

COMESA NEWS

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Free Flow of Traffic Across COMESA, EAC, SADC **Expected**

Tripartite Ministers Approve New Harmonized Guidelines

Editorial

COVID -19 Should not Justify Reintroducing NTBs in COMESA



For several years, COMESA region has maintained a success rate of resolving non-tariff barriers by over 95%. Indeed the goal has been to attain 100% rate to ensure unfettered flow of goods and services across the region. A 100% success rate is achievable, because it is a win-win situation where the aggregate of good is higher than the aggregate bad. In any case, belonging to an economic bloc such as COMESA, entails making

some sacrifices for the greater good of the participating members. With the Covid-19 pandemic rampaging across our region and the globe, the commitment towards honoring the free trade protocols seems to be facing an acid test. Gradually, there has been a notable upsurge of NTBs as countries strive to contain continued spread of the virus. The most common are restrictions on movement of goods and services across borders. Whereas the measures could be understandable given the battering that Covid has visited on the economies, these are not enough reasons to justify the re-introduction of NTBs. By and large, such restrictions run counter to the spirit of establishing the COMESA Free Trade Area, which was based on the need for establishing an economic community of nations. As reported in this edition, at least 82% of the reported NTBs in the region are mainly operational, those imposed on imports and exports of goods and services and are easy to identify and monitor. But there are the complex ones, the behind-the-border measures imposed internally and include domestic legislations. Nevertheless, there is optimism that the emergence of NTBs will not last long based on two factors: one, that Covid-19 will be stopped, very soon now that a number of curative and preventive measures are succeeding. The development of several vaccines, which have achieved high levels of efficacy is a major breakthrough. The second point is that regional frameworks that enable smooth trade and transport facilitation are in place and countries are implementing them. Also notable is the online platform for monitoring NTBs not just in COMESA but at the Tripartite and AFCFTA levels. In addition, the Council of Ministers is expected to adopt the revised COMESA Regulations on the Elimination of NTBs and its working procedures. This will enforce the application of the provisions of the COMESA Treaty on dealing with a Member State that fail to fulfill an obligation under the Treaty or has infringed such provision.

Mwangi G

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File Photo: Meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture, 2015.

COMESA Ministers Adopt COVID-19 Food Security and Nutrition Plan

Ministers responsible for agriculture, environment and natural resources have adopted the COMESA COVID-19 Food Security Response Plan to help the region deal with the impacts of Covid-19 on regional food security.

In their 7th joint meeting conducted virtually, the Ministers expressed concern about the unfolding effects of Covid-19 on food and nutrition and called on Member States to immediately mobilise resources to support the implementation of the regional plan to ensure food security.

The Ministers have also committed themselves to ensure that food and agricultural input markets and supply chains, along with associated logistics and services remained open and functional in line with the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite COVID-19 guidelines adopted last week.

In a Declaration issued at the end of the one-day meeting, the Ministers pledged to support agricultural research to develop, transfer and disseminate technologies, innovations and management practices that are climate-resilient, market-responsive, suited to assorted agro-ecological contexts and end-user preferences in the region.

The Ministers committed themselves

to supporting smallholder farmers to increase production and productivity, through access to inputs, services and improved technologies including seeds, planting materials, fertilizer, veterinary products and animal feeds.

Speaking at the official opening, Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said a lot more still needed to be done for the region to effectively address the challenges of climate change, transboundary plant pest and animal diseases, and degradation of natural resources.

She called for the need to build the resilience of agriculture and agri-food systems as well as ecosystems for greater functionality and efficiency. This will also call for adoption of comprehensive approach to early warning, disaster preparedness and response including social protection & safety net systems.

The SG urged Member States to collectively deal with food safety issues to further open-up markets and enhance trade in safe agricultural and food commodities in the region and in the context of African Continental Free Trade Area.

As part of efforts to boost sustainable agricultural productivity, the Secretariat

has supported Member States to adopt Climate Smart Agricultural policies and strategies and implementation of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) through technical and advisory support.

The Secretariat has also supported the development of livestock and fisheries development through provision of financial, technical and organizational support in the development and implementation of policies and strategies.

Through its Agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), COMESA Secretariat has been working with Member States and partners in harmonizing and domestication of the seed trade regulations to promote cross-border seed trade for increased access to quality seeds by the farmers.

Representatives of partners organization including the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) among others attended the meeting.

82% of NTBs in COMESA are Operational and Easy to Monitor

But Behind-the-border type of NTBS are more complex

A police roadblock

Source: Adobe stock

At least 82% of the reported Non-Tariff Barriers in the COMESA region are those imposed on imports and exports of goods and services and are largely operational by design. According to trade experts, these type of NTBs are easy to identify and monitor.

Thus, from an analytical perspective, the relatively high rate of resolution of NTB cases in COMESA, which is over 95%, does not necessarily imply that the mechanisms established to eliminate NTBs are effective. Rather it shows that mechanisms in place capture more of the operational as opposed to the behind-the-border types of NTBs.

The behind-the-border measures are mainly imposed internally and include domestic legislations covering health, technical, product, labor, environmental standards, internal taxes or charges, and domestic subsidies.

According to the COMESA Director of Trade, Dr Christopher Onyango, (in picture) the latter category is much more complex and difficult to identify and have in recent times become major sources of NTBs.

He was speaking at the opening of the virtual 8th Meeting of the COMESA NTBs Focal Points which took place from 8 - 10 July 2020. The objective of the meeting was to deliberate on the revised COMESA Non-Tariff Barriers regulations, the 2nd draft of the Working Procedures on implementation of COMESA NTBs regulations and to consider the



outstanding Intra-COMESA NTBs.

Dr Onyango said several strategies and mechanisms have so far been put in place to reduce the occurrences and eliminate NTBs since the establishment of COMESA, particularly following the advent of the FTA regime. However, the NTBs have remained prevalent and continue to constrain the growth and expansion of intra-COMESA trade and investments.

He called for continuous reviewing and improving of existing regulations and mechanisms taking into account changing eco-systems, understanding key causes, analyzing regulatory regimes, production techniques and technological advancements. In the COMESA region, some NTBs have remained unresolved for long, some dating back to 2000.

He added that in as much as willingness and commitment of parties involved may be critical, the effectiveness and capability of the mechanisms and

institutional structures to resolving all types of NTBs require sustained review.

Regulations should take into account the nature, forms and categories of various non-tariff measures, domestic policies, laws and regulations and the diversity of economic sectors. But even more importantly, the regulations and procedures should be inclusive, considering small scale enterprises, youth and women as important players in the integration process.

Although all Member States have established NTBs Focal Points, several countries are yet to formalize and operationalize their National Monitoring Committees. These are considered critical to the implementation of the regulations and elimination of NTBs, even most important is sharing experiences and developing capacities to identify, categorize and report them as they occur.

Dr Onyango underscored the importance of sustained capacity building and information sharing to strengthen the ability to capture emerging issues and finding lasting solutions to NTBs. Going forward, he said COMESA Secretariat will endeavor to elevate capacity building and research in the efforts to strengthen NTB mechanisms and effectively support their elimination from the region.

The meeting was attended by delegates from Burundi, Djibouti, D.R. Congo, Comoros, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia,

COMESA Launches **Mobile App** to Facilitate Operations of the Regional Customs Transit Scheme



File Photo/ Crew prepare a transit goods truck operating under RCTG, departing to Uganda from the Port of Mombasa, Kenya

The COMESA Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme (RCTG-Carnet) launched a Mobile Application on 11 September 2020 to provide access to real-time information to clearing and forwarding agents in the region. The Application is accessible on Google Play Store and Apple Store and provides a one-stop shop for the agents in member countries to view current Bond balance and active Carnets, get notifications on Carnet acquittals and expiry of RCTG Bonds.

The scheme popularly known as the RCTG CARNET is a guarantee used for goods in transit as an undertaking to comply with Customs obligations within each transit country. Its objective is to ensure that governments of transit countries can recover duties and taxes from the guarantors should the goods be illegally disposed-off in the local market. The CARNET offers Customs Administrations a secure regional system of control replacing the nationally executed practices and procedures.

COMESA Member States introduced the Scheme in 2012 to address difficulties experienced by transport operators, freight forwarders and clearing agents. These included high cost of Bond / Guarantee and collaterals charged by

Sureties and Agents, delays at border points and revenue leakage.

The COMESA RCTG Carnet is the second of its kind in the world after the European Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) Carnet and the only one in the region and the African continent. It is recognized by the World Customs Organization (WCO).

The RCTG Scheme has 13 members namely Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Currently, the Scheme is operational in five countries; namely: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The RCTG Carnet is fully digitalized and integrated with the National Customs IT Systems.

During the year 2018, nearly \$2 billion COMESA RCTG Carnets for customs duty and taxes for goods in transit in the Northern and Central Corridor countries were issued.

Find the App on google and apple store on:-

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.comesa.rctgmobile>
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/id1530035067?platform=iphone>

Consumer Alert on Pyramid Schemes

COMESA Competition Commission (CCC) issued an alert in September advising consumers in the region to be on the lookout for pyramid schemes, whereby people are encouraged to join and recruit others at a fee to make money. Members of a pyramid scheme make money through the recruitment of others.

A statement from CCC Headquarters in Malawi announced that the Commission's attention had been drawn to the activities of a scheme known as Crowd1, which marketed itself as a digital multi-level company and whose operations were being investigated in some jurisdictions.

Specifically, the Commission noted that authorities in the Philippines and Namibia found that Crowd1 members made money by recruiting others. The organization has since been banned in Namibia. In Philippines, authorities are said to have issued a cease and desist order to Crowd1 for operating without a license.

Further, authorities in Mauritius and New Zealand had issued investor alerts, advising the public to exercise caution in their dealings with Crowd1.

Consumers were advised to exercise caution when dealing with Crowd1 and also conduct research about companies they wish to invest in to avoid losing their hard-earned money.



Tripartite Transport Facilitation Laws set to be Harmonized from Cape to Cairo

Cross border road transport laws, regulations, standards and systems are set to be harmonized from Cape to Cairo following the endorsement of two anchor Multilateral Agreements and five Model Laws.

The two anchor multilateral agreements are the COMESA-EAC-SADC Vehicle Load Management Agreement (VLMA) and the COMESA-EAC-SADC Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement (MCBRTA). The two had been adopted by the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Infrastructure (TSMCI) at its 2nd meeting held in October 2019 in Lusaka, Zambia.

The accompanying model laws endorsed were COMESA-EAC-SADC Vehicle Load Management Model Law, COMESA-EAC-SADC Cross Border Road Transport Model Law, COMESA-EAC-SADC Road Traffic Model Law, Draft COMESA-EAC-SADC Road Traffic and Transport Transgressions Model Law, and Draft COMESA-EAC-SADC Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road Model Law.

The COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Legal Affairs (TSMCLA) endorsed the tripartite draft legal instruments on transport and transit facilitation during a virtual meeting held on 18 September 2020. Thereafter, the Tripartite Ministerial Council will consider them and then recommend the

agreements for signature by the Heads of State and Government. The meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers will be conducted before the end of this year.

The COMESA-EAC-SADC vehicle load management agreement sets out the harmonized regulations and standards and the methodology for calculating overload fees. The purpose is to retrieve the additional cost to the infrastructure caused by overloading, as well as the permissible load limits with the view to protect the road pavement as well as to ensure road safety. This Draft Agreement also provides the basis for cooperation between the Member/ Partner States of the Tripartite Free Trade Area regarding vehicle load management, law enforcement, information sharing, as well as mechanisms for dispute resolution.

The COMESA-EAC-SADC Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement, provides for a Tripartite legal framework for harmonization of road traffic and transport related aspects, including vehicle registration documents, transport operator registration, vehicle fitness testing, driver training and testing, as well as driving license categories based on appropriate international standards, including United Nations Standards.

Further, the Draft COMESA-EAC-SADC

Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement provides for a framework for enabling a comprehensive cross border road transportation management system, which is based on quality regulation as opposed to economic regulation.

The transport management system is supported by an electronic Tripartite Transport Registers and Information Platform System (TRIPS), which enables the exchange of data between the Member/Partner States, from their own National Transport Information Systems (NTIS) that consist of a number of modules, amongst others a vehicle system, a driver system, an operator system and a transgression system.

The draft instruments were developed through the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP) of COMESA, EAC and SADC. The joint programme is funded by the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund.

The meeting was opened by the Minister of Justice of Madagascar, Hon Jonny Richard Andriamahefarivo and also addressed by the Executive Secretary for the Southern Africa Development Community Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax who is also the Chair of the Tripartite Task Force.



Source: Adobe stock

COMESA Welcomes the new Continental One-Stop-Shop for Medicines

The launch of the African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) in June this year, was an invaluable One Stop Shop that would ensure access to safe and affordable quality medicines in Africa. The platform was developed to serve as a consolidated online marketplace to facilitate the provision of COVID-19-related medical products by addressing supply chain issues such as shortages, delays in distributing supplies, accessibility and affordability.

In September 2020, COMESA and the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) joined hands to showcase the platform to key stakeholders, among them, ministers in charge of finance and health from the African continent. The aim was to demonstrate how it would help address health challenges posed by the COVID-19 and how governments could scale up interventions to stop further spread of the pandemic.

At the event conducted online, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe cited financial constraints as one of the biggest stumbling blocks to effectively manage the pandemic considering that majority, if not all economies in Africa have financially-

strained health systems.

“By reducing costs through pooled procurement, this initiative goes a long way in easing the financial burden and strengthening national responses to the pandemic,” she told the guests.

She added: “COVID-19 has shown the limitations of globalization and global supply chains, which have been easily disrupted due to the various lockdowns and the unprecedented shortages of tradable commodities and services in our countries.”

Of greatest concern in the region has been shortages or constrained supplies of essential pharmaceutical products, including medicines, personal protective equipment and potential increases in substandard and counterfeit products. Consequently, the costs of these essential medicines and other health products have escalated thereby further limiting their access by health workers and the sick.

COMESA had in the immediate past started working on a programme to strengthen production capacity of pharmaceutical and medical supplies in

the region - during and post Covid-19. “Evidence from analytical data indicate that there are various products in the medical industry that COMESA countries can produce and export to each other if the capacities of pharmaceuticals manufacturing enterprises related to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) Quality Management Systems (QMS) and Regional Standards are improved,” Secretary General said.

She added that it is against this background that the COMESA and ECA, in partnership with Africa Centre for Diseases Control, Afreximbank, and the AU Special Envoy, Mr. Strive Masiyiwa convened the high level virtual meeting, to showcase the opportunities offered by the African Medical Supplies Platform.

“By reducing costs through pooled procurement, this initiative goes a long way in easing the financial burden and strengthening national responses to the pandemic,” she told the guests.



File Photo: Participants at a past symposium of Central Bank Governors

Experts Discuss Trade Negotiation Modalities in Time of COVID-19

Trade experts from the 21 COMESA Member States met on 16 September 2020 to review progress on trade negotiations between countries and to review progress towards concluding Trade in Services negotiations. The virtual meeting, which was the 8th for the COMESA Technical Working Group on Trade in Services, considered the complexities prevailing during the COVID-19 period and provided technical and policy guidance from the Member States regarding the negotiations.

Speaking at the meeting, Senior Trade Officer at the COMESA Secretariat Mrs. Alice Twizeye stressed the importance of concluding negotiations on Trade in Services in all the seven identified priority sectors. These were: business, communication, financial, transport, construction, energy-related and tourism services.

"These have potential to enhance the development and diversification of regional services as well as facilitate an increase in Trade in Services and proactively find solutions to be

competitive and trade with third parties outside the region and globally," she said.

COMESA considers Trade in Services as a fundamental economic activity globally given its contribution to job creation, building competitiveness and significantly contributing to economic growth. It creates the need for Member States to streamline their policies and promote it among themselves.

Mrs. Twizeye added: "This makes the Trade in Services agenda important for COMESA hence the need for this meeting so that despite COVID-19 impact across the world, our Member States can take necessary actions and explore new opportunities to the prevailing challenges."

Previously, most of the trade negotiations were conducted in physical meetings. However, in view of pressing need for negotiations to progress, the Secretariat decided to convene the virtual meeting to provide Member States with relevant updates in light of the current logistical challenges of convening a physical

session.

"Online negotiations may be very challenging and may be impossible but through online and virtual platforms exchange of requests and offers, it is still possible with other technical work on improving the drafting and presentation of the initial offers," said the Senior Trade Officer.

At the meeting, the Secretariat shared information and updated Member States on the submission of draft offers for sectors that the countries were willing to open for the others. It also shared preliminary technical analysis of the initial offers submitted and information on capacity building initiatives planned for the coming months.

The delegates provided suggestions on how to move forward on some of the issues to advance the negotiations on the schedules that have already been submitted during this COVID period to enable work to continue. At least 60 delegates participated in the meeting.

COMESA Bank in an Unprecedented Funds Mobilization

as World Bank Approves \$425 Million Towards Infrastructure Financing

The World Bank Board of Directors approved a total of US\$425 million in International Development Association (IDA) financing to support infrastructure development in the Eastern and Southern Africa through the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) and COMESA Secretariat.

This funding falls under the Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility Project (RIFF), which aims at expanding long-term finance to private firms in selected infrastructure in the power sector, as well as in the transport, logistics, and social sectors. This is the first regional facility of this kind in Africa. The new transactions will support regional integration and private sector development, and in turn, the sustainable socio-economic development of the region TDB serves.

TDB provides trade and project finance to its 22 member states, which includes countries from the wider COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area, and will use the facility to diversify its long-term funding sources, sharpen focus on critical food and fuel imports, and facilitate imports of COVID-19 equipment and construction materials for healthcare facilities through its structured trade finance business

This is the first time IDA and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) - the political risk insurance and credit enhancement arm of the World Bank Group - are jointly supporting a regional development bank. MIGA is providing TDB a credit enhancement of EUR 334.4 million on a ten-year loan from private commercial banks, that will help TDB expand trade finance activities.



President Mr. Admassu Tadesse

This guarantee provides protection to the lenders against the risk of Non-Honoring of Financial Obligations by a Regional Development Bank ('NHFO-RDB') and supports TDB's access to commercial bank financing at longer tenors and lower interest rates than would otherwise have been available.

TDB has also attracted two new European funding partners with initial long-term funding of USD 80 million. They include a 10-year EUR 50 million term loan facility signed with Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP), Italy's Development Finance Institution, for on-lending to the private sector – particularly SMEs – located in some TDB Member States, and operating in agribusiness, social infrastructure, health, education, transports and logistics.

The other is similarly a 10-year USD 25 million term loan facility signed with the development bank of Austria, Oesterreichische Entwicklungsbank AG (OeEB). The funds will finance projects in various development areas such as renewable energy including hydro, windmills, solar, cogeneration and geothermal projects, energy efficiency in industry, housing, electricity transmission

and distribution, as well as infrastructure, in TDB Member States.

President and Chief Executive Officer of the TDB Mr. Admassu Tadesse described the past quarter of this year as a season of new and expanded multilateral and bilateral partnerships on an unprecedented level.

Mr Tadesse noted that the TDB and COMESA flags were flying high and new Member States from beyond COMESA were continuing to knock on the doors. And as the region was embracing the newcomers, in the spirit of the AfCFTA, the bank was dutifully preserving TDB's character as a COMESA-based specialist regional bank, with membership and operations well beyond COMESA. Reacting to the positive developments, Secretary General of COMESA Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, congratulated the TDB for the new partnerships.

"We take immense pride in achievements of the Bank as a COMESA institution, which is actualizing the vision and foresight of the founding members of building strong institutions which can deliver the mandate for the benefit of the region," she said.

"We take immense pride in achievements of the Bank as a COMESA institution, which is actualizing the vision and foresight of the founding members of building strong institutions which can deliver the mandate for the benefit of the region," she said.



Traffic in motion on a highway

Source: Adobe stock

Free Flow of Traffic Across COMESA, EAC, SADC Expected as Tripartite Ministers Approve New Harmonized Guidelines

The Tripartite Council of Ministers of the three regional economic communities in the eastern and southern Africa have approved new harmonized trade and transport facilitation guidelines for the movement of persons, goods and services across the region.

Dubbed the Tripartite Guidelines for the Movement of Persons, Goods and Services across the Tripartite Region during COVID-19 Pandemic, the guidelines consolidate those developed earlier by COMESA, the East African Community and the Southern Africa Development Community into one, and will henceforth be applied across the 28 Member States. These are:

- the COMESA-Guidelines for Movement of Goods and Services across the COMESA Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic,
- the EAC-Administrative Guidelines to Facilitate Movement of Goods and Services during COVID-19 Pandemic;
- and the SADC-Guidelines on Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport Operations across the Region during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The harmonization of these guidelines was necessitated by the overlapping membership of countries among the three economic blocs and the shared traffic on their transport corridors, which have been negatively impacted by the current COVID-19 response measures.

In a meeting conducted in July 2020 via teleconference, the Ministers directed the Tripartite Task Force to establish the required institutional arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the Guidelines. Ministers in charge of trade and transport and other government officials attended the meeting.

The Ministers also agreed on the development and integration of electronic surveillance systems to monitor drivers' health and movement of trucks, which will be undertaken by Member/Partner States. They noted that COVID-19 cross-border restrictions have mainly targeted truck drivers leading to their stigmatization. This has not only affected the drivers and local communities, but also negatively impacted the ongoing efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

"Those mobility restrictions to contain COVID-19 have affected regional trade and transport, and resulted in shortage of goods, and long queues at ports of entry and exit, translating into increased cost of doing business and consumer prices, but this will be a thing of the past," said the Chairperson of the Tripartite Task Force Dr Stergomena Tax, who is the Executive Secretary of SADC.

With the Tripartite guidelines in place, she noted, the smooth flow of traffic for goods and services will ensure economic development of Member and partner States who have been affected by the pandemic and help them build their economies once again.

The Tripartite Council Chairperson who was represented by Assistant Minister for Foreign Trade, Agreements and International Relations of Egypt, Hon. Tarek Shalaby, said the harmonization of guidelines presents an opportunity towards the realization of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA).

"The attainment of tripartite and continental integration can only be realized with the harmonization of regional initiatives and overcoming the challenges of overlaps and multiple membership of COMESA, EAC and SADC," he said.

Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe and Mr Kenneth Bagamuhunda, the representative of the Secretary General of EAC, H.E. Ambassador Liberat Mfumukeko



Source: Adobe stock

Packed seeds in preparations for sowing, organization and storage for safety.

Improved Seed Trade, will Unlock Regional Food Security

Sustainable agriculture is an essential factor in advancing trade within COMESA and the rest of Africa. Over the last two decades, Africa has remained a net food importer, with agricultural accounting for about 60% of Africa's total trade in agricultural products. Furthermore, agricultural product imports account for around 13% of total imports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought agriculture and food security issues to the fore and it presents a formidable threat to trade in agricultural commodities. This has necessitated bringing together experts to discuss and come up with practical recommendations to cushion the sector from pandemic related disruptions.

This is what informed the COMESA Business Council (CBC) webinar on 27 July 2020 themed: "Unlocking Food Security Through Improved Seed Trade in COMESA". This was a public-private consultative platform on agricultural transformation and improved trade within COMESA and brought together regional seed producers and traders.

Discussions hinged on, access to quality and affordable seed, trade facilitation in the movement of seed across the borders during COVID-19, measures to curb illicit trade in seed and policy and regulatory frameworks to facilitate

investment and increased seed production and trade among others.

Among the key recommendations of the Webinar was the need to develop harmonized legislation across the region and one stop shop to provide relevant permits for the seed industry. Participants noted that some of the authorities are not based at one place which in turn increase costs and time for getting the necessary documentations. They agreed that strong inter-agency regulatory processes and information flows need to be put in place to map out simpler clearance processes at domestic and transboundary trade facilitation level.

The meeting also recommended that a peer review be conducted to monitor the authenticity of seed in the region to avoid cases of counterfeit and those found wanting to be penalized. This will be done through strengthening the supply of the volumes of truly certified seeds marketed in the region, as well as information sharing campaigns, which is key in sensitizing farmers on quality seeds.

The CBC was urged to engage local seed companies and governments to strengthen the existing business environment, as this will motivate companies to make investments in countries that they are operating in. It will also strengthen dialogue between

different actors in the seed sector for the sustainability of the industry.

Further, CBC was called upon to come up with a Seed Statistics Information System. This would address the challenge posed by lack of real-time trade data on seeds, which delays and affects decision making process.

Currently, COMESA is working with Member States to benchmark seed standards and regulations to International accepted levels. The involvement of both private and public sector is needed mostly through private-public dialogue so that policies are well informed and also practical solutions can be identified.

Panelists included the Regional Director for Syngenta Foundation East Africa, Mr. Osure George, Regional Head Africa & Middle East at Advanta Seeds, Mr. Ndavi Muia and the Corporate Engagement Lead – Africa for Bayer Crop Science Mr. Jimmy Kiberu. Others were, Dr. John MacRobert, the Acting Chairman for Zimbabwe Seed Trade Association and Mrs. Providence Mavubi, Director, Industry and Agriculture at COMESA. CBC Chief Executive Officer Ms. Sandra Uwera moderated the Webinar.

Region has Increased Staple Crop Production



File Photo: Vegetable farm in Mphatini, Eswatini

Most countries in the COMESA region have recorded an above average yield in the production of staple foods for the 2019/2020 farming season, and this is expected to reduce hunger among the 560 million people.

COMESA Seed Expert Dr John Mukuka attributes the increase to the fact that 90% of the 80 million smallholder farmers involved in the production of staple foods in the Member States, now have access to affordable, quality and improved seed. However, the production of the same staple food crops for the coming season of 2020/21 is likely to drop due to the impact of COVID-19.

Dr Mukuka estimates that agricultural production is likely to contract between 2.6% and up to 7% in the region due to COVID-19. This might result in increased prices of food (especially staples such as wheat, maize and rice) due to mainly disruptions to the agriculture and input supply chain.

This data on staple food production has been collected from selected member countries under the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP) in collaboration with the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI) in Zambia and FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS).

Zambia produced 3.4 million Metric Tonnes (MT) of maize, representing 69% more than the 2018/19 season which was slightly above 2 million MT. In addition, the country recorded 20,000MT of sorghum, 35,000MT of rice, 45,000MT of millet, 50,000MT of sunflower and 300,000MT of Soya beans among others.

In Burundi, the 2019 aggregate cereal production was about 326 000 MT, similar to the 2018 output and about 10% above the average of the previous five years.

The 2019 cereal production in Egypt is forecast at 22 million MT, about the same quantity as in 2018, but about 6% below average due to decline in rice production.

According to the data, Eswatini harvested an estimated 95 000 tonnes of maize in May 2019 which was 16% below the previous year's high level, but still 10% above the five year average.

In Ethiopia, harvesting of the 2019 main "Meher" season crops is well underway and production prospects are generally favourable. In western key producing areas of Benishangul Gumuz, western Amhara and western Oromiya regions, the June - September 2019 "Kiremt" rains were up to 30% above average,

with a positive impact on yields.

In Madagascar, paddy yields are forecast to be below average in 2020 in the paddy producing districts in Anosy and Ihorombe, as a result of erratic rainfall and seasonal totals that have been below average, hindering crop development.

In Malawi, production of other cereal crops, mainly rice and sorghum, was also estimated at above average levels as favourable weather conditions boosted the area planted and yields. Overall, cereal production in 2019 is estimated at 3.7 million tonnes, 12 percent above the five year average.

In Rwanda, the cereal production was at about 733 000 tonnes, about 3% up from 2018 and 12 percent above the average of the previous five years.

In Mauritius, the production of paddy, the principal cereal produced in the country, increased on a yearly basis, mostly on account of favourable weather conditions that boosted yields. In addition, the yield of vegetables and fruits are estimated to be 35% above the level of the corresponding period in 2018.

In Tunisia, the preliminary forecasts for the 2019 cereal production point to a bumper cereal crop of almost 2.2 million MT, over 55 percent above the 2018 weather-stricken harvest and over 40 percent above the average. For the 2019 harvest, about 700,000 hectares were planted with wheat and 620,000 hectares with barley, compared to 620,000 and 525, 000 hectares, respectively, planted in 2018.

In Zimbabwe production of cereals in 2019 was below average level of 944,000 MT due to unfavorable weather conditions. To increase imports, the government lifted the ban on imports of Genetically Modified (GM) grains in December 2019, introducing a rule that provides for grains to be put into quarantine before being milled into flour. *(this report was published in July 2020)*



File Photo: Cargo freighters at the Kazungula border between Zambia/Botswana

COMESA-EAC-SADC

Develop Electronic Corridor Trip Monitoring System

A regional electronic Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) which will allow cross border road transport operators, drivers, regulators and law enforcement agencies to record and monitor driver wellness data such as COVID-19 test results has been approved by the Tripartite group. The CTMS will also enable operators to track the driver, crew and truck movements against pre-approved route plans.

The CTMS is supported by the current legal and regulatory framework existing both at regional and national level, which include inter-alia: REC Treaties, Protocols and Agreements, Corridor Agreements, Bilateral Road Transport Agreements as well as National COVID19 regulations being implemented by Tripartite Member/Partner States.

The system will eventually be reinforced by the legal provisions in the Tripartite Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement adopted by the Tripartite Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Infrastructure held in Lusaka in October 2019.

Director of Infrastructure at COMESA

Secretariat Mr Baptiste Mutabazi revealed in Lusaka that the CTMS will enable operator, vehicle and driver information to be readily available along regional transport corridors at the roadside and at border posts to all regulatory and law enforcement agencies.

The CTMS is an immediate remedial response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its use will in future be further enhanced through the Tripartite Transport Registers and Information Platform System (TRIPS) which is now under development, as a corridor performance management tool for smart corridors, Mr Mutabazi noted.

He added that the CTMS was being developed and deployed in a phased manner and was first released in June this year. It will be piloted on a section of the Trans Kalahari Corridor that is Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, a sections of the Walvis Bay Namibia-Ndola Zambia-Kasumbalesa DRC Corridor and a section of the North-South Corridor that is South Africa, Botswana, Zambia up to Kasumbalesa Border post.

Thereafter, the CTMS will be rolled out to other corridors in the Tripartite region based on Member States preparedness. According to transport experts at COMESA Secretariat, a number of activities have been undertaken in preparation for piloting and roll out of the CTMS which include presenting it to COMESA Member States in June, to EAC Partner States in July and to SADC Member States also in June this year.

The CTMS will in future be integrated with the EAC Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System (RECTS) which has been enhanced to include Driver Tracking too and is currently being piloted in the East African region.



Mr Baptiste Mutabazi

Unconventional Monetary Policies Necessary to Address the Impact of COVID-19



Dollar and Euro Bills

Central Banks in the COMESA region implemented new policy instruments and made changes to their monetary policy frameworks to address the low growth and increased unemployment that resulted from the negative impact of COVID-19.

According to the report published in September by the Director of the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI), Mr Ibrahim Zeidy, most of the banks in the region and beyond applied different combinations of what have been labelled as Unconventional Monetary Policy Tools (UMPTs) and adapted their operations to the circumstances in their jurisdictions.

In view of this, the CMI came up with key recommendations of possible tools for the Central Banks to consider in addition to the UMPTs during the pandemic. They include the need to provide funding to market segments where liquidity has dried up.

"The possible tool to consider is providing funding for Lending Schemes whereby

Central Banks provide collateralized long-term funding to banks to aid monetary transmission through the banking system and to support provision of new credit to bridge financing needs of specific sectors," Mr. Zeidy stated.

However, before implementing such tools, he noted, careful consideration should be given to the potential financial risks to Central Bank balance sheets, the operational readiness of such tools, potential distortions and spill overs and the importance of transparency and accountability in the use of such instruments.

"Central Banks should consider lowering the interest rate to increase loans to businesses (and decrease their cost) and provide commercial banks with more liquidity to support business activities," he said. He added that a temporary use of capital flow management measures can help prevent a free fall of the exchange rate such as restrictions on resident investments and transfers abroad, caps and other limitations on non-resident

transfers abroad etc.

He however cautioned that such measures should be implemented with due regard to countries international obligation, in a transparent manner, be temporary and lifted once crisis conditions decreases.

Other proposals made include the need for countries to initiate fiscal stimulus packages to minimize the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the national economies; fiscal stimulus to taxpayers impacted by COVID-19 and tax suspension, waiver of tax payments in critical sectors and encouraging local sourcing by the public sector to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and other businesses.

Mr. Zeidy proposed that governments through Central Bank can also renegotiate external debt payment plans, and conditions to ensure smooth servicing of the debt, including suspension of interest rates payments during the time of the crisis.

Regional-Wide Post-Covid-19 Recovery Plan is a Top Priority



Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe flanked by Assistant Secretary General- Administration and Finance Dr. Dev Haman (R) and staff during the virtual meeting with the Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Hon. Nandcoomar BODHA (not in picture)

As COVID-19 pandemic raged across the globe, COMESA Secretariat continued engaging multilaterally and bilaterally with Member States to share experiences and updates on virtual platforms.

Towards the end of September, Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe conducted a virtual mission to Mauritius where she met the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Hon. Nandcoomar Bodha.

In the ensuing discussions covering a wide range of issues, the two agreed on the need to prioritize a regional-wide post-Covid-19 recovery plan to assist Member States get their economies back on their feet and focusing resource mobilization efforts towards supporting the plan.

Minister BODHA, whose Ministry is in charge of coordination of COMESA programmes in Mauritius lauded COMESA Secretariat for cutting its budget by 10% and passing the benefit to the Member States. Hence, Member States will reduce their annual subscriptions to the regional economic bloc by the same percentage next year. He urged the organization to adopt a No-budget increase policy to help the Member States in their economic recovery efforts.

Secretary General Kapwepwe said COMESA had actively engaged development partners including the African Development Bank, the European

Union and the World Bank among others, to support Member States during the pandemic and after.

She said, various support facilities had been secured including a \$850,000 commitment from the AfDB to support the development of pharmaceutical products and creation of value chains for COMESA Member States. Further discussions were underway to upscale this project with additional resources and expand its scope.

COMESA was also conducting socio economic studies on the impact of the pandemic to Member States to support their recovery efforts. Further, it had set up a portal for exchange of information on essential goods that are available in the region. Ms. Kapwepwe said the platform will enable Member States to share information and connect buyers to suppliers thereby promoting and fostering regional intra-COMESA trade.

Other matters discussed included the implementation of the COMESA Free Trade Area Agreement and the importance to Member States to avoid introducing any new trade barriers and resolution of the pending ones to boost regional trade and support post-Covid-19 economic recovery.

“What we need is regional approach for economic recovery, with a harmonized plan for all Member States as this will enable us forge partnerships with the development partners as opposed to going alone,” the SG noted.

With regard to the ratification of the COMESA, EAC and SADC Free Trade Area, the Minister said Mauritius was looking forward to the conclusion of the negotiations on Rules of Origin and Market Access to ratify the Agreement. The Tripartite was launched in 2015 and had by then been signed and ratified by eight countries, six short of the required threshold of 14.

“Negotiations have been lengthy as some of the products involved are sensitive,” the Minister noted. “It would be important to share the outcomes of bilateral negotiators with all parties regarding market access.”

The SG said lack of funding had also slowed down the tripartite negotiations and this situation also been exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic.

The two also discussed preparation of the 2021 -2025 COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) which was being developed. Minister Bodha said the development of the ocean economy, maritime security and climate change were the main priorities of the island States and should be placed top on the agenda of the next COMESA strategic plan.

Secretary General Kapwepwe hailed Mauritius for setting the best example in the region in the management and containment of the Covid-19 pandemic. The country had by then flattened the curve and had no active cases.



File photo: Kinshasa, DR Congo

RISM Programme Sensitizes over 600 Congolese Stakeholders on the COMESA Rules of Origin

In September this year, over 600 stakeholders comprising of border officials and local economic operators from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) completed trade related skills training designed to enhance better understanding of the potential opportunities that the COMESA market offers.

The training was provided under the COMESA Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) with funding from the European Union. This was part of a Grant Agreement signed in August 2019 of 489,600 Euros between COMESA and D.R. Congo.

The training covered the COMESA Rules of Origin, regional economic integration, national regulation of COMESA Rules of Origin, COMESA Preferential Tariffs, COMESA Simplified Trade regime (STR), the functioning of the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) and mechanisms and procedures to request and benefit from preferential tariff treatment within that framework.

Under RISM, the regional business community get the opportunity to benefit from the COMESA Free Trade Area such

as preferential trade regimes that make them more competitive on the local and regional markets.

Despite its enormous potential, especially in agriculture and labour, D.R. Congo's local industries have been negatively impacted by lack of integration into regional and global value chains. Further, the lack of information, which is essential for decision-making limits export possibilities.

Over the past few months, the RISM Programme, has also funded training seminars and workshops to build the capacity of economic operators and state actors operating at border posts.

Participants from Bukavu, Uvira, Kinshasa, Kolwezi, Lubumbashi, Kasumbalesa, Goma and Bunia benefitted from the training. Similar trainings at D.R. Congo's borders which had been temporarily suspended due to COVID-19 are set to resume as soon as the travel bans are lifted. An additional 200 participants from Kisangani, Matadi, Kananga, Mbuji Mayi are targeted in the next round.

Phase II of Tripartite Capacity Building Programme Begins as AfDB Provides \$1.1m for Implementation

COMESA Secretariat received \$1.1 million funding from the African Development Fund (AfDB) for the implementation of the Tripartite Capacity Building Programme Phase II. The funds will support COMESA, East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and their Member States to operationalize the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), a major milestone for Africa integration.

The programme has two key areas, which includes improving the capacity to implement the TFTA agreement and improving transparency in trade to tackle non-tariff barriers. Key outputs from the second phase will be the development of guidelines, procedures, regulations and manuals required to operationalize the Agreement in areas such as rules of origin and dispute settlement.

The programme will support the establishment of online databases for non-tariff measures in Tripartite Regional Member countries, building on the pilots under Phase 1. This is expected to improve transparency in trade, speed up the resolution of non-tariff barriers (NTBs), deter arbitrary application of regulatory measures that hinder trade, and improve awareness of traders about legitimate regulatory requirements, which provides a foundation for them to improve their capacity for compliance.

The programme will also enhance awareness of traders and the business community on the market access opportunities available under the Agreement. Launched in 2015, the TFTA consolidates the markets of the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to address the challenge of fragmented markets and proliferation of non-tariff barriers, which inhibit cross border trade.

Together, COMESA-EAC-SADC covers a USD1.3 trillion market representing 56% of Africa's Gross Domestic Product and approximately 740 million consumers in 27 countries.

Energy Infrastructure Development will Unlock the Region's Vast Potential



The Zambia - Tanzania - Kenya (ZTK) Power Inter-connector project substation in Kazama, Zambia

The power outages being experienced in the Eastern Africa-Southern Africa-Indian Ocean have continued to affect productivity leading to Africa losing 12.5% of production time compared to 7% for South Asia. This has been attributed to lack of adequate regional infrastructure in energy.

Recent studies have shown that many African countries, some of which are in the Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (ESA-IO) suffer power shortages and regular interruptions to services.

Dr Kipyego Cheluget, the Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes in COMESA, says that bridging the energy gap is one of the main priorities of the region's infrastructure development as it will reduce the cost of doing business and enhance the competitiveness.

He was speaking during the 6th Technical Steering Committee (PTSC) of the project on Enhancement of Sustainable Regional Energy Market for Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (ESREM-EA-SA-IO) meeting on 15th September 2020. The ESREM project is supported by the European Union.

"As economies grow, so does the demand for energy as chronic shortages hold back potential for economic growth," he said. "This, underscores the need for new approach as we seek to craft



Dr Kipyego Cheluget

strategies to increase the implementation of power projects in both generation and transmission."

He noted that COMESA region was richly endowed with power generating natural resources of which only a few are

harnessed. The situation is exacerbated by inadequate regional infrastructure in energy leading to low levels of competitiveness of the countries in the local, regional and global markets and power shortfalls.

Dr. Cheluget stressed the need for more generation capacity and optimization of the general system losses of electricity which is currently higher than average of 12 per cent.

Participants to the meeting represented Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Association of Energy Regulators, Power Pools, Regional Centres for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, the European Delegation to Zambia and COMESA.

One of the proposals made to the meeting was the need for countries to secure their energy sources by tapping into indigenous resources to ensure the region is not dependent on imports of fuel to light cities and power economic growth. Currently, there are several oil and gas exploration activities in some of the regional States, which governments and private sector can invest in infrastructure such as transmission interconnectors and pipelines.



COMESA's New Plan for the **Next Five Years**

The COMESA Secretariat has developed a draft Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) covering 2021-2025 which is geared to support structural transformation of the region and boost overall economic development through trade facilitation and investment promotion.

To formulate this new MTSP, the Secretariat used a wide consultative approach with key stakeholders both internally and externally. Consultations were undertaken at different levels including the African Union Commission under Agenda 2063, SDG Centre for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as with partner Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to gather information for the upcoming strategy. As a result, alignment was established at the global, continental, regional and subject specific levels.

As part of the strategy formulation process, the draft MTSP 2021-2025 was presented to the Member States for validation on 17 September 2020, during a virtual meeting attended by 60 participants from the 21 Member States.

COMESA Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Kapwepwe addressed the delegates and told them that the process to develop an inclusive and sustainable successor strategy was a key priority

for the Secretariat as the facilitating and coordinating office.

"It is important that we, as a Member State's driven organization develop a strategic plan that will enable the region to build on its successes and override its challenges."

She asked Member States to domesticate the Strategic Plan once finalized, by aligning it with their National Development Plans (NDPs) and take on ownership of the implementation process. This would be central towards attainment of the long-term goals of COMESA.

She also emphasized the need for a regional buy-in while acknowledging that the speed towards attaining the regional integration agenda would come about when Member States and non-state actors fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

The SG also urged Member States to entrench ownership through funding of regional integration programmes. Currently, over 70% of the programmes are funded by cooperating partners.

"Sustainability of programmes under such funding arrangements is not easy to foresee. We need to think about reversing the reliance of external funding

for regional integration programmes," the SG said.

The plan is designed to create an enabling economic environment focusing on trade facilitation, market integration, infrastructure development, industrialization including small and medium enterprise development and regional industrial clusters, institutional and regulatory policies, capacity development as well as resource mobilization.

The Plan will also be used to engage COMESA's strategic partners and mobilize financial and non-financial resources and also provide a framework for developing the organization's annual work programmes and budgets. It will be presented to the COMESA Council of Ministers in November this year for approval and subsequent implementation from January 2021.

"It is important that we, as a Member State's driven organization develop a strategic plan that will enable the region to build on its successes and override its challenges,"
Secretary General



Trade Information Desk at the Rubavu border post in Rwanda

Study on the Sustainability of Trade Information Desk Underway

The World Bank funded Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) launched a three-months study to develop appropriate strategies of maintaining and sustaining the Trade Information Desk Offices (TIDOs) at selected border points. The objective was to enable the TIDOs to continue facilitating cross border trade beyond the timelines of the main project which ends in December 2021.

The study is expected to produce a comprehensive report detailing a proposed framework and options for sustainability of the TIDOs. This will include an indicative estimate of the maximum amount of money that small-scale cross-border traders may be willing to pay as fees for the TIDOs services at each border.

For each sustainability option recommended, a roadmap of concrete steps and responsible authorities will then be taken to COMESA Member States for validation through a regional workshop before operationalizing the proposed solutions.

GLTFP Coordinator Mr. Thomas Barasa

said the issue of sustainability of projects and programmes is important to COMESA and the World Bank.

“The Bank and the (COMESA) Secretariat would like to see the TIDOs continue operating way after the GLTFP has closed. This will ensure that small scale cross-border traders continue their trade without any disturbances,” he said adding that the study would be undertaken in a participatory manner involving all stakeholders using physical and modern ICT tools such as online meetings.

Being part of the wider World Bank Great Lakes Regional Initiative, the GLTFP aims at increasing formal small-scale cross border trade flows in the region, leading to high revenue collection for governments at the targeted border posts.

One of the core activities of the project is to provide information and sensitization support to cross border traders, especially, the small-scale category as well as the collection of data on small scale trade. Through the TIDOs, desk information officers sensitize the traders and collect vital information on small scale cross border trade which would

otherwise be missed by the officially designated border agencies like customs officers.

Presently, the TIDOs are operational at 12 selected borders in the three project countries. On the DR Congo-Uganda border are: Mahagi/Goli, Kasindi/Mpondwe and Bunagana/Bunagana. On the DRC-Rwanda borders are Goma/Petite Barriere Rubavu, Bukavu/Rusizi and at the Kamanyola/ Bugarama border points respectively.

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“The Bank and the (COMESA) Secretariat would like to see the TIDOs continue operating way after the GLTFP has closed. This will ensure that small scale cross-border traders continue their trade without any disturbances,” he said

FEMCOM Adopts New Name, Appoints New Board

The Federation of Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) has changed its name to COMESA Federation of National Associations of Women in Business. This is in line with the correct name which appears in the COMESA Treaty. The new acronym will now be "COMFWB".

The name change happened during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held virtually on 25 and 26 August 2020. A new board of directors was also appointed to oversee the running of the organisation in accordance with Article 6(8) of the FEMCOM Charter.

Ms. Maureen Masungu Sumbwe from Zambia was elected Chairperson and Ms Naila Abbas Thabit from Comoros the Vice Chairperson. Ms. Angeline Wibabara from Rwanda took the position of the Rapporteur. Other board members appointed were: Ms. Eliane Munkeni Kiekie from DR Congo, Ms. Selamawit Mekonnen Woldegiorgis (Eritrea), Ms. Zintombi Thandi Nxumalo (Eswatini), Ms. Towera Jalakasi (Malawi), Ms. Siham Sharif Abdalla (Sudan) and Ms. Leila Jaber Belkhiria from Tunisia.

The General Assembly was attended by the FEMCOM National Chapters. It reviewed and adopted the revised FEMCOM Charter and the draft FEMCOM Staff Rules and Regulations. This was in addition to the Draft FEMCOM Financial Rules and Regulations which also includes the Procurement Policy. It also considered the 2021 work plan and budget.

Eswatini has Developed Trade Facilitation Instruments for Small Scale Border Traders



Small scale Eswatini farmer

Eswatini has developed a national Roadmap for the implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) as well as the Trade and Transportation Facilitation instruments for the Small-Scale Cross Border Traders (SSCBT). The Roadmap is under consideration by senior management in respective ministries and institutions in the country.

The Roadmap and related instruments were developed during a sensitization workshop on implementation of the tools under the COMESA EDF11-Cross Border Trade Initiative (CBTI) conducted virtually on 1-2 September. It was intended to create awareness amongst Eswatini stakeholders on the need to formally adopt the STR and other COMESA trade facilitation instruments to facilitate SSCBT flows at selected borders.

Director of Micro- Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSME) in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade of Eswatini, Mr. Mluleki Sakile Dlamini opened the meeting and emphasized the importance of small-scale cross

border trade. He outlined the challenges that SSCBTs face in conducting their businesses.

"I am hopeful that this workshop will help develop instruments that will facilitate small scale cross border trade. Our country will support all these activities that COMESA is implementing locally," Mr Dlamini stated.

Team Leader/Cross Border Trade Expert at the COMESA Secretariat, Tasara Muzorori, stressed the importance of the STR in facilitating trade by SSCBTs.

Mr Muzorori called on stakeholders in Eswatini to embrace and implement the STR with some of the COMESA Member States to enhance the trading environment for the SSCBTs. He thanked the European Union for providing funding for the Cross-Border Trade Initiative which had made it possible for the workshop to be conducted.

Mr Muzorori was accompanied by Coordinated Border Management Expert, TFP at the Secretariat Mr. Ahmed Y. Salih.

50 Million African Women Speak Platform Launched in Zimbabwe



Young African entrepreneur checking how her business is doing on her mobile phone

Source: Adobe stock

Zimbabwe became the third COMESA Member State to unveil the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform in a colourful ceremony hosted in Harare on 3rd September 2020. The national launch of the platform was presided over by the Minister for Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Hon. Stembiso Gladys Nyoni.

The event was held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants gathered physically at the launch venue were joined virtually by several invited guests. COMESA's high-profile participation was led by Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe, Assistant Secretaries General Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget and Dr. Dev Haman and FEMCOM Chief Executive Officer Ms Ruth Negash, among others.

Minister Nyoni commended COMESA for its support stating that it was "a bold acknowledgement of the critical role women plays in Zimbabwe's economy." She observed that the 50MAWSP platform would allow women to connect across borders and create businesses online, adding that it would ultimately contribute significantly to the empowerment of women.

"Deliberate and meaningful assistance

of women will help them to become viable entrepreneurs," Hon. Nyoni said in reference to the 50 Million African Women Speak initiative.

Secretary General Kapwepwe noted that the platform could not have come at a better time, as businesses are more seized than ever before of the need to move online.

"Existing and aspiring women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe for whom traditional markets may be shut are looking for solutions, and the 50MAWSP platform is one such practical solution," the Secretary General.

"Zimbabwean women will have an opportunity to create their own virtual market stalls where they can showcase their products all day long and all year round," she added, highlighting the fact that women who use the platform will not have to worry about restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

Ms Kapwepwe thanked the funding partner, African Development Bank for the financial support which has made the 50 Million African Women Speak Project possible in 36 countries across the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs, as well as the Government of Zimbabwe for its support in

implementing the initiative. She urged the government to devote the required resources to ensure its sustainability.

The platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries.

Owing to the pandemic, Seychelles also held a virtual national launch of the platform. Launch events in 12 other COMESA Member States were planned before the end of the year.

"Existing and aspiring women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe for whom traditional markets may be shut are looking for solutions, and the 50MAWSP platform is one such practical solution," Secretary General said.

50 Million African Women Speak platform Unveiled in Seychelles



President Danny Faure (centre in blue shirt) participated in the launch

Seychelles unveiled the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform on 25 August with the country's President, Danny Faure urging women to seize the opportunities it will present them to do business.

The launch was the first in a COMESA Member State since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and was held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants gathered physically and were joined virtually by several invited guests. COMESA's high-profile participants at the event were led by Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Assistant Secretaries General Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget and Dr. Dev Haman as well as other officials from the Secretariat and Member States.

During the event, speaker after speaker emphasized the need for women to embrace digital approaches as one of the ways to ensure their businesses survive during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While making his official launch address, President Faure lauded the strong bond Seychelles enjoys with COMESA,

noting that the launch of the 50MAWSP platform was "yet another example of the results of our strong relationship."

He made a case for closer collaboration at Member State level as well as among business people in the region and reaffirmed the importance of digital platforms such as 50MAWSP in making this possible.

"The 50 Million African Women Speak platform comes at a time when the world needs to come together more now than ever before, following the economic and social disruption caused by COVID-19," President Faure said.

"Seychelles is grateful to COMESA and the African Development Bank for this investment. I am convinced that this will benefit many families and enable them to overcome the challenges they face. I encourage all women to sign in to www.womenconnect.org to do your part to support our families, our economy and come together for Seychelles," he added. On her part, Secretary General

Kapwepwe commended the Government

of Seychelles for ensuring the successful launch of the 50 Million African Women Speak Project and observed that the digital platform would give women in Seychelles an opportunity for a fresh start despite the devastation by the pandemic.

"The thousands of women who have already signed up to the platform have quickly found value in the various knowledge groups that connect women entrepreneurs based on their specific interests, which range from the pursuit of digital marketing skills to fashion and photography.

The 50MAWS platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries.



Source: Adobe stock

Lack of Proper Measurement Equipment in MS Affecting Trade

Several Member States in the COMESA region are disadvantaged against their trading partners because of the lack of reliable, accurate and comparable measurement equipment and test results in industrial production, trade and in food safety.

In view of this, the region is working together to address these challenges and install appropriate equipment.

Towards this end, the Secretariat convened a virtual validation workshop on 19 August on the status of the Measuring (Meteorology) Infrastructure in the region which was attended by representatives of National Meteorology Organisations.

Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget addressed the meeting. In his statement delivered by Director of Agriculture and Industry Mrs. Providence Mavubi, he said the region has continued to face considerable challenges in measuring infrastructure, thus affecting trade.

The ASG noted that there is an increasing number of refusals of food products

by importing countries due to the non-acceptance of measurement and test results carried by the exporting countries, or by a lack of any measurement and test result at all. The lack of proper quality infrastructure made it difficult to manufacture to international specifications and tolerance. He called for the region to install quality infrastructure which ensures integrity of export commodities, quality control for the acceptance of fresh produce at the port of arrival and it locks out unsafe imports.

One of the fundamental concerns on Quality Infrastructure is the lack of traceability in areas such as mass, volume, flow, temperature and chemical measurements. These measurements are of direct importance for many products traded by countries in the COMESA Region, without which, it is hindering the development of these economies.

In response to this, the 11th EDF Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Trade Facilitation Programme, is funding the metrology project, which aims at strengthening and upgrading the Regional Metrology

Infrastructure through addressing the key measurement gaps as well as enhancing the capacity, capability, competence and international recognition of National Metrology Organizations in the region.

A detailed technical assessment and evaluation of the measurement status in the COMESA Region was undertaken to provide data and identify information gaps in the area. Further, the assessment report proposed interventions for a regional scheme/framework, in order to build technical competency in metrology through recognition of test report/calibration certificates issued in laboratories operated by various organizations in COMESA Member States.

The validated report forms the basis for the implementation of interventions to upgrade and strengthen National Metrology Institutions and Legal Metrology Organisations in the COMESA Member States.



File Picture: Cross Border Trade at Kasumbalesa on the Zambia, DR Congo border

Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project Extended to end in 2021

The World Bank agreed in August, to a no-cost extension for the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) to December 2021. This was revealed during the 12th Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting held virtually on Friday 14 August 2020. The five million US dollars project was launched in 2016 for a five-year period.

The Project facilitates trade for small scale cross border traders by promoting the Simplified Trade Regime and providing necessary information needed to conduct business across the three project countries of Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

At the meeting, it was noted that though most traders were affected by COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed by countries, the GLTFP has continued to ensure that Trade Information Officers are available at border posts to attend to those who are trading.

The meeting was briefed on how COVID-19 has also halted most of the project's field-based activities such as regular visits to project countries and

borders in order to hold consultations with relevant stakeholders.

On a positive note, the Project Team adopted online communication platforms provided by COMESA Secretariat and have continued implementing the project.

“The use of online meetings has had its positive effect in terms of saving resources which can be used during the no-cost extension of the project that now ends in December 2021,” Dr Kipyego Cheluget.

Another major activity that the project is focusing on is the continued provision of technical support and coordination of activities aimed at rolling out effective implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR). The STR seeks to help in bringing the informal sector into formal trade by simplifying trade and customs process for small-scale traders and allowing them to also benefit from the Free Trade regime of COMESA, among other objectives.

The project model is already attracting appeal beyond the COMESA region

and being considered for enhancement of cross-border trade in some West African countries. Thus, under GLTFPs' sister programme, the Small Scale Cross-Border Trade Programme that is funded by the EU, the International Trade Center intends to set up Trade Information Desks at selected borders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. These will support and provide information to small-scale cross-border traders based on the experience gained from EAC and COMESA regions.

“The use of online meetings has had its positive effect in terms of saving resources which can be used during the no-cost extension of the project that now ends in December 2021,” Amb.

Kipyego Cheluget



File photo: Youth attending a COMESA, AU event

COMESA, AU, SADC Engage Youth on Silencing the Guns

COMESA, the African Union and SADC agreed that young people in Africa should no longer be seen as perpetrators of conflicts or targets of violence but rather be recognized as actors and partners in promoting peace and security.

This affirmation was made during the Southern Africa Regional Consultations on the Roles of Youth in Silencing the Guns in Africa. The virtual meeting held on 28 August was organized by COMESA working with the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It attracted youth participation from most parts of COMESA and SADC.

The three bodies acknowledge that youth are partners who have continued to play an important role in preventing and maintaining peace on the continent.

High level representatives from the two Regional Economic Communities (RECS) and the AU discussed how youth can play a bigger role in silencing the guns on the continent. The event offered an opportunity to the young peacebuilders to interact with the RECs and build relationships with their intergovernmental institutions.

The consultations were also meant to provide youth with a platform to update the RECs on their activities as peacebuilders and support the

implementation of Silencing the Guns programme which aims to free the African continent of wars, civil conflicts, humanitarian crises, human rights violations, gender-based violence and genocide. COVID-19 pandemic was also mentioned as a threat to youth development because they are among the most affected.

Speaking on behalf of COMESA Secretariat, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget highlighted the need for the youth to be more involved in implementing programmes that affect the continent such as Silencing the Guns.

“We should resolve to move from rhetoric to action which will require that we change our mindsets and start to view the youth, not as leaders of tomorrow but leaders of today,” he said.

COMESA through the Programme on Peace and Security supports the 2013 AU Declaration on Silencing the Guns and end all wars in Africa by 2020. This is done through conflict prevention, conflict management, post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes.

The COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) shows that youth make up 34% of the COMESA population with a steady upward trend and one in four

young people are affected by violence or armed conflicts in the southern African region alone.

AUC Head of Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Amb. Fred Ngoga pointed out that regional consultations will yield positive results that can enable the continent to get closer to its aspirations of an integrated and peaceful society necessary to drive and maintain development.

“I must give credence to youth and their networks in the way that they are seizing the opportunities afforded to them – including through the Youth for Peace Africa program to continually innovate and overcome myriad complexities that challenge their contributions to peace and security in Africa,” Amb. Ngoga added.

SADC Head of Regional Early Warning Centre Mr Habib Kambanga commended the youth for playing their part in Silencing the Guns in the region.

AU Youth4Peace Ambassador for Southern Africa Ms Karabo Mokgonyana called for the involvement of young people in the designing of programmes such as the Silencing the Guns so they can be part of the solution from the beginning.



Enhancing the Leather Value Chain in Eswatini

Over 150 artisans were trained in various areas of the Leather Value chain in the Kingdom of Eswatini with support from the European Development Fund through the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) this year.

Specifically, the project has trained artisans in footwear design and making, leather goods design and making, vegetable tanning and on the establishment of a vegetable tanning cluster. The project has also funded the development and validation of a feasibility study on the possibility of establishing a leather tannery in the Kingdom.

Eswatini and COMESA signed a Grant Agreement in December 2018 for an overall amount of more than Euros 1.185 million from the European Development Fund (EDF) through RISM. Subsequently, various Ministries came together to ensure the project succeeds.

The Leather Value Chain Strategy of 2016 to 2025 states that the Kingdom of Eswatini is highly dependent on the importation of footwear and other leather

products and annual footwear imports averaged at US\$17.8 million in the period 2011 to 2017 which is reflective of a sufficient local market.

However, the performance of the artisans who are involved in the production of footwear and other leather products are constrained due to several factors which include lack of skills in business management, collaboration (clustering). They also have limited access to suitable equipment/machinery and technical production skills.

The funds made available through RISM have contributed to the enhancement of performance of the leather value chain in trying to mitigate some of these challenges faced by the sector players.

According to a progress report on Eswatini, this project has contributed to addressing the constraints that had been identified to further the achievements by procuring leather production equipment including cutting, stitching, making and lasting machinery and tools amounting close to \$36, 000.



File Photo: Sudanese children

Sudan's New Law Allowing Women to Travel with their Children Hailed

The move by the Government of Sudan to allow women to travel outside the country with their children without their father's permission, and for criminalizing female genital mutilation won accolades from COMESA gender experts.

Director of Gender and Social Affairs Division Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde said the move recognized women as equal partners in making decisions about their children, and was in line with the



UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

Mrs Hamusonde described this as a demonstration of the progress that the country was making to conform to regional and international standards to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and the achievement of gender equality and women empowerment in all spheres. Under Sudan's Muslim Personal Law Act of 1991, only the father could decide if the child could travel abroad, even if he was a former husband to the mother.



Source: FEMCOM

FEMCOM Supporting Eritrean Women Farmers Tackle COVID-19 Challenges through Agriculture

Agriculture in the African continent has increasingly come under severe strain due to increased population, changing access to resources and evolving markets, climate change and the global COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. But in the State of Eritrea, farmers, most of them women, have been able to produce adequate food for the local consumer markets, thanks to availability of dams in various villages and continuous rain this year.

Led by the Eritrean Women Agribusiness Association (EWAA), which is the national chapter of the COMESA Federation of National Associations of Women in Business (FEMCOM), women entrepreneurs have been facilitated to form groups to enable them work as partners by merging their capital, knowledge, time, and resources. This has led to the creation of sustainable business.

As a result of these mergers, the EWAA mushroom group has been established

and brings together women in food processing, oyster and mushroom and Aloe production as well as rabbit farming. Chairperson of EWAA Mrs. Selamawit Mekonnen revealed that the current challenges caused by the COVID-19 have led her organization to enhance women empowerment in agricultural activities to continue operating their businesses.

EWAA was established in 2003 and registered in 2016 to promote small scale agriculture amongst women. In November 2019, EWAA linked up with FEMCOM to build capacity and participate in the empowering of women farmers and entrepreneurs for economic development and in the hope for market linkages for future regional trade activities.

FEMCOM is a COMESA institution for the empowerment of women in business, with national chapters in the Member States. The FEMCOM Secretariat is based in Lilongwe, Malawi.



Source: Adobe stock

Sugar Safeguard on Kenya is Paying-Off

The sugar industry in Kenya has steadily expanded over the years, currently with 15 white sugar mills being opened and several jaggery (healthy sugar alternative) operators in place. This development has been attributed to the safeguard granted by COMESA since 2002 when the government sought protection from importation of cheap sugar from the region.

According to the Head of the Sugar Directorate in Kenya's Ministry of Trade, Rosemary Owino the area under cane increased by 24% from 159,288 hectares in 2010 to 197,438 hectares in 2019 in an effort to meet the expanding mill crushing capacities. The cane yields have been fluctuating over the ten years, from a low 51 tonne per hectare in 2012 to a high of 66.41 tonne per hectare in 2015.

She was speaking during the third meeting of the COMESA Sub-Committee on the Kenya Sugar Safeguard conducted virtually on 30 July 2020. The Committee was established in 2018 as a dedicated forum for the COMESA region to deliberate on the issues relating to the administration of the sugar safeguard.

According to the Kenyan officials, total sugar production was 298,636 tonnes compared to 244,826 tonnes for the period January to June 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, indicating a 22% increase. This represented improvement in the industry performance. To bridge the gap, a total of 237,581 tonnes of sugar was imported. In addition, sugar production increased by 22% from 523,652 tonnes in 2010 to 639,741 tonnes in 2016. In 2019, production stood at 440,935 tonnes against a consumption of 1,038,717 tonnes, resulting into a 58% deficit.

According to trade experts, production costs determine whether the sugar industry can compete with duty free and quota free imports from the COMESA Free Trade Area. Ms Owino reported that Kenya's sugar production costs are currently at about USD\$700 per metric ton. Government owned sugar mills have the highest cost of production therefore, putting Kenya's production costs at about 36 per cent higher than import prices from the COMESA exporters.

Speaking during the opening of the

meeting, COMESA's Director of Trade Dr Christopher Onyango said it was about time the region begins to strategize on how to deal with the distorted world market prices given the uncertainties in world market for sugar.

Dr Onyango listed the following as among the strategies to address emerging uncertainties: the adoption of environmentally sustainable production, infrastructure, trade policy, research and development and unlocking the potentials for production of energy. This is in addition to addressing productivity and diversifying sources and usage of sugar to help improve the position of small-scale sugar cane growers and their dependent communities, which are being undervalued by the global sugar market.

The meeting was attended by delegates from sugar exporting Member States namely Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Kenya, which is implementing the safeguard.



File Picture: Burundi Business Incubation centre

Women in Burundi Empowered to Produce Good Quality Textile

Women working in the textile sector in Burundi will soon be able to produce high quality cloth. This is after undergoing skills and entrepreneurial empowerment through an incubator project supported by the Federation of Women in Business for Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) in partnership with African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) Spanish Fund.

The training was facilitated through the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) project and is expected to contribute to creating jobs for women in Burundi.

BIAWE Project Coordinator, Darlene Hakizimana stated that the women entrepreneurs have been equipped with business skills as well as being trained technically to use industrial sewing machines to manufacture creative and

well-designed textile products. Once trained, the women are encouraged to form cooperatives so as to empower themselves financially and through coaching and mentorship programs for sustainability of their startup business.

BIAWE project strategic project creates partnerships for the entrepreneurs with different institutions in the country and beyond. These partnerships will enable them to link with off-takers and market for their products. The activity is expected to create a great opportunity for designers and entrepreneurs who would want to craft their own brand with innovative fashion designs. Using local arts and traditions which will attract local, regional and international customers with reasonable cost and be able to compete with imported textiles' market from other countries.

Some of the items earmarked for production include uniforms, branded wear as well as other textile products including embroidery targeted for the local and foreign market.

The Burundi Investment Promotion Authority (API) commended the initiative saying it would greatly benefit the agriculture sector by promoting the growing of local cotton, which is a raw material for most garments and textiles.

This FEMCOM project in the textile sector aims to empower women in different sectors in COMESA Member States where association has its footprints.



Source: Adobe stock

Small scale enterprise

Supporting Eswatini Women Incubators during COVID-19

COMESA through the Federation of National Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM), has continued to support women entrepreneurs in the region in various sectors through the BIAWE Project Business Incubation Model.

Eswatini is one of the Member States that has benefited from the funding through its FEMCOM chapter and has supported business incubation in the kingdom in agro-processing, handicrafts and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT).

FEMCOM Chapter Chairperson for the Kingdom Hon. Thandi Zintombi Nxumalo indicated that despite the Corona virus pandemic, the women have continued to make progress in the production of various products by adopting a mixed model in their business operation. This includes a residential and non-residential approach to business incubation.

The residential approach is used during pre-incubation and incubation phases. This involves bringing women incubatees

within the incubator's industrial estates, allocating them space and equipment for incubation services while the non-residential approach is used during post-incubation phase and for outreach. This involves providing incubation services to women entrepreneurs through telephones, internet or mass media communication within and outside the incubator's country. This also include visits by the incubators to the location of the incubatees to deliver tailor-made in-house incubation services, mentoring and coaching.

The project is run by one of the women business associations known as Asiphileni Women Business association at Hlathikhulu in the southern part of the country, about 150 km from Mbabane, the capital city started in 2019. It deals with production of indigenous chickens. The objective of the project is to improve the skills of the women in planning and operating a business through planning, marketing and management. It is expected that the level of business sustainability for businesses owned by women is expected to improve which will

result in the growth of MSMEs business hence contributing to the economic growth of the country.

The Business Incubator under the African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) Project has a budget of over 103,000 Euros to support 30 women incubatees (20% from other COMESA Member States) over a period of 12 months.

Hon. Nxumalo indicated that the project which is supported by the African Union, COMESA and NEPAD with funding from the Spanish International cooperation, has helped the country to construct an abattoir and storage facilities.

Women have also been trained to learn how to operate the abattoir so that they can produce high quality meat and meat products that are acceptable on the local and international market. The association is now working on improving the production of chickens to supply the abattoir.

COMESA Kicks-off Business Process Re-engineering

COMESA Secretariat began the process of re-engineering its business processes earlier this year with the objective of redesigning and modernizing all the business processes at the Secretariat. The aim is to raise the business efficiency and effectiveness at all levels across the organization to enable optimal service delivery.

In the second quarter of the year, the exercise kicked off in earnest led by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) will help establish cost-effective and measurably more efficient set of business processes in Secretariat. This will be through redesigning, and re-engineering of all business processes, and introducing new ones if necessary, for accomplishing COMESA mandate.

ACBF has worked with COMESA in the past on capacity building and in 2019 conducted an organisational capacity assessment from which a recommendation was made to carry out the BPR exercise. ACBF has also conducted a restructuring exercise for COMESA and is currently engaged in carrying a number of HR strengthening activities for the Secretariat.

The BPR exercise is expected to result in effective governance, efficient performance, and targeted development outcomes for public sector and transparent accountability mechanisms. Among them is to shift from a function-oriented work performance to a service-oriented performance; transit from output-based assessment to well defined outcome-based assessments; and move away from an ad-hoc piecemeal view of performance information to an integrated and holistic data-driven view.

The exercise will cover all divisions and units including the offices of the Executive Management. ACBF will support the Secretariat to identify both internal and external customers together with the services delivered to its customers.



Zambia Toasts SG Kapwepwe for Being Named Among 100 Influential African Women

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Skapwepwe was named among 100 most Influential African women by Avance Media, a leading Public Relations and Rating firm on the continent. The first list was published in 2019.

President Edgar Lungu of Zambia congratulated the SG for making her country Zambia proud.

On 17 August, Avance Media released its second annual list of winners which recognizes women who are leading various initiatives across the continent and seeks to present them as role models for the younger generation. Avance Media Managing Director Prince Akpah said the women on the list were selected because of their incredible achievements and they deserved high recommendations among other female trailblazers in Africa.

The criteria for selection included; excellence in leadership and performance, personal accomplishment, commitments to sharing knowledge, breaking the status quo and being an accomplished African woman.

Permanent Secretary in Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr Mushuma Mulenga also hailed the SG who has immensely contributed to fostering trade facilitation and development in the region.

Madam Kapwepwe is a Zambian accountant and corporate executive who became the Chief Executive of COMESA July 2018 making her the first female to be appointed as Secretary General of the Regional Economic Community (REC) in its 26 years of existence.



Guests at the launch of the Zimbabwe Empowered Women Excel SACCO Bank

FEMCOM Zimbabwe Launches Women Bank

The Federation of National Association of Women in Business, Zimbabwe Chapter reached a new milestone with the launch of a micro-finance institution to support women economic empowerment. The institution, known as Empowered Woman Excel SAACO Bank, which was launched on 25 June this year, targets women in various sectors including agribusiness, teaching, mining, handicrafts and textiles, transportation, law, finance, service industry, tourism and

professional associations.

The Bank has been registered and it's the only institution lending money in USD in Zimbabwe with contributions worth \$24,000 US dollars. Women MSMEs with Savings Accounts, otherwise denied loans by the big banks, are already accessing small loans from the SAACO to help their businesses survive the tough COVID19 times and expand existing businesses with the new market

opportunities.

The Bank is the brainchild of two entrepreneurs, Ms. Edina Mukurazhizha and Ms. Birgitta Matengenzara, the FEMCOM Africa and National Chapter Chair and Founder and member of the Business Female Teachers. The FEMCOM women chapter in Zimbabwe targets to reach 15,000 members by the end of the year of 2020 up from 3,500 at inception.

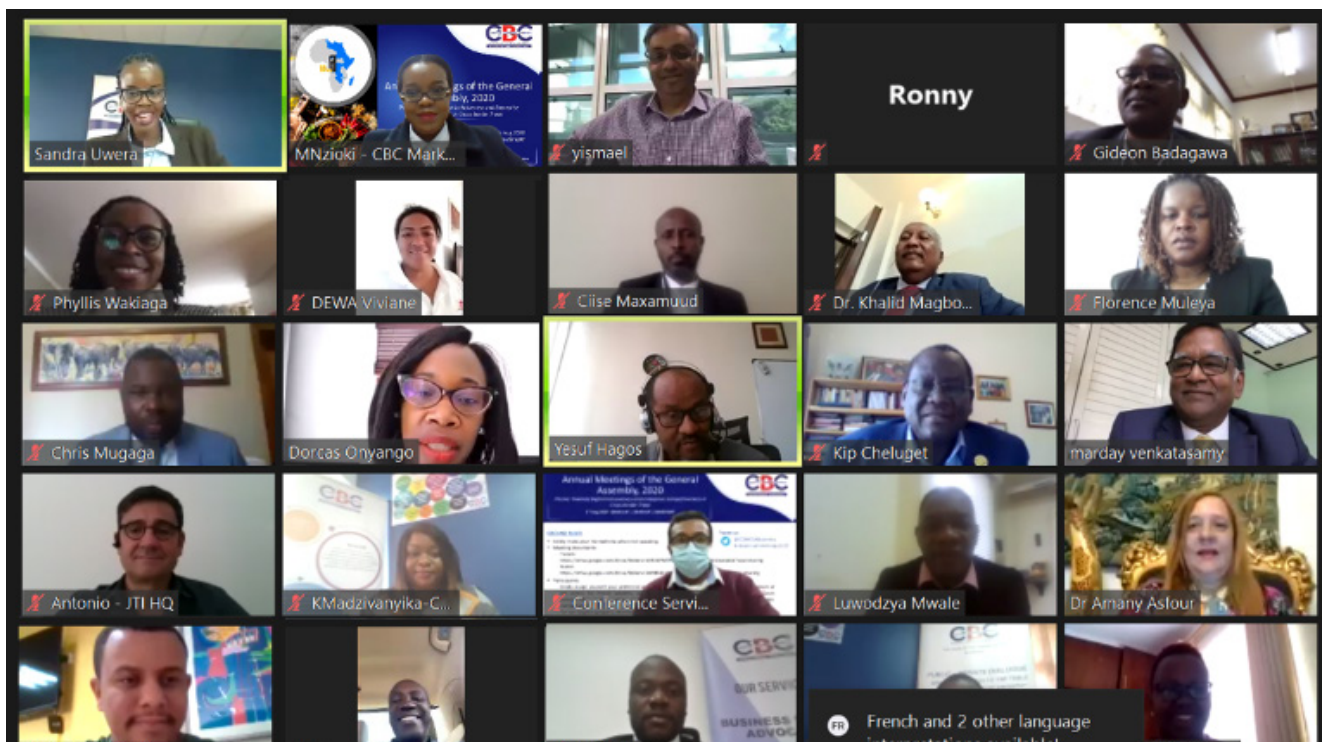
Framework for Regulatory Oversight for the Regional Energy Market Developed

The Eastern-Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) is developing a framework for regulatory oversight for the regional energy market to guide cross border power trading. In July, the final report of the framework was presented to the COMESA Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA) by the Consultants contracted to undertake the assignment.

The framework covers five Regional Economic Communities (RECs), including Eastern African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) as well as their specialized energy agencies: Association of Energy Regulators, Power



Man holding magnifying glass and light bulb



A section of participants at the virtual CBC Annual General Meeting

Business Sector Calls for Digital Inclusiveness and Enterprise Competitiveness in Cross-Border Trade

The current disruption in global supply chains has underlined the importance of regional markets, and the need to address constraints and build robust economies that can fully compete and take advantage of regional markets.

According to the Chairman of the COMESA Business Council (CBC) Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, the strategy of 'Building Regional Going Global', has never been more important than it is now.

He was speaking during the CBC's 9th Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 5 August 2020 and 1st Industry Technical Committee Meeting themed "Towards Digital Inclusiveness and Enterprise Competitiveness in Cross-Border Trade".

The virtual meeting was attended by national and regional sectoral associations of 15 out of the 21 COMESA countries and corporate companies.

Cognizant of the serious disruptions in trade and value chains caused by the

COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in grave losses to economic output and business sustainability in the region, the CBC has been active in influencing policy-making processes and high-level engagement to address some of the key impediments in regional and global trade.

Key advocacy programs for the second half of the year, include the CBC's Business Trader Observer: An Annual Survey of Business Impediments along Trade and Transport Corridors in the COMESA Region.

The other is the CBC Digital Financial Inclusion (DFI) project whose objective is to develop a digital integrated regional common payment scheme that can address issues of affordability, accessibility, convertibility and interoperability for Small and Medium Enterprises and industry response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the private sector's competitiveness.

Chairperson of CBC's Industry Technical

Committee Dr. Sherif Al Gabaly, who is also the Chairman of the Africa Cooperation Committee said the expected outcome of the proposed digital common payment policy for SMEs would be an increase in financial inclusion of SMEs and a subsequent increase in the volumes of digital cross-border transactions within the segment.

The meeting cited the need for increased efforts towards curbing illicit trade, prioritizing key business and trade facilitation impediments for advocacy, and setting up strong and more strategic engagement platforms with ministers, parliamentarians and regulators to address these issues.

The meeting underlined the importance of increasingly adopting digital technologies for both manufacturing and services sector, in view of fast-tracking the development of the regions industries and economies.

Taking Stock of the Implementation of Regional Guidelines, two Months After

There is need for establishment of a public-private border management consultative committee to foster dialogue, collaboration and awareness on new regulatory requirements and response mechanism, to provide a framework for continued intra-regional trade during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This was part of the recommendations that emerged from the virtual interactive meeting with regional stakeholders from the public and private sectors to discuss the ongoing implementation of the COMESA regional guidelines for movements of essential goods and supplies across the region.

The forum, which was hosted by the COMESA Business Council, was convened to take stock of the implementation of the COMESA regional guidelines. This comes two months since they were introduced, in May this year, to provide a framework for continued intra-regional trade during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Participants noted that whilst the focus has been on essential goods relating to food, beverages and health, there was need to consider all goods as essential to livelihoods and health of regional economies. They urged governments to provide exceptions to facilitate the movement of other goods/ services of high economic significance not

Whilst the focus has been on essential goods relating to food, beverages and health, there was need to consider all goods as essential to livelihoods and health of regional economies."

covered under essential goods.

Discussions focused on the varied levels of implementation including bilateral, tripartite and continental approaches and the experience of the private sector in moving their goods across the region. Key challenges discussed were testing requirements and quarantining of truck drivers, relay systems, inadequate information on the Covid-19 response measures, lack of consistency on classification of essential goods, delays and other restrictions

Other recommendations made were to increase private sector investment for industrial development and infrastructure to improve border efficiency through digital trade facilitation (e-trade and e-logistics). They also emphasized the need for governments to increase investment in local manufacturing hubs and production capacities to Strengthen alternative sourcing and regional value chains in Africa.

Participants underlined the importance of maintaining safe

trade through application of health and safety measures while balancing trade and trade facilitation and called on COMESA to support SMEs through stimulus packages, access to markets, and among other interventions.

The panelists included Mr. Ian Hirschfeld, Head of Public Policy for Coca-Cola Southern and Eastern, Mrs. Temitope Iluyemi Director Global Government Relations for Africa, Procter & Gamble, Mr. Mike Fitzmaurice Executive Director, Federation of East and Southern African Road Transport Associations (FESARTA) and Mr. William Ojonyo, Board Member and Member of the COVID-19 Taskforce, Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFFA).

The public sector was represented by Zambia's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry Mr. Mushuma Mulenga and the COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr. Christopher Onyango. CBC Chief Executive Officer Ms. Sandra Uwera moderated the discussion.

Covid-19 Online Portal Developed to Spur e-Trade



COMESA has developed an online portal to be used by Member States to exchange information on availability of essential products within the region. This is in response to a directive issued by the COMESA Council of Ministers, in May this year to develop the platform to support regional trade, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe launched the prototype platform to representatives of Member States (focal points), during a virtual meeting on July 17. The focal points will coordinate with the private sector in populating the platform with information on essential supplies. This is expected to boost local production and address shortages in supply from outside the region.

The platform will enable manufacturers and suppliers in different Member States to share information on the e-platform, on their products and their potential to produce and supply. It will connect buyers to suppliers thereby promoting and fostering regional intra-COMESA trade.

As part of the roll out and implementation of the platform, the Secretariat conducted a training programme for the users considering that multiple stakeholders' use is needed to make it versatile, functional and sustainable. The platform will also help small-scale cross-border traders and SMEs to have access to market information by linking producers, sellers and buyers.

In her address, the SG said the adoption and implementation of the Digital Trade Facilitation programme and other instruments would strengthen the stability of the COMESA region against external shocks.

COMESA's strategy in combating Covid-19 includes strengthening openness, coordination and collective approach by Member States in facilitating movement of goods and services amidst restrictive measures. It also focuses on safeguarding the existing trading arrangements while avoiding the erosion of gains already made as far as liberalization of trade and investments.

Framework for Regulatory Oversight..

► continued from page 30

Pools and Centres for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency.

COMESA /RAERESA Chief Executive Officer Dr Mohamedain Seif Elnasr said that the activity was part of the European Union (EU) funded project on Enhancement of a Sustainable Regional Energy Market in the EA-SA-IO Region. Among the key areas of focus is harmonization and environmental sustainability.

On harmonization of regulations, the report recommends that priority areas should include licensing guidelines, regulations for license applications and processing by national and regional regulatory bodies, and standard license conditions for generation, transmission, distribution, import/export and system operation.

The report further recommends harmonization of network regulations including transmission connection/use of system agreements, network tariffs, grid code and associated technical standards. It advocates for harmonization of market access regulations, market surveillance regulations and dispute resolution procedures.

Measures to address environmental sustainability through the regulation of the regional energy market are also proposed. These include: encouraging renewable energy generation in the region, facilitating regional interconnection and increased focus on supply side and demand side energy efficiency.

Regulations that help to address these issues are important and could include defining procedures to cover integrated resource planning, transmission expansion planning, and strategic environmental assessment.



D R Congo President Felix Tshisekedi , flanked by Chair of FEMCOM DR Congo, Mrs. Eliane Kiekie (L) and First Lady visits the FEMCOM Saturday Market Pavilion in Kinshasa, June 20, 2020.

USD 2.3 Million Project To Support DR Congo FEMCOM Chapter

President Tshisekedi pays a visit to the FEMCOM Pavilion

The COMESA National Federation of National Associations of Women in Business (FEMCOM) Chapter in DR Congo embarked on a \$2,300,000 project to support women in business during the third quarter of 2020. Among the businesses earmarked include the production and marketing of local fresh foods and smoked foods, fruits and vegetables. Others are value-added agricultural products and those involved

in the textiles and handicrafts industry.

This was contained in a project document presented to DR Congo President H.E. Félix Tshisekedi by the Chairperson of the local chapter of FEMCOM, Mrs. Eliane Munkeni Kiekie. The president visited the Saturday Market at the FEMCOM Pavilion in Kinshasa mid this year.

President Tshisekedi promised to

get stakeholders to partner with the FEMCOM Chapter to specifically develop three categories in the agri-businesses. These are: fresh fruits and vegetables; fresh food, meat, fish and poultry and processed agricultural products. Additionally, the Pavilion will accommodate a location for sanitation products, textiles and handicrafts.



Source: Adobe stock

Adopting ICT is Critical in Post Covid-19 Trade Facilitation Programmes in COMESA Region

COMESA developed and issued guidelines for movement of goods and services across the region during the COVID-19 Pandemic in May 2020. During this period, there has been a notable adherence to the guidelines and the advisories provided by World Customs Organization (WCO) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at the points of entry and exit by border authorities in most Member States.

According to a report by the Team Leader of the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme funded under the 11th European Development Fund, Mr. Charles Chaitevzi, this is a departure from the past, where state agencies were working in silos without a designated lead to ensure a “whole of government” response.

“There has always been conflict between facilitating trade and the overriding need for border agencies to maximize revenue collections and compliance with enforcement measures and hence, the benefits of using ICT tools were not fully realized,” he noted. “Government agencies are now working in a more coherent manner and have also embraced the use of ICT tools.”

The COMESA guidelines provide procedures and standards to reduce the

spread of the Coronavirus disease and at same time minimizing disruptions in the supply chain and to facilitate movement of goods and services across the region during the pandemic.

In the report, Mr. Chaitevzi noted that enhanced adoption of technology in various trade facilitation instruments can unlock the COVID-19 induced restrictions and help accelerate the much need cross-border trade and investment even during such difficulties.

Emerging changes in perceptions of border agencies regarding trade facilitation and enhanced use of ICT have created opportunities for redesigning border processes and operations. These will build and sustain the emergency measures that were adopted to maintain supply chains under the COVID-19 pandemic environment.

The report recommends for upgrading of the ICT systems with connectivity among the government agencies coupled with the application of the principles of risk management and reducing physical inspections.

“There are opportunities to utilize track and trace systems offered by Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems and Global Positioning Systems in freight vehicles units and to institute performance management systems that will ensure

that operations at border crossings reduce the costs of transporting goods and contribute to the competitiveness of the products from COMESA Member States,” the report says.

Currently, several key interventions are already being implemented through the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme at targeted border posts in the region. Under the programme, technical and financial support has been provided to automate government agencies systems to support full implementation of Coordinated Border Management principles.

According to the report, the lessons learned from COVID-19 responses is the need to ensure more sustainable systems are put in place to facilitate efficient and effective border operations.

“There has always been conflict between facilitating trade and the overriding need for border agencies to maximize revenue collections and compliance with enforcement measures and hence, the benefits of using ICT tools were not fully realized,” Mr. Charles Chaitevzi



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