's long-term commitment to supporting COMESA's regional integration agenda. He noted that support would extend beyond the European Development Fund (EDF) framework, through the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Framework.

RECAMP was implemented by the COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with its institutions, including COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB), Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), Alliance for Commodity Trade in East and Southern Africa (ACTESA) and COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA).

As RECAMP concludes, its achievements provide a strong foundation for future initiatives aimed at strengthening enterprise competitiveness and regional trade in COMESA.

## Deepening Cooperation with UNIDO



Ms. Haidara Fatou (L) meets COMESA Secretary General in Lusaka

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe welcomed a delegation from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to the Secretariat on 3 April 2025. The visit was led by Ms. Haidara Fatou, Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director of Global Partnerships and External Relations for bilateral discussions.

It focused on deepening cooperation across ongoing initiatives, notably the €40 million Trade, Competitiveness, and Market Access Programme, funded by the European Union under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and launched in July 2024.

Ms Kapwepwe highlighted key efforts,

including the promotion of local pharmaceutical production and the development of a Green Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Strategy and Business Plan, supported by the AfDB-funded COMESA Towards Regional Pharmaceutical Sector Development Project.

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

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



Above - COMESA Assistant Secretary General Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah (right) meets UNCTAD SG Ms. Rebeca Grynspan and (Insert) Ms. Leila Farah Mokaddem of AfDB at the G20 meeting.

## Support RECs to strengthen regional integration, COMESA urges G20

COMESA was among the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) that participated in the Group of Twenty (G20)'s first meeting chaired by an African nation. The inaugural G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting was held in Johannesburg on 20-21 February 2025, led by South Africa's leadership. The Meeting was attended by Ministers from member countries, representatives from invited nations, international organizations and RECs. South Africa attained the G20 presidency on 1 December 2024, and will run until 30 November 2025. The G20 presidency is themed "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability," reflecting

its dedication to addressing global challenges through inclusive and equitable solutions.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah led the delegation which participated in the two day event. In his remarks, he urged the G20 nations to strengthen regional integration by supporting RECs, and fostering a rules-based international trading system, addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting good governance, democracy and human rights. He also reaffirmed COMESA's commitment to working closely with South Africa's

Presidency and the G20 to achieve shared goals.

Ambassador Dr. Kadah also engaged in bilateral discussions with key partners, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations Trade and Development Rebeca Grynspan and the Director-General of the African Development Bank Ms. Leila Farah Mokaddem, to explore avenues for enhanced collaboration.



Ms Jubilee Hamwala, Assistant Commissioner for Customs (Zambia Revenue Authority), speaks during the public-private dialogue conducted at Chirundu.

## COMESA holds Public-Private Dialogue for Border Agencies and Traders at Chirundu

COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility conducted a Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) on promoting women's economic empowerment and fostering gender-responsive trade policies at the Zambia-Zimbabwe Chirundu Border Post. This was on 14 February 2025. In addition to Chirundu, the Secretariat and the ICR Facility also planned to conduct a series of the PPD at the Zambia-Malawi border, Uganda-Kenya Busia border and the Kasumbalesa border between DR Congo and Zambia.

The aim of the workshops was to foster meaningful dialogue between public and private sector stakeholders to identify and address challenges that women traders face at border crossings, with a focus on developing and implementing gender-responsive policies in line with COMESA's commitment to promoting gender equality and increasing economic opportunities for women in the region. The event brought together 30 participants who included key border agencies, policymakers and representatives of cross border traders'

associations and other private sector operators to discuss strategies, share best practices and collaborate on empowering women to drive regional economic growth.

Presentations and discussions focused on COMESA's gender-responsive policies, gender-based violence prevention and response in cross-border trade as well as risk mitigation strategies. Assistant Commissioner for Customs at the Chirundu Border Zambian side, Ms Jubilee Hamwala, opened the workshop and thanked COMESA Secretariat for the initiative. She appreciated that cross-border traders were represented in the dialogue, noting that their voices and views were important adding that in facilitating trade, "We must make sure women are not left behind".

Speaking on behalf of Zimbabwe, Mr Brian Guyo, Deputy Director responsible for Women Economic Empowerment in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development highlighted the powerful role that both the public

and private sectors must play in unlocking opportunities for women's economic empowerment. Public-private partnerships are critical in addressing the unique challenges women face in accessing resources, markets, and capital.

"Through dialogue and collaboration between government bodies and private entities, we can create an enabling environment that supports women entrepreneurs, helps them overcome barriers and enhances their participation in economic activities," Mr Guyo said. Ms Beatrice Hamusonde, Director for Gender and Social Affairs at the COMESA Secretariat also shared that women traders continue to face numerous challenges, including policy and regulatory barriers, inadequate infrastructure and personal security concerns.

The ICR Facility is co-funded by the European Union (EU) under the 11th EDF with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council.



## COMESA Kicks Off Preparations for 2026–2030 Medium-Term Strategic Plan

Preparations for the development of COMESA's 2026–2030 Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) commenced on March 24–25, 2025 with a two-day retreat for management and technical staff in Lusaka. The retreat's agenda focused on reviewing the performance of the current 2021–2025 MTSP, identifying successes, challenges, and key lessons to inform the next five-year plan.

Leading the discussions, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe emphasized the need for excellence in all aspects of the regional bloc's operations. She highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in implementing regional integration programs. "This exercise is not just another retreat, it is a defining moment in COMESA's journey. We are dedicating time to discuss and agree on key milestones that will shape our policies, instruments, programs, and activities for the next five years. Our goal is to positively impact more than 670 million people in

our region," Ms. Kapwepwe stated.

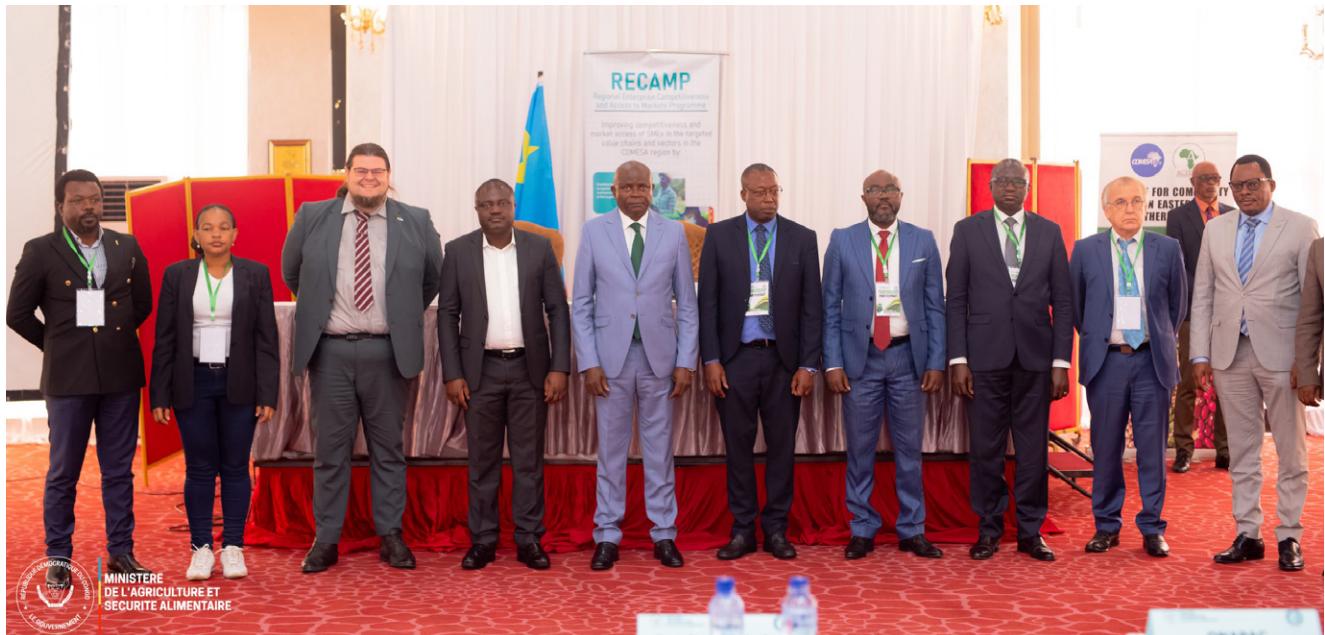
She underscored COMESA's strategy of fostering regional integration through trade, investment, agriculture, social development, physical infrastructure, and connectivity. Reflecting on the organization's three decades of existence, she acknowledged the economic challenges Member States have faced—including debt, rising inflation, and increasing living costs—stressing the need for an effective strategic plan. Despite these challenges, the Secretary General noted that the region has shown resilience, recovering from the effects of COVID-19, climate change, and geopolitical tensions. By the end of 2025, the region is projected to register an average GDP growth rate of 5.6%.

Assistant Secretaries General for Programmes and Administration & Finance, Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah and Dr. Dev Haman, also addressed the retreat. Dr. Kadah emphasized

the need for organizational efficiency, innovation, and effective communication to showcase COMESA's achievements. Meanwhile, Dr. Haman highlighted the importance of prudent resource management and ensuring sustainability beyond donor support.

The management team acknowledged the crucial role of COMESA's development partners, including the European Union, the African Development Bank, and the World Bank, in supporting various regional programs over the years. Through successive MTSPs, COMESA has achieved significant milestones, including establishing Africa's largest Free Trade Area, implementing a Simplified Trade Regime, automating border posts through the ASYCUDA system, and eliminating most Non-Tariff Barriers to enhance intra-regional trade. Additionally, COMESA's institutions continue to play a vital role in deepening regional trade and improving the livelihoods of citizens across its 21 Member States.

# Regional Seed Programme set to Boost DR Congo's Seed Trade & Food Security



Democratic Republic of Congo Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Gregoire Mutshail Mutombo, (5th from Left) and ACTESA CEO, Dr John Mukuka, with stakeholders from the seed industry stakeholders at the COMESA Aligned National Seed Regulations Awareness Meeting at Beatrice Hotel in Kinshasa.

COMESA in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) held a two-day awareness sensitization meeting in Kinshasa on 26-27 February 2025 to address challenges that small farmers face in accessing quality seeds in the COMESA region.

DR Congo's Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Gregoire Mutshail Mutombo, as the chief guest reaffirmed the country's collaborative support and commitment towards unlocking regional seed trade opportunities in Africa for a more sustainable, competitive, and enhanced Agriculture Trade in the region.

The Minister underscored the relevance of seed trade laws harmonization in the COMESA and EAC region for improved quality seed, increased agriculture production and food security. He remarked that harmonization of seed trade regulations as crucial for strengthening governance in the seed sector of the DR Congo.

"It remains crucial for DR Congo to ensure the enactment of Seed Trade Laws in Parliament for us as a country to be competitive on the regional market. DR Congo like other African countries has immense potential to increase its agriculture productivity not only to enhance food security but trade with other countries in the region," he said.

Secretary-General of Agriculture in Congo, Dr Jose Ilanga, reiterated the importance of functional Seed Laws and regulations in ensuring improved cross-border trade among the COMESA Member States. He noted that harmonization of seed trade laws facilitates establishment of seed systems that enhance the production of quality and affordable seed for increased agriculture productivity.

"Establishing an appropriate regulatory framework for seed trade in DRC cannot be over emphasised. The DR Congo's integration into the COMESA region requires aligning its legal instruments with the organization's standards to

facilitate increased Gross Domestic Product and cross-border seed trade," he stated.

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Dr. John Mukuka, remarked on COMESA's continued support and commitment towards ensuring COMESA Member States enact and implement the Harmonised Seed regulations for enhanced regional integration. This is in line with strategic objectives of the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP). Also discussed were the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations and Harmonization Regulations among other topics.

Supported by the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECOMP) and funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF 11), the sensitization meeting marked a pivotal milestone in ACTESA's series of sensitization COMSHIP meetings in COMESA countries.

# COMESA Women Celebrate International Women's Day



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe (seated 6th from left) with female staff at the celebrations. Two Directors also joined this event: 4th from Left: Mrs Auleria Olunga Director Budget & Finance and on her left is Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde Director Gender and Social Affairs

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and the female staff of COMESA Secretariat gathered on March 21, 2025, and celebrated the International Women's Day (which originally falls on 8 March) under the theme "Accelerate Action for All Women and Girls: Equality. Rights. Empowerment." The event provided a platform for reflection, experience sharing and mutual learning.

The highlight of the celebration was an engaging conversation with Secretary General Kapwepwe, who shared practical insights on leadership, professional growth and overcoming workplace challenges. "Never apologize for being a woman. Bring something valuable or leave something impactful by preparing yourself enough to take up a leadership role, don't just fight for it.

Empower yourself, so that when you are empowered, you can challenge the status quo. And once you have reached success, be ready to transfer knowledge and support other women as they climb the ladder to where you are," she advised. Strength is better than power."

Madam Kapwepwe emphasized the importance of women's active involvement in policy reforms and economic decision-making, reaffirming COMESA's commitment to gender-responsive policies that support women's leadership and participation in key economic sectors. "Gender equality is not just about fighting for your rights; it requires you to adequately prepare, strive for empowerment, and make valuable contributions that position you as a leader who drives impact. When women are empowered, communities

and economies thrive because their contributions come from a place of total commitment and dedication."

The event facilitated networking and mentorship, allowing women from different departments to discuss their professional growth, challenges and strategies for balancing work and family life. The Q&A session was particularly engaging, with many women expressing appreciation for the Secretary General's insights, acknowledging them as relatable, motivational and empowering.

The event was a call to action, urging women to continue striving for leadership, influence and impact in their respective fields, and reinforcing the importance of creating opportunities for women to thrive in their careers.



H.E. Lilian Cheptoo Tomitom presenting her Letter of Credence to COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe

## New Kenya Envoy Accredited to COMESA

Kenya's High Commissioner to Zambia, H.E. Lilian Cheptoo Tomitom was on 20 March 2025 accredited to COMESA as the country's Permanent Representative.

Speaking when she presented her Letter of Credence to Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, in Lusaka, Ambassador Tomitom reaffirmed her country's commitment to working with all COMESA Member states for economic growth.

She also underscored Kenya's deep-rooted commitment to fostering regional economic integration by fully participating in all programmes that the COMESA Secretariat initiates on behalf of the Member States.

"Kenya remains steadfast in its pursuit of economic cooperation and regional trade advancement. I look forward to working closely with the secretariat and member states to drive COMESA's integration agenda forward," She stated.

Receiving the new envoy, the SG noted that the world economy was constantly changing, thus it is important to strengthen regional partnerships to address key challenges such as the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, dealing with climate change and adapting to new trade conditions.

"Kenya consistently demonstrated its leadership in economic integration through its strong commitment to the COMESA Free Trade Area, the Tripartite Free Trade Area, and the African Continental Free Trade Area," said the SG. "The country has also been instrumental in infrastructure development, trade facilitation and cross border cooperation," she noted.

The accreditation marked another step towards enhancing Kenya-COMESA relations, which will further reinforce the country's influence in shaping regional economic policies and strengthening its position within the bloc.



## COMESA SG is the new Chancellor of Eden University

COMESA Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe was pronounced as the Chancellor of Eden University in Lusaka, Zambia on 6 March 2025. In her acceptance speech during the installation ceremony, the SG stressed the importance of supporting all efforts especially by local institutions to address the critical need to impart knowledge and skills to young people.

"With over 14,000 students, including those from the COMESA region, the African continent and beyond, this underscores the quality of education that is being offered at this University" ... adding.. "the attraction of learners from far and wide, underscores one of our core values, which is inclusive education for differently abled and disadvantaged persons,"

The Eden University has progressed from a college into a private University since 2016.



L-R: H.E. Hüseyin Barbaros Dicle, H.E. Ms. Mayada Essam Abdelrahman, Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe and H.E. Mr. Thomas Rossignol at the presentation of credentials

## Egypt, Turkey, France Ambassadors Accredited to COMESA

Egypt, Turkey and France Ambassadors to Zambia have been accredited as representatives of their respective countries to COMESA. In a brief ceremony at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka Monday, February 10, 2025, the three presented their letters of credence to Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, marking a new chapter in international cooperation.

H.E. Ms. Mayada Essam Abdelrahman was accredited as Permanent Representative of Egypt to COMESA, as her country is a Member State of the regional bloc. H.E. Hüseyin Barbaros Dicle of Turkey and H.E. Mr. Thomas Rossignol were accredited as Special Representatives of their respective countries.

The ceremony highlighted the commitment of these nations to strengthen ties with COMESA in areas such as trade, investment, culture, peace, and security. Ambassador Rossignol said that the French government will continue to pursue collaborative initiatives with COMESA in various sectors emphasizing the importance of regional integration.

"As a French person, issues surrounding regional integration and the free movement of people are very close to my

heart," he said.

Ambassador Abdelrahman commended COMESA's regional integration initiatives, stating, "Egypt has always supported the COMESA Secretariat in its quest to implement integration programs aimed at uplifting living standards of the people in the region."

Ambassador Dicle highlighted Turkey's commitment to empowering women-led businesses, a vision supported by Turkey's First Lady.

"We will focus on expert exchanges, institutional capacity building, and addressing gender issues in collaboration with the COMESA team," he noted.

Secretary General Kapwepwe acknowledged the valuable partnerships COMESA has built with these nations. She stated that France, in particular, has been a significant supporter through the European Union, which has funded numerous COMESA programs.

"Each year, France provides funding to enhance the use of French, one of our official languages. We hope to further strengthen this relationship," she explained.

On the cooperation front with Egypt, Ms. Kapwepwe praised the country as a strong advocate for regional integration, noting its impressive export growth within COMESA—rising to 24.1% of trade in 2022 from 22.2% the previous year.

"Egypt's leadership in facilitating intra-COMESA trade is commendable," she remarked.

Turning to Turkey, the Secretary General highlighted its emerging role as a vital partner for Africa. She expressed optimism regarding Turkey's engagement with the continent, citing initiatives like the Turkey-Africa Economic and Business Forum that pave the way for collaboration.

"Turkey's expertise in agriculture, health, and tourism can offer immense benefits to our region," she asserted.

The Secretary General further emphasized COMESA's commitment to nurturing and expanding its partnerships, and cooperation with Egypt, Turkey, and France which will result in enhanced socio-economic landscape of the region.



Participants at the launch in Lusaka

## COMESA, AfDB Launch USD1.5m Information Management Systems on Energy

The African Development Bank and COMESA launched a USD 1.5 million Information Management System (IMS) to streamline data collection, analysis, and reporting for electricity regulators and utilities across Member States. Unveiled on 21st March 2025, this online platform will enable efficient data submission and access, supporting annual and biannual reporting.

This initiative, covering 12 COMESA countries and South Sudan, aims to standardize monitoring and evaluation, driving best practices in the energy sector. Other COMESA nations are supported through a parallel initiative by RERA-SADC.

The new Information Management System spearheaded by COMESA through the Regional Association of Energy Regulators in Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) under the Project on Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation in the region shall see tangible progress in energy access, economic development,

poverty reduction, and wealth creation.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe represented by Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohammed Kadah with Mr. Callixte KAMBANDA, Manager, Energy Policy, Regulatory and Statistics Division of the African Development Bank launched the IMS at the Secretariat on 21 March 2025. They were joined by Eng. Elijah Sichone, Director General, at the Energy Regulation Board (ERB) of Zambia.

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**“In effect, this is a game-changer, promoting regional harmonization and accountability, enhancing data-driven decision-making, and ultimately fostering an environment conducive to regional energy trade, integration, and investment,” Amb Dr Mohammed Kadah**

Ambassador Dr. Kadah stated that the RAERESA IMS will not only enable regulators and utilities in our participating Member States to monitor progress against established key performance indicators, but will also create a platform for transparent and consistent reporting across the region.

“In effect, this is a game-changer, promoting regional harmonization and accountability, enhancing data-driven decision-making, and ultimately fostering an environment conducive to regional energy trade, integration, and investment,” Ambassador Dr Kadah said.

He added that the development of the Information Management System (IMS) is a major milestone under the project on Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation. “It embodies our commitment to creating a transparent, data-driven, and harmonized regulatory environment that supports investment and drives economic growth,” he added.

*Continued to page 17*



L-R: Peter Nielson (Statistics Sweden), Dr Macdonald Obudho, CEO, (KNBS) COMESA EDF Manager Ms. Mshuka Kamwela, Dr Daniel Amanja, (KNBS) Ngayo Banda COMESA and Paul Nderitu (KNBS) at the launch of the first Compendium of Environmental Statistics for Kenya.

## First Compendium of Environment Statistics for Kenya Launched

COMESA and the Government of Kenya launched the first-ever Compendium of Environment Statistics for Kenya, on 20 March 2025, a vital resource that consolidates key data on environmental conditions, natural resource use, waste management, disasters, human settlements, and environmental policies.

Developed by COMESA through its EU-funded Eleventh European Development Fund (EDF-11) Institutional Capacity Building Program (ICBP), the compendium addresses the critical need for reliable environmental statistics. With this resource, the Kenyan government, businesses, researchers, and civil society can now develop more effective climate action plans, implement science-driven policies, monitor progress toward environmental commitments, and enhance transparency in governance.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) was the lead agency in this initiative.

COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, hailed the compendium as

more than just a collection of data—it is a pivotal tool for sustainable development, evidence-based policymaking, and proactive climate action.

"This initiative is about more than just producing a report. It is about fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making that will shape Kenya's environmental policies for years to come," she said in a statement delivered by Ms. Mshuka Kamwela, COMESA-EDF Programme Manager.

The compendium goes beyond raw statistics, providing insights into trends, patterns, and emerging threats that require urgent action. Its methodologies can serve as a model for other countries in the region striving to enhance environmental data collection and analysis.

The environmental statistics in the compendium will play a key role in assessing biodiversity loss to guide conservation efforts and protect endangered species and fragile ecosystems, monitoring air and water

quality to enable timely interventions that safeguard public health and promote sustainability.

Dr. Daniel Amanja, Chair of the KNBS Board, who officially launched the report, emphasized that the compendium's impact will be felt in the practical application of environmental statistics for a greener and more sustainable future.

KNBS Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Macdonald Obudho, underscored its significance, stating: "This report is directly relevant to our lives—the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the places we live." Peter Nielson, representing Statistics Sweden, a key collaborating partner, advocated for more frequent production of environmental statistics to keep pace with climate changes.

The launch marked a significant step forward in strengthening Kenya's environmental data framework, supporting informed decision-making, and fostering a sustainable future.



Madam Monique Andreas Esoavelomandraso

## Madagascar Member of the Committee of Elders Passes on

COMESA Secretariat with deep sorrow announced the passing on of a member of the COMESA Committee of Elders from Madagascar, Madam Monique Andreas Esoavelomandraso. She died on Monday 17th March 2025 in Madagascar.

Head of the Governance, Peace and Security Unit Dr Oita Etyang revealed that upon being appointed to the Committee of Elders in 2021, Madam Esoavelomandraso was an active member and served COMESA with dedication.

Before being appointed to the COMESA Committee of Elders, Madam Esoavelomandraso was a Minister of Decentralization and Development of Autonomous Provinces of the Republic of Madagascar (2002-2005). Thereafter, she served as Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission until 2008. She also served as a mediator for Madagascar as a Member of the negotiation group led by Ecumenical Council of Churches of Madagascar for the resolution of the political deadlock in 2009. She was also a member of the conflict resolution team during the presidential elections of 2005 in the Comoros.

“It is truly refreshing to celebrate this milestone and re-affirm our shared commitment to fostering an enabling environment for investment, strengthening investor confidence in Africa’s electricity markets, unlocking the continent’s vast energy potential, and accelerating universal energy access,” Mr Callixte Kambanda stated.

## COMESA, AfDB Launch...

*Continued from page 15*

Eng Sichone who is also Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Capacity Building, Information Exchange, Energy Statistics & Database of RAERESA, thanked COMESA for spearheading the development of the IMS.

He said that the Information Management System (IMS) will facilitate standardized data collection, analysis, and reporting across 13 participating Member States. It will empower regulators and utilities with a robust platform to monitor performance against key indicators, promote transparency, and enhance data-driven decision-making.

“Ultimately, this will contribute to a more resilient and integrated regional electricity market,” Eng. Sichone said.

The African Development Bank provided the USD1.5M technical assistance to COMESA for the development of tools and frameworks to harmonizing regulatory policies across the region. Division Manager for Energy Policy, Regulation and Statistics at the AfDB, Callixte Kambanda stated that an integrated power market will play a crucial role in shaping Africa’s energy transition.

“It is truly refreshing to celebrate this milestone and re-affirm our shared commitment to fostering an enabling environment for investment,

strengthening investor confidence in Africa’s electricity markets, unlocking the continent’s vast energy potential, and accelerating universal energy access,” Mr Kambanda stated.

He added that the launch coincides with the ambitious objectives of Mission 300, a bold initiative jointly launched by the African Development Bank and the World Bank Group. The Mission 300 aims to provide 300 million first-time electricity connections across the continent by 2030.

Twelve pilot countries have already committed to National Energy Compacts, which include time-bound targets for expanding energy access, mobilizing private sector investments, adopting new policies and regulations, and reforming electricity markets.

With the initiative directly targeting nearly half of Africa’s population currently without electricity access, as well as 87 percent of the world’s unelectrified population, Mr Kambanda said that a strong regulatory environment, regional integration, and cross-border electricity trade are critical to achieving the objectives of Mission 300.

The launch marks a significant milestone in our journey towards enhancing electricity regulation and improving energy access across the COMESA region.



## Eswatini joins Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units

COMESA Secretariat through the Governance, Peace and Security Unit (GPS) supported the Eswatini Financial Intelligence Centre (EFIC) to join the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs). EFIC embarked on one of the critical phases in the Egmont application process from 17 – 21 February 2025.

The process was supported by COMESA and facilitated by EFIC sponsors, namely the Malawi Financial Intelligence Authority and the South Africa financial Intelligence Centre. The results of the review were submitted to the Egmont Group and a follow-up onsite visit will be conducted during the year to ensure the process is expedited.

The COMESA Member States in the Egmont Group belong to different Financial Action Task Force-Style Regional Bodies (FSRBs) including eight

which are member countries of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money laundering Group (ESAAMLG) and three (Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia) which are member countries of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF). Eswatini becomes the 12th COMESA Member State once admitted.

The Egmont Group was established in 1995 and is a united body comprising of 177 FIUs from across the globe. Its goal is to promote international cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of money laundering and financing of terrorism. Progress has been achieved in the COMESA region where 11 Member States namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have enlisted in the Egmont Group of FIUs. Once integrated Eswatini will enhance its Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering Financing of

Terrorism (CFT) effectiveness due to the opportunities availed through the Egmont Group.

With Eswatini having proclaimed a new AML/ CFT omnibus law, the Anti-Money Laundering, Countering of Terrorism and Proliferation Financing (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act, 2024 odds for admission to the Egmont Group are high. "With half of COMESA Member States having joined the Group, COMESA has high hopes that all remaining Member States will also follow suit in the near future," said Conflict Early Warning Expert in the GPS Unit Tapera Chinemhute.

Egmont group has an elaborate platform for the secure, seamless, lawful and mutually beneficial exchange of financial intelligence and expertise relating to money laundering and terrorist financing to enhance FIUs' strategic and operational effectiveness.



## Regional Apex Bank's Staff Trained to Address Data Delays in Forecasting GDP

The COMESA Monetary Institute developed a training programme to build the capacity of staff in the regional apex banks on 24 - 28 February 2025, in Nairobi, Kenya. The first activity was a training program titled 'Now casting and Near-Term Forecasting of GDP'.

With the objective of engaging central bank staff involved in policy analysis to appreciate nowcasting and acquaint them with the standard nowcasting methods and Near-Term Forecasting of GDP, the training was attended by delegates from eight COMESA member Central Banks namely Djibouti, Eswatini, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Most Member States do not compile high-frequency measures of gross domestic product (GDP). If they do, the estimates come with a considerable lag, yet policy decisions need to be made often, particularly when major shocks

such as COVID-19 pandemic or climate related shocks have occurred.

Now-casting simply means seeking to understand things (predict) the way they are happening now while Near-term forecasting is predicting what will happen in the Near future. At the opening session, Dr Lucas Njoroge, Director of CMI observed that data publication delays and missing data complicates forward-looking policy making. In such context, he noted, making use of a range of leading and coincident variables to forecast in real-time the missing values of GDP have become a standard practice in the analysis of economic outlook, in what is referred to as now casting. Its aim is to bridge the gap between the time lag in data releases and policymaking.

The training equipped the participants with scientific tools to overcome numerous data challenges faced by most COMESA member countries including

but not limited to, missing data, lack of high frequency data, considerable data lags and publication delays. The skills acquired at the training included various methods for now casting and near-term forecasting of GDP, which they will start applying to improve their forecasting methods. Participants also shared knowledge and experience of various aspects of forecasting.

The 'Now casting and Near-Term Forecasting of GDP' is part of the CMI 2025 Work Plan, which was approved by the 28th meeting of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks in November 2024.

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## Gender-Responsive Trade Policies Initiative at Kenya/Uganda Border

COMESA Secretariat and the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility on 26 February, 2025, held a public-private dialogue (PPD) workshop on promoting women's economic empowerment and fostering gender-responsive trade policies at the Kenya-Uganda border of Busia.

This was the third dialogue in a series of workshops supported by the ICR Facility, which is co-funded by the European Union (EU) under the 11th EDF with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council. It brought together 25 participants, who included representatives of key border agencies such as Immigration, Customs and Standards, leaders of cross border traders' associations from Kenya and Uganda and women traders to discuss strategies, share best practices, and collaborate on empowering women to drive regional economic growth.

Four border points in the region were selected for the dialogue workshops, namely Chirundu (Zambia-Zimbabwe

border), Mwami (Zambia-Malawi border), Busia (Uganda-Kenya border) and Kasumbalesa (DR Congo-Zambia border).

These workshops aim to foster meaningful dialogue between public and private sector stakeholders to identify and address challenges that women traders face at border crossings. They are focused on developing and implementing gender-responsive policies in line with COMESA's commitment to promoting gender equality and increasing economic opportunities for women in the region.

Presentations and discussions focused on COMESA's gender-responsive policies, trade facilitation tools such as the Simplified Trade Regime (STR), and the draft regional women economic empowerment strategy, among others.

Mr Silvanus Nkanae, Customs and Border Control officer on the Kenya side of Busia border opened the workshop by noting the importance of public-private partnerships in driving economic growth.

"As we seek to enhance trade facilitation, improve regulatory frameworks, and unlock opportunities for MSMEs, youth, and women entrepreneurs, it is imperative that we strengthen collaboration between policy makers and the business community.

Mr Edmund Rutebemberwa, who spoke on behalf of Uganda, thanked COMESA Secretariat and the ICR Facility for the initiative.

Speaking on behalf of the COMESA Secretariat, Senior Gender Mainstreaming Officer Ms Tsige Biyazen noted that border points are key trade corridors where women's economic participation is both vibrant and challenged by various structural and operational constraints.

"By bringing together public and private sector stakeholders, we aim to generate actionable recommendations that will inform policies and interventions for an enabling and supportive operating environment for women in cross-border trade," Ms Biyazen stated.



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

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

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

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

Speaking as Officer in Charge of the Division of Human Resource and Administration, Dr. Alick Mhizha emphasized the importance of aligning with global best practices: "By training staff on the ESF and ESS, COMESA can better manage environmental and social risks, ultimately improving development outcomes and protecting communities and ecosystems."

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

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**"By training staff on the ESF and ESS, COMESA can better manage environmental and social risks, ultimately improving development outcomes and protecting communities and ecosystems."**



Staff from Central Banks attending the CMI training in Nairobi, Kenya

## COMESA Central Banks Embrace Data Science to Strengthen Financial Stability

The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) organized a training workshop titled "Applications of Data Science for Analysis of Financial Stability" for Central Bank staff to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to apply data science techniques effectively. This was in recognition of the need among COMESA Member States' central banks to have this skill.

The training aimed at enabling regional central banks to significantly enhance their ability to assess risks, identify financial system vulnerabilities and anticipate potential disruptions by leveraging advanced data analytics and statistical modeling. Held from 24-28 March 2025 in Nairobi Kenya, the primary objective of the workshop was to empower participants with practical tools for monitoring systemic risks and making informed, data-driven decisions to safeguard financial stability.

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

"The techniques can also support other tasks relevant to financial stability, including payment systems analysis, consumer risk assessment, financial inclusion monitoring, and anti-money laundering efforts," Dr. Njoroge added.

Caption: Delegates from nine COMESA member states—Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia—participated in the training. The program featured hands-on exercises using programming languages commonly applied in data science and

analytics.

Participants also exchanged insights on their respective countries' experiences in applying data science to analyze financial stability, fostering a collaborative learning environment across the region.

**"The techniques can also support other tasks relevant to financial stability, including payment systems analysis, consumer risk assessment, financial inclusion monitoring, and anti-money laundering efforts," Dr. Lucas Njoroge**





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