

Common Market for  
Eastern and Southern Africa



# COMESA

in **BRIEF**

*Growing Together, for Prosperity*

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Revised 2024

### **OUR VISION**

"To be a fully integrated economic community that is prosperous, internationally competitive, and ready to merge into the African Economic Community."

### **THE MISSION OF COMESA**

Endeavour to achieve sustainable economic and social progress in all Member States through increased co-operation and integration in all fields of development particularly in trade, customs and monetary affairs, transport, communication and information technology, industry and energy, gender, agriculture, environment and natural resources.

**COMESA Member States** are Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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## BACKGROUND

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) comprises 21 African Member States that came together with the aim of promoting regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region.

COMESA was initially established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA), within the framework of the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. The PTA transformed into COMESA in 1994. The PTA was established to take advantage of a larger market size, to share the region's common heritage and destiny and to allow for greater social and economic co-operation. COMESA is one of the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union.

## THE OBJECTIVES OF COMESA

Among other things, COMESA Member States have agreed on the need to create and maintain:

- (a) A full free trade area guaranteeing the free movement of goods and services produced within COMESA and the removal of all tariffs and non-tariff barriers;
- (b) A customs union under which goods and services imported from non-COMESA countries will attract an agreed single tariff (Common External Tariff) in all COMESA Member States;
- (c) Free movement of capital and investment supported by the adoption of a common investment area to create a more favourable investment climate for the COMESA region;
- (d) Gradual establishment of a payment union based on the COMESA Clearing House and the eventual establishment of a common monetary union with a common currency; and
- (e) The adoption of common visa arrangements, including the right of establishment leading eventually to the free movement of *bona fide* persons.

## INSTITUTIONAL SET UP

The COMESA decision making structure is as follows:

**The Authority of Heads of State and Government:** This is the supreme organ of the Common Market and is composed of the Heads of State and Government of all the 21 Member States.

**The Council of Ministers:** This is composed of Ministers from the Coordinating Ministries of all the Member States. It is responsible for overseeing the functioning and development of COMESA and ensuring the implementation of agreed programmes and policies.

**The Technical Committees:** These are comprised of sector specific technical officials from the Member States. These committees are responsible for the preparation of comprehensive implementation programmes and timetables, which serve to prioritize the programmes with respect to each sector. In addition, they monitor and review the implementation of the programmes on co-operation and may request the Secretary-General to undertake specific investigations. Articles 15 and 16 of the Treaty stipulate that the Technical Committees of the Common Market shall be the following:

- (a) The Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Matters;
- (b) The Committee on Agriculture;
- (c) The Committee on Comprehensive Information Systems;
- (d) The Committee on Energy;
- (e) The Committee on Finance and Monetary Affairs;
- (f) The Committee on Industry;
- (g) The Committee on Labour, Human Resources and Social and Cultural Affairs;
- (h) The Committee on Legal Affairs;
- (i) The Committee on Natural Resources and Environment;
- (j) The Committee on Tourism and Wildlife;
- (k) The Committee on Statistical Matters;

- (l) The Committee on Trade and Customs; and
- (m) The Committee on Transport and Communications.

**The Committee of Governors of Central Banks:** comprises the Governors of Central Banks of all the Member States and they are in charge of the regional finance and monetary affairs.

**The Intergovernmental Committee:** This Committee comprises principal and permanent secretaries from Member States and is responsible for developing the programmes and action plans in all sectors of co-operation, except in the finance and monetary sectors. It monitors the functioning and development of the Common Market and oversees the implementation of the programmes in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty.

**The Secretariat:** Consists of members of staff that are representative of the 21 Member States, headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the Authority. The Secretariat of the Common Market is in Lusaka, Zambia.

## **LINKAGES WITH OTHER REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES**

There are several regional organizations that work in collaboration with COMESA. These are: The East African Community (EAC), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). COMESA has excellent working relations, both formally and informally, with all these regional organizations. Memoranda of Understanding have been signed with EAC, IGAD and IOC such that these organizations have agreed to adopt and implement the COMESA trade liberalization and facilitation programme. COMESA and SADC have also set up a Joint Task Force to harmonize their programmes; and under the Tripartite Arrangement, COMESA, EAC and SADC have embarked on the implementation of programmes in Climate Change mitigation, infrastructure development and trade, among others.

COMESA  
INSTITUTIONS

## **African Trade and Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI)**

The African Trade and Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI) was established in 2000 (initially known as the African Trade Insurance Agency). The main objective of the ATIDI is to provide political risk cover from commercial sources or export credit agencies, which were not available in any COMESA Member State. Membership to the ATIDI is open to all African Union Member States. The most important benefit of a regional insurance scheme is its potential to deal with the perception of high levels of risk in doing business in Africa as a region. Many financial institutions and business enterprises associate political risk to the region as a whole and never get to the stage of attempting to distinguish different levels of political risk between individual countries. This perception of high regional political risk deters financial institutions and business enterprises from establishing a presence in the region.

ATI's current range of insurance products includes:

- i. Trade Political Risk Insurance
- ii. Comprehensive Trade Political Risk
- iii. Foreign Direct Investment Insurance
- iv. Project Loan Cover
- v. Mobile Assets Cover
- vi. Unfair Calling of Bonds and Standby Letters of Credit
- vii. Credit Insurance Cover

<https://www.atidi.africa>

## **COMESA Clearing House**

The COMESA Clearing House (CCH) was established in accordance with Article 73 of the COMESA Treaty to facilitate the settlement of trade and services payments amongst Member States. It enables Member States to use local currencies in their intra-COMESA trade. Although the Clearing House was highly utilized in the 1980s

and early 1990s when most Member States imposed strict exchange controls, it is being restructured to enable real time gross settlement payments in the new liberalized market setting. Subsequently the Clearing House introduced the Regional Payment and Settlement System (REPSS) which was designed to allow Member States to transfer funds more efficiently and effectively within the region. The aim of the payment system is to stimulate economic growth through increased intra-regional trade and a capacity to enable importers and exporters to settle and receive payment for goods and services through an efficient and cost-effective platform. The COMESA Clearing House is based in Zimbabwe.

### **COMESA Competition Commission**

The COMESA Competition Commission commenced its operations on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2013 and is a regional body corporate established under Article 6 of the COMESA Competition Regulations. In order to ensure fair competition and transparency among economic operators in the region, COMESA enacted the regional competition law and policy to harmonize existing national competition policies to avoid contradictions and provide a consistent regional economic environment. The main functions of the Commission are to prohibit, monitor and investigate anti-competitive business practices, control mergers and other forms of acquisitions in the Common Market and mediate disputes between the Member States concerning anti-competitive conduct.

The COMESA Competition Commission is the first regional competition authority in Africa and the second in the world, after the European Competition Authority. It is charged with the enforcement of the regulations. The introduction of the regulations created a 'One Stop Shop' for the assessment of cross border transactions thereby reducing the burden and cost of doing business in the region, given that such transactions no longer need to be examined in each Member State. The COMESA regime also provides the only and most extensive network of national competition authorities in Africa. The Commission, in its enforcement of the regulations, enjoys international legal personality in the territory of each Member State and the legal capacity required for the performance of its functions under the Treaty. The Competition Commission is based in Lilongwe, Malawi. <https://www.comesacompetition.org/>

### **Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute**

The Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI) was established in 1990 as the COMESA Leather and Leather Products Institute (LLPI). It was rebranded in 2017 as ALLPI to enable it support activities towards strengthening of the leather value chain across the continent in a seamless and cost-effective manner. The

institute has prepared several programmes and projects in areas such as human resource and institutional development, trade and investment in the leather and leather products' sector. LLPI has helped a number of entrepreneurs with preparation of investment feasibility studies. It has also designed and executed several projects to help Member States develop their respective leather sector. The LLPI also conducts training programmes in leather footwear technology and pattern making for its Member States' small and medium scale entrepreneurs. ALLPI is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. <https://allpi.int/>

### **COMESA Monetary Institute**

The COMESA Monetary Institute was established in 2011 to undertake all technical activities that are needed to enhance the COMESA Monetary Cooperation Programme. Since its establishment, the institute has undertaken capacity building and research activities related to improving macroeconomic management and financial stability in the region. More specifically, the institute focuses on the implementation of the two pillars of the COMESA Monetary Integration Programme; namely the COMESA Multilateral Macro-economic Surveillance Framework and the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan. The main emphasis of the COMESA Multilateral Macroeconomic Surveillance Framework is to ensure the viability and sustainability of the COMESA monetary integration agenda and make the region a zone of macroeconomic stability. The focus of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan; is to achieve Regional Financial Integration (RFI). The RFI facilitates financing of larger real transactions among member countries of the region. RFI is thus a complementary process to trade and services integration among member countries. It should be noted that trade integration would be facilitated and accelerated if the financial sectors of member countries are well developed and integrated. The CMI is based in Nairobi, Kenya. <https://cmi.comesa.int/>

### **COMESA Regional Investment Agency**

The COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA) was launched in 2006 in line with COMESA's ultimate objective of creating a fully integrated, internationally competitive and unified regional economic community in which goods, services, capital and persons move freely, for the sustainable economic development of the region. The principal route that was chosen to realise this goal is development integration through increased trade and investment. Since its inception in 2006, RIA has been focusing on two main pillars of operations: promoting the COMESA region as an attractive investment destination; and improving the business and investment climates of Member States, namely through capacity-building programmes targeting Member

States Investment Promotion Agencies (NIPAs) and relevant Government Officials. (<https://comesaria.org/>)

### **COMESA Federation of National Associations of Women in Business (COMFWB)**

The Federation of Women in Business, (formerly FEMCOM), was established in 1993. Its mandate or charter is derived from article 155 of the COMESA Treaty. The Federation was founded on the premise that regional economic integration cannot be seen to have succeeded if it did not involve the full and equal participation of women in business. The core mission of COMFWB is to develop women entrepreneurship in the COMESA region through programmes that promote, encourage and serve the needs of women and their businesses, working in smart collaboration with relevant partners. The COMFWB Secretariat is in Lilongwe, Malawi. <https://www.comfwb.org/>

### **PTA Reinsurance Company (ZEP-RE)**

The PTA Reinsurance Company (ZEP-RE) was established by an Agreement of Heads of States of Government, signed on 23 November 1990 in Mbabane, Eswatini. The company commenced was officially launched in 1992 and commenced operations on 1 January 1993 with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The PTA Reinsurance Company is tasked with the responsibility of promoting trade, development and integration in the insurance and re-insurance sector.

ZEP-RE is further mandated to: transact reinsurance business through Treaty and facultative cessions in respect of all or some classes of insurance inside as well as outside the sub-region; create and administer pools for various risks for the account and to the interest of the sub-region's insurance and reinsurance markets; facilitate the training of insurance and reinsurance industry personnel in the Sub-Region; provide technical assistance to the insurance and reinsurance institutions of the Sub-Region; invest its funds in the sub-region in a manner that promotes economic development, provided the company may invest outside the sub-region to meet its operational and/or technical requirements; and Promote contacts and business co-operation among national insurance and reinsurance institutions in the sub-region.

Besides operating in several COMESA countries, ZEP-RE also serves many non-COMESA Member States such as Morocco, and Algeria in North Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Senegal in West Africa, Mozambique in Southern Africa, and Tanzania in East Africa. The Global Credit Rating (GCR) rates the company AA for local/national and BBB- for international Business. The Company's Headquarters is in Nairobi, Kenya. <https://zep-re>

[com/](#)

## **Trade and Development Bank**

The Trade and Development Bank for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA Bank) was established as an autonomous specialized institution by the PTA Bank Charter on 6 November 1985, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 9 of the COMESA Treaty. The Bank's broad objectives are to provide financial and technical assistance and promote social and economic development and trade among Member States, in accordance with the provisions of the COMESA Treaty. The PTA Bank's mandate is to finance and foster trade, socio-economic development and regional economic integration. Its Charter also provides for the establishment and administration of special purpose funds in the region. The Bank implements its mandate by complementing the activities of national development agencies of Member States and co-operating with other institutions and organizations, public and private, national and international, which are interested in the economic and social development of the Member States.

The Bank's shareholders include African States in COMESA, EAC and SADC, institutional investors such as the African Development Bank, COMESA Reinsurance Company ZEP-RE, Africa-Re, the National Pension Fund of Mauritius, Mauritian Eagle Insurance Company, Seychelles Pension Fund, Rwanda Social Security Board (RSSB) and Banco Nacional de Investimento (BNI) of Mozambique and two other non-regional members, namely China and Paritetbank (Belarus). <https://www.tdbgroup.org/>

## **JUDICIAL ORGAN**

### **COMESA Court of Justice**

The COMESA Court of Justice is the judicial organ of COMESA. The Court provides certainty that COMESA is a rules-based institution, with rules that can be enforced through a court of law. The Court of Justice has its permanent seat in Khartoum, Sudan<sup>1</sup>. It was formally established at the COMESA Heads of State Summit in June 1998 at which the initial seven Judges of the Court were appointed. The Judges all hold high judicial office in their own countries. In 2004 the Treaty was amended to expand the Court into two Divisions. The lower Division, known as the Court of First Instance, has seven judges. The upper Division of the Court, which has five Judges, is called the Appellate Division.

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1 The CCJ has temporarily relocated to Lusaka, Zambia from 2024 owing to political instability in Sudan.

The Court of Justice adjudicates and arbitrates on, among other matters, unfair trade practices, interpretation of Treaty (Protocols and other legislative acts) and ensures that Member States uniformly implement and comply with agreed decisions. Decisions of the Court on the interpretation of the provisions of the COMESA Treaty have precedence over decisions of national courts and are binding on all COMESA Member States. <https://comesacourt.org>

## **SPECIALIZED AGENCIES**

### **Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA)**

The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) is a Specialized Agency of COMESA formed to address staple food production and marketing to increase market access; food production; food productivity and removal food trade barriers. The establishment was in response to the 2003 Maputo Declaration by the African Union (AU) which required the need for coordinated and comprehensive public and private investments in the agricultural sector commonly known as Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP). ACTESA's commodity focus includes cereals and pulses; oil seeds; horticultural crops; roots and tubers; tree crops; forestry products; livestock and agricultural inputs. ACTESA provides an answer to the region's agricultural challenges including market access related constraints, low productivity, technological and policy related constraints.

The horticulture sub-sector also offers significant potential for improving the financial agency of women given the high proportion (50%) of women who work in the sub-sector along the value chain, from farming to processing and marketing. Given this potential, ACTESA has prioritized building the capacity of the horticulture sub-sector across the COMESA region in its 2021-2031 Strategic Plan. The potential of horticulture has also been recognized by the East African Community (EAC) Member States, as reflected in the EAC's Fruit and Vegetable Strategy 2021-2031. ACTESA has three focus areas of its Strategic Plan in line with COMESA EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA), namely:

- Improving the competitiveness of small-scale producers, traders, and processors of horticultural products.
- Expanding market facilities and services for the commercialization of horticultural commodities – specifically avocado, onion, and potato.

- Increasing commercial integration of East African horticultural value chains into national, regional, and international markets to promote growth in horticultural markets leading to job growth along the chain, especially for women and youth, and for improved farmer incomes.

In view of the above, ACTESA Secretariat is looking forward to the transformation of the horticultural industry in our region currently at USD4 billion to double or triple in the next 10 years.

### **The Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA)**

The Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), which is COMESA's energy regulatory arm, was officially launched in 2009 and thereafter seven energy regulators from COMESA countries namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda and Sudan signed its constitution. Uganda joined RAERESA in 2013 while Seychelles and Zimbabwe joined in 2015. Burundi, Mauritius and Zambia joined in 2018. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) joined in 2022, bringing the total number of the countries with full membership status to 14 out of the 17 countries which have so far established their energy regulators. The main objectives of RAERESA are to assist in the capacity building and information sharing; facilitate energy supply policy, legislation and regulations; inter-regional cooperation; and regional energy regulatory co-operation.

RAERESA successfully facilitated the implementation of the European Union Funded Project on Enhancement of a Sustainable Regional Energy Market (ESREM) in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region which culminated in development and adoption of 43 reports and guidelines for domestication at national level, from May 2017 to December 2022).

The Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation in COMESA is African Development Bank funded Project (AfDB), whose implementation is being carried out through RAERESA in association with the Energy Regulators Association of East Africa (EREA), based in Arusha, Tanzania, (September 2022 to December 2024).

The project activities are being implemented through two consulting assignments. The two are:

- a. Consultancy Service for Regional Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks and Tools for Improved Electricity Regulation in COMESA; and

- b. Consultancy Service for Development of an Information Management System for RAERESA.

### **COMESA Business Council**

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization, and a private sector institution of COMESA. Established in 2005, under the Treaty CBC is defined as a consultative committee for the business community at the policy organs level. CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the Private Sector and Business Community in the COMESA region. Nine members of the Board of Directors who are Presidents of their respective National Apex Business Associations in COMESA Member States constitutionally manage CBC.

The CBC began its operations as a Secretariat in 2010. It is structured on key focus areas of private sector representation through facilitation of business interests from apex and sectorial business association membership to all levels of policy formulation and decision making in the region, and private sector development in growth sectors that contribute to the overall competitiveness of businesses in regional and global markets

The key objectives of the CBC are to enforce strategic advocacy platforms for the private sector in at least 70 percent of the priority sectors within COMESA region; ensure effective representation of private sector interests in COMESA decision making processes in at least three priority sectors per year; provide timely and strategic business services to regional and international stakeholders on the business environment in the region; to ensure 90 percent of private sector inclusiveness in the regional integration agenda; and ensure that the CBC is a fully membership led and driven Institution by 2018. <https://comesabusinesscouncil.org/>

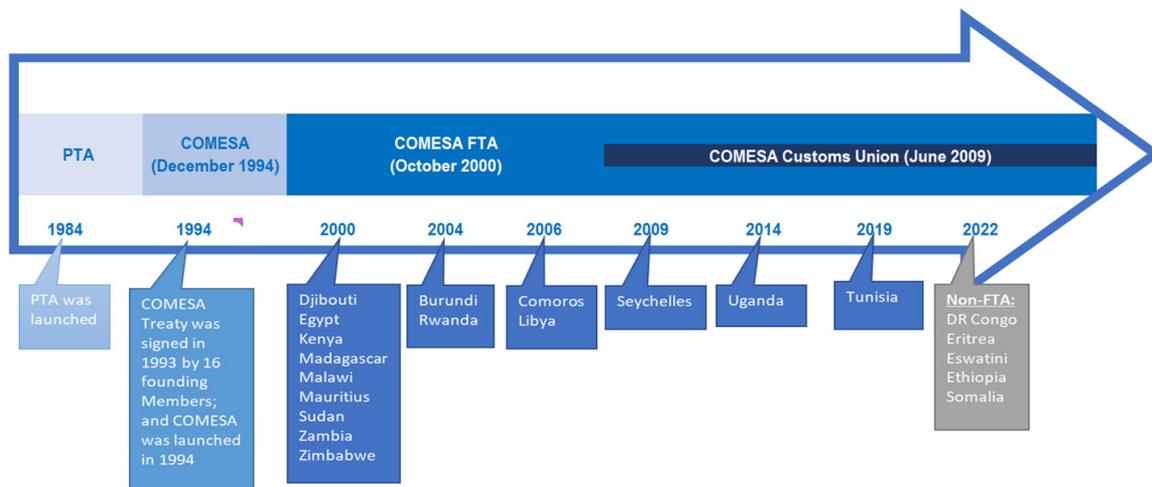
# PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES



## TRADE LIBERALIZATION

### Free Trade Area

COMESA Member States established a Free Trade Area (FTA) on 31 October 2000 after a sixteen-year period of progressive trade liberalization through reduction of intra-COMESA tariffs. As at March 2024, 17 countries (Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) were members of the Free Trade Area. The existence of the FTA and the tariff reductions effected by the other Member States has the result that average tariffs on intra-COMESA trade have fallen significantly. According to COMESA statistics, intra-COMESA trade has grown at average of 7 percent every year since the establishment of the Free Trade Area with a higher increase reflected between the intra-FTA states.



### Rules of Origin

The COMESA Rules of Origin are used to determine whether goods produced in the COMESA region are eligible for preferential treatment within the FTA. The COMESA Rules of Origin have five (5) independent

criteria. The COMESA Rules of Origin have five criteria and goods are considered as originating if they meet any of the following five criteria:

- a) The goods should be wholly produced;
- b) The cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value of any non-originating material should not exceed 60% of the ex- work price of the goods;
- c) Goods must attain the value added of at least 35% of the ex-factory cost of the goods;
- d) Goods should fulfill the Change in Tariff Heading (CTH) rule; and
- e) Good must have importance to the economic development of the Member States and should contain not less than 25% of value added.

The exporter is free to base a claim to COMESA duty-free or preferential tariff treatment on any one of the criteria, according to which of them has been complied within the production process. Except for small consignments, goods being exported under COMESA FTA or preferential tariff reduction treatment have to be accompanied by the COMESA Certificate of Origin, which is issued by the designated competent authority in a Member State.

### **COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (COMESA-STR)**

The COMESA developed the Simplified Trade Regime (STR), which was launched in in 2010 recognising that cross border trade constitutes a significant component of trade in the region. The STR aims to formalize informal cross-border trade (ICBT) by putting in place instruments and mechanisms tailored to the trading requirements of small-scale traders that are decentralized to border areas where informal trade is rampant with the view to facilitate ease of access by small traders. The STR targets small-scale traders importing and/ or exporting goods worth US\$2,000 or less, which are on the Common list of eligible products negotiated and agreed by the two neighbouring countries. The STR reduces costs for small traders and increases the speed of crossing the border using a simplified Certificate of Origin and a Simplified Customs Document (SCD) as well as simplified customs clearance procedures. The STR has been further simplified by requiring on the simplified customs documents noting the by being on the Common List, products are deemed to be originating.

Trade Information Desk Officer (TIDO) have been deployed at some border posts to assist small scale traders with information on border crossing procedures and form filling. As part of the coordination of cross border traders, Cross Border Trade Associations have been set up in most of the border posts which improves the sensitization and use of the STR. However, membership to these associations is not a prerequisite for use of the STR.

## **Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Programme**

The Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Project (GLTFIP) is a six-year regional lending operation implemented by the governments of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and COMESA. The GLTFIP aims to support peace and stability in the region through programs to improve livelihoods in the border areas, promoting cross-border trade and strengthening economic relationships. The GLTFIP covers four main components areas of interventions namely:

- a) Improving Policy and Regulatory Environment for Cross-Border Trade, (e.g., policy reform and simplification of procedures for small scale traders and implementation of smart border system and coordination and monitoring regional integration);
- b) Improvements to core trade infrastructure. (That is rehabilitation and modernization of border posts, construction and development of border markets, improvement of lake ports, and rehabilitation of local access roads);
- c) Support to commercialization of cross-border value chains, (this includes investments in facilities to add value to products, promoting exports of select products, and Labelling, certification, and conformity of selected products); and
- d) Implementation and monitoring and evaluation, (involves implementation support and communication, and project M&E).

The overall Project Development Objective is to “facilitate trade and enhance the commercialization of selected value chains primarily targeting small-scale and women traders in the borderlands of the Great Lakes Region”. The total amount of the project is USD 245 Million, with the COMESA component being USD 8 million.

## **COMESA Customs Union**

The COMESA Customs Union established in accordance with Articles 4 and 45 of the Treaty with the view to: further liberalize intra-regional trade in goods; promote efficiency in production within COMESA; enhance domestic, cross border and foreign investment in COMESA; and promote economic development and diversification in industrialization in COMESA.

The Customs Union was launched on 7 June 2009 by Heads of State and Government of the COMESA Authority at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. The Authority endorsed the key principles and rules that form the basis for the operation of the Customs Union. A transitional period of three years was provided, during which time the Member States would align their national customs laws with the regionally agreed Customs Union instruments namely, the Customs Management Regulations (CMR) regional customs law, the Common Tariff Nomenclature (CTN) as the harmonized system for coding and describing the traded products, and the Common External Tariff (CET) as the uniform tariff system in trade with non-COMESA third countries.

The establishment of the FTA in COMESA by the year 2000 was a prelude to the establishment of a Customs Union. There are various administrative, legal, institutional and logistical preparations for the operation of the Customs Union. Once fully implemented, it is expected that the Customs Union will bring great benefits to the region such as: enhancing cross-border investment, price advantage for regionally produced goods, wider choice of goods, faster clearance of goods, lower cost of production, and larger and wider market for producers. This, however, requires Member States to converge their national tariffs towards the agreed CTN/CET and CMR. The COMESA Council of Ministers in 2016 adopted the transposed CTN to Harmonized System (HS) 2017 edition and Member States are in the process of transposing their Tariff Books to the HS 2017, considering their migration to the COMESA CTN/CET.

### **The COMESA Customs Document (COMESA-CD)**

The COMESA-CD was officially adopted by COMESA at the Council of Ministers' meeting in April 1996. The Secretariat runs training courses for Customs officials in other COMESA countries on how to use the COMESA-CD as part of a programme to harmonize customs and trade statistics systems (including ASYCUDA<sup>2</sup>). Majority

2 Automated System for Customs Data. This is a computerized system designed by the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development](#) (UNCTAD) to administer a country's customs.

of COMESA Member States are using the ASYCUDA System with a few implementing equivalent customs management systems. The COMESA Secretariat works closely with the Member States that require assistance in migrating to ASYCUDA World or its equivalent level of advanced customs management system. Further, the Secretariat signed a co-delegation agreement with UNCTAD to develop and implement the Customs Automation Regional Support Centre (CARSC) at the Secretariat with the aim of providing sustainable technical and financial support to Member States and standardize and harmonise systems to enhance connectivity and electronic data exchange.

### **Removal of Non-Tariff Barriers**

Steady progress has been made in elimination of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) such as in liberalization of import licensing, removal of foreign exchange restrictions, removal of taxes on foreign exchange, removal of import and export quotas, removal of roadblocks, easing of Customs formalities, extending times border posts are open, creation of pilot “one stop border posts”, among others. The COMESA Council of Ministers in December 2014 adopted the NTB Regulations which streamline the way NTBs are resolved in the region.

### **TRADE FACILITATION**

COMESA Secretariat is implementing programmes to improve the transport and communications systems of the region as well as improve information available to businesspersons wishing to trade both within the region and beyond. They include the following:-

#### **Harmonized Road Transit Charges**

The Road Transit Charges system was introduced in 1991 (currently being implemented by Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and specifies that heavy goods trucks with more than 3 axles should pay a road charge of US \$10 per 100 km; trucks with up to 3 axles should pay a charge of US \$6 per 100 km; and buses with a capacity of more than 25 passengers pay US \$5 per 100 km.

#### **COMESA Carrier's License**

The COMESA Carrier's License allows commercial goods vehicles to be licensed, with one license, which is valid throughout the region so that the vehicles can operate in all Member States. This means that vehicles can pick up back-loads in other countries which make more efficient use of the region's transport fleet so reduces

the cost of trade. The license was introduced in 1991 and is currently in operation in 11 mainland countries (Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

### **Harmonized Axle Loading and Maximum Vehicle Dimensions**

Axle load limits are:

- (a) single steering axle = 8 tons
- (b) single load or drive axle = 10 tons
- (c) tandem axle group = 16 tons
- (d) triple axel group = 24 tons
- (e) The maximum load limit is 56 tons.

The maximum vehicle dimensions approved by the COMESA Authority (are:

- (a) 12.5m for a rigid chassis single vehicle or trailer;
- (b) 17m for articulated vehicles;
- (c) 22m for truck and draw-bar trailer;
- (d) 2.65 maximum width; and
- (e) 4.60 maximum height

### **Coordinated Border Management:**

COMESA had adopted One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) as part of its corridor strategy to address congestion at border crossings along major traffic corridors to complement other transit instruments and cross border transport facilitation programmes. There are over 30 OSBPs in the region reported as at different stages of implementation in the region. The development of OSBPs along the corridors in the region has been adopted to facilitate development of appropriate infrastructure, procedures and systems at border posts to reduce delays

encountered by transporters and travelers.

### **The COMESA Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA):**

The Secretariat is implementing DFTA Action Plan to provide traders with the necessary digital tools and infrastructure they need for enhancement of intra trade and global trade. The three instruments of the DFTA, are e-Trade, e-Logistics and e-Legislation and are implemented alongside various customs programmes.

### **Electronic Single Window Implementation:**

Single Windows are platforms that are government mandated and allow for the submission of information to fulfill regulatory requirements between economic operators and government authorities. A Single Window is a single-entry point for data. The Electronic Single Window System (eSW) is one of the key trade and transport facilitation instruments prioritized by most of the COMESA Member States to improve the ease of doing business environment and to enhance intra-regional trade in region. The development of eSW system is one of the instruments under the COMESA Digital Free Trade Area Action Plan. It includes developing and implementing the system at national and regional levels. Currently, national single windows are operational or at development stage in 14 Member States that include Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **Implementation of the WTO TFA:**

The Secretariat is implementing the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme under the EDF 11 TFP as a regional approach on trade facilitation strategy to assist Member States in implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and improving customs cooperation and trade facilitation in the region. In this regard, Member States have established National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) and the TFP is supporting implementation of their work plans on a demand driven basis.

### **The Regional Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme - RCTG-CARNET**

The COMESA Customs Transit Guarantee Scheme, popularly known as the RCTG-CARNET is a Customs transit regime designed to facilitate the movement of transit goods under Customs seals in the COMESA region. The RCTG is a component of the COMESA Protocol on Transit Trade and Transit Facilitation, Annex I of COMESA Treaty that provides, inter-alia, for all Member States to implement transit and customs measures

to remove trade and transport barriers in the region. The RCTG Agreement was signed and ratified by twelve COMESA Member and non-Member States, namely: Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Work on developing the modalities of operations and institutional arrangements was started in 2002 and the implementation of the scheme commenced in 2012.

The objective of customs bond guarantees is to ensure that respective governments can recover duties and taxes from the guarantors should the goods in transit be illegally disposed of for home consumption in the country of transit. COMESA Member States agreed to introduce a Regional Customs Bond Guarantee Scheme to address the difficulties experienced by transport operators, freight forwarders and clearing agents and at the same time to offer Customs Administrations a secure regional system of control replacing the nationally executed practices and procedures. At the same time to help protect the revenue of each State through which goods are carried.

### **The Yellow Card**

The COMESA Yellow Card Insurance Scheme is essentially a Regional Third-Party motor vehicle insurance scheme that provides third party legal liability cover and compensation for medical expenses resulting from road traffic accidents caused by visiting motorists. The liability cover offered under this scheme is limited to the statute provisions on road traffic third party liability award limits of the country being visited and or in which an accident occurs. A Yellow Card issued in one COMESA Member State is valid in all other countries participating in the scheme.

The COMESA Yellow Card was established in 1986 after 14 countries signed the Protocol on the Establishment of the Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance Scheme in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Subsequently, on April 26, 1987, the Agreement on the implementation of the Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance Scheme, known as the Inter-Bureaux Agreement, was signed in Lusaka, Zambia. This was in conformity with the provisions of the Protocol by National Bureaux designated by governments to administer the operations of the Scheme in their countries and the ratification of the Protocol on the establishment of the Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance by 11 member countries. These were: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Swaziland, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The COMESA Yellow Card Scheme was implemented and started its operations in

the above member States while DR Congo, Malawi and Tanzania a non-COMESA country joined the scheme later. The yellow card scheme is operational in thirteen countries and over 250 companies in the region are participating in the scheme.

### **Liberalization of the Skies**

COMESA is working with the relevant authorities and the region's airlines on a programme to remove air traffic controls. The aim is to eventually remove all air traffic controls except for those concerned with safety. Increased competition within regional routes will reduce the cost of air travel and transport and foster greater regional trade. A detailed policy on Air Transport has been adopted by the COMESA Heads of State and Government. The policy considers the Yamoussoukro declaration on Air Transport in Africa. The policy has been adopted in collaboration with SADC and EAC to cover the whole Eastern and Southern Africa region. Air Transport Competition Regulations have been developed jointly by the EAC, COMESA and SADC Ministers responsible for air transport.

### **Support to Air Transport Sector Development in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (SATSD)**

COMESA and the European Union signed a Contribution Agreement of eight million euros to implement the Support to Air Transport Sector Development Program (SATSD) in the Eastern Africa, Southern African and Indian Ocean Region. Its objectives are to operationalize the Single African Air Transport Market; strengthen regulatory and institutional capacity of civil aviation institutions in EA-SA-IO region and improve air navigation efficiency in the EA-SA-IO region. Specifically, the programme is intended to operationalize the Single African Air Transport Market; strengthen regulatory and institutional capacity of civil aviation institutions in EA-SA-IO region; and improve air navigation efficiency in the EA-SA-IO region.

### **Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT Sector**

COMESA Secretariat and the European Union (EU) signed a Grant contribution agreement of eight million Euros for the Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region (EA-SA-IO). The EGEE-ICT is a four-year programme (2021 – 2024) to support the effective review and/or development of various regional policy and

regulatory frameworks in a harmonized manner that will contribute to enhancing competition, improved access to cost effective and secure ICT services. The programme is implemented in five Regional Economic Communities namely COMESA, East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). COMESA as the lead REC will implement the programme on behalf of other Partner RECs in the EA-SA-IO region. It is expected to achieve a regionally coordinated public and private sector ICT policy development, Enhanced policy and regulatory environment for competitive markets and gender sensitive ICT markets, Improved infrastructure connectivity and access to ICT.

### **Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) Project**

The RIFF project is an Investment Financing Facility Project with funding from the World Bank to COMESA and the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) amounting to US\$ 425 million. Its objective is to promote access to long-term finance and improve the enabling environment for investment in infrastructure. The project is scheduled to run from July 2020 to September 2025 and is made up of the following three components. Component 1: Project and Infrastructure Finance Facility (US\$ 325 million), Component 2: COVID-19 Infrastructure Sector SME Response (US\$ 75 million) and Component 3: Technical Assistance (US\$ 25 million). The RIFF Project is expected to achieve results that contribute to improved enabling environment and availability of long-term finance for private investment in the renewable energy subsector and infrastructure sector in general.

### **Cape to Cairo Electricity Corridor**

COMESA is implementing the Zambia-Tanzania-Kenya (ZTK) electricity interconnector which links the East African Power Pool (EAPP) and the South African Power Pool (SAPP). The ZTK seeks to connect power systems of the three countries by constructing a high voltage power line from Zambia through Tanzania to Kenya spanning a distance of about 2,300 km. It will realize the Cape to Cairo Electricity highway. It will also pave the way for the establishment of the regional energy market. The main objectives of the project are to promote electricity trade, enhanced security of power supply and faster regional integration.

### **Trade Facilitation Programme and Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI)**

With the support of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund, COMESA is implementing a five-year programme

Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) and Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI). The objectives of the 68 million euros programme is the reduction of the cost of cross-border trade, through removal of internal barriers in line with Tripartite Agreements:

- i) The SSCBTI (€15 million), aims to increase formal small-scale cross border trade flows in the COMESA/tripartite region, leading to higher revenue collection for government at the borders as well as increased security and higher incomes for small scale cross border traders.
- ii) The TFP (€53 million), aims to increase intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services by reducing the costs/delays of imports/exports at specific border posts through reduction of Non Tariff Barriers (NTBs), implementation of Digital Free Trade Area (FTA), World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), improvements of Coordinated Border Management (CBM) and liberalisation of Trade in Services (TIS), free movement of persons and trade promotion.

## FINANCIAL AND MONETARY SYSTEMS

### Monetary Harmonization Programme

COMESA has adopted a phased monetary co-operation programme which aims at establishing a common monetary area. Greater monetary stability facilitates economic integration efforts and provide for sustained economic development. The ultimate objective of the programme is to establish a monetary union, and thus enable the Common Market to attain the status of an Economic Community.

A phased Monetary Harmonization Programme is in place to prepare the ground towards the eventual establishment of a Monetary Union. The programme enables Member States to:

- i. Take aggressive economic reform programmes while at the same time learning how to co-operate and co-ordinate their economic policies;
- ii. Through their reform programmes, create an enabling environment for price stability and economic growth to allow a natural development of financial markets and a high degree of economic integration;

- iii. Increase intra-regional trade while narrowing inequalities through economic growth; and
- iv. Form a more balanced Monetary Union of relative equality in the region.

To achieve the above, it was considered essential that the Member States should first go through a process of monetary harmonization with a view to achieving macro-economic convergence. To assess progress being made towards this objective, a number of convergence criteria were formulated, with a view of gauging the progress being made by the Member States in the implementation of the programme. The COMESA Monetary Institute CMI undertakes all technical activities to enhance the Monetary Cooperation Programme.

### **The COMESA Fund**

The COMESA Fund protocol was adopted in 2002 for Co-operation, Compensation and Development of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. The Protocol includes two windows, a special facility referred to as the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF) and the COMESA Infrastructure Fund (CIF).

### **COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF)**

The CAF was founded on Articles 60 and 150 of the COMESA Treaty with the objective of providing adjustment support to countries as they implemented the COMESA regional integration programmes. In accordance with Article 10 of the Protocol, the Adjustment Facility aims to provide support to eligible Member States for revenue loss and economic and social costs of adjustment that:

- Address the loss of customs and other related tax revenues and other conditions mentioned herein in a sustainable manner;
- Contribute to implementing policy reforms designed to improve the efficiency of domestic markets, the business environment, facilitating the reallocation of capital, labour resources and assisting firms in meeting the cost of compliance to new obligations and further meet the social and economic costs of liberalization; and
- Contribute to improving the global competitiveness and resilience of economies and industries so that they can take advantage of new market opportunities through support to productive infrastructures and investment in developing new products, processes and

technologies.

### **COMESA Infrastructure Fund (CIF)**

The COMESA Infrastructure Fund (CIF) is one of the two of the COMESA Fund protocol that was adopted in 2002. The other is the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF). The Fund is managed by the Trade and Development Bank (formerly PTA Bank.)

### **AGRICULTURE PROGRAMMES**

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the regional trade and integration and remains an important sector in sustaining most economies of the COMESA Member States. The sector accounts for more than 32 percent of COMESA's gross domestic product (GDP), provides a livelihood to about 80 percent of the region's labour force, accounts for about 65 percent of foreign exchange earnings and contributes more than 50 percent of raw materials to the industrial sector. The objective of the COMESA Agriculture Programme is to catalyse inclusive agricultural growth and sustainable transformation.

### **The Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS)**

The RFBS initiative seeks to generate a more predictable trade and policy environment in East and Southern Africa (ESA) to increase food security and enhance regional trade and investment. The RFBS initiative is a response to the lack of reliable, timely, and accurate data for food trade, and food security related decision making in many in East and Southern African countries. The objective of the RFBS initiative is to support the increased use of near real-time data on critical food balance inputs to inform decision-making by ESA governments, private sector actors, and development partners.

The RFBS effort is a collaborative and multi-stakeholder engagement, which has COMESA as the convener and eventual host of the tool. COMESA is supported by co-lead AGRA, as well as a range of analytical and technology partners including the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD), NASA Harvest/UMD, Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy (BFAP), and Tetra Tech. The above RFBS Implementing partners developed a digital regional food balance sheet that ingests data from a variety of public and private sources and then leverages advanced analytics and tools to develop near real-time and forward-

looking food balance estimates.

### **COMESA Livestock Programme**

The objective of this programme is to increase production and productivity of livestock and fisheries through utilization of technologies, enhanced animal husbandry, health and resilience to shocks and access to markets and value addition. The COMESA Livestock Programme works with Member States Veterinary and Animal Production Authorities, Regional Economic Communities, continental and global organizations such as the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), United Nations Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO) and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in improving animal production, productivity and trade in animal and animal products.

### **COMESA Fisheries Programme**

The Programme aims to enhance the private sector particularly small and medium scale fisheries producers' participation in sustainable regional and global value chains. The programme is supported by the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP) under EDF 11.

### **The COMESA Climate Change Programme (CCCP)**

The COMESA Climate Change Programme started in 2009 and is managed and coordinated by a specialized unit within the Secretariat. The core mandate of the Programme is to provide customised support to Member States and other stakeholders on climate change matters, partner engagement and capacity building, management of multiple projects and sub grantees. Over the years, the Programme has developed strong links with national focal points, regional, continental and international partners and built up a wide network of collaborating national and regional technical institutions and experts.

Since its inception, the Programme has played a key role in supporting Member States to articulate and align their national positions with the unified African Position, develop policies, strategies, institutional and human capacities, enhancing access to resources to implement their priority actions and to comply with their commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

The Programme leverages and builds on other successful programmes in gender and youth empowerment, women-in-business, statistical development, ICT, resource mobilisation, strategic planning, governance, peace

and security, legal resources, to promote sustainable low carbon growth and development.

### **Key interventions:**

- Climate Change Negotiations
- Pilot community-based interventions in Climate Smart agriculture and scaled up successful pilots with regional relevance.
- Development of National Climate Change Response Strategies
- Support MS regional and national policy dialogues on the national CC response strategies and policies and aligning them to the new global agreement.
- Support Resilience building: COMESA has been championing resilience in development and regional integration to complement the disaster risk reduction support extended to Member States by other RECs the AUC and others. The programme has developed the COMESA Regional Resilience Framework to guide Member States and other stakeholders in developing and implementing their own resilience strategies. The implementation plan and resource mobilisation strategy for the Resilience Framework have also been finalized.
- Enhanced Member States readiness to access climate finance.

COMESA is an admitted observer to the UNFCCC and the Programme has a strong collaborative partnership with the UN Climate Change Secretariat (which hosts the UNFCCC) whose experts support the COMESA Member States through participation in the training of negotiators, focal points and other stakeholders providing clarifications on the requirements and commitments under the Paris Agreement and on-going discussions to increase ambitions towards global carbon neutrality.

### **THE COMESA INDUSTRIALIZATION PROGRAMME**

Guided by the COMESA Industrial Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2017 –2026, the Industrialisation Programme focuses on building a regionally integrated, diversified, and competitive production capacity anchored on agriculture, industry and services sectors and based on value addition, diversification, innovation

and common regional standards. Among the key activities are the domestication of the COMESA Local Content Framework in Member States and the Zambia-Zimbabwe Joint Industrialisation Programme. The latter is a flagship programme of the COMESA Secretariat whose aim is to increase the production of industrial goods and services for the bilateral market of the two Member States and deepen regional integration by expanding intra-regional trade.

### **Regional Enterprises Competitiveness and Access to Market Programme (RECAMP)**

The RECAMP was signed between the European Union and COMESA in November 2019. The programme focusses on three priority value chains, namely; agro-processing, horticulture and leather and leather products. The RECAMP provide appropriate interventions to support the improvement of the business environment, facilitate access to regional markets, provide market information and skills development in regional and global trade requirements. Specifically, the programme targets SMEs participation in regional value chains through enhancing their capacity and facilitating the creation of business linkages at the national and regional level. RECAMP is implemented through a participatory and collaborative approach with other COMESA programmes including the Gender and Social Affairs Programme and the COMESA Statistics Programme, COMESA Implementing Institutions that include the COMESA Business Council (CBC), Alliance for Commodity Trade for Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute (ALLPI), COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB), COMESA Regional Investment Agency (COMESA- RIA), and Member States' national and regional institutions.

## **CROSS CUTTING PROGRAMMES**

### **COMESA Statistical Development**

The COMESA Treaty provides the policy context for the development of statistics in the COMESA region. The Treaty envisages a four-pronged strategy for the development of statistics namely;

- a) A Common Market Information System - This was to be established for purposes of reviewing the functioning and development of the Common Market. Issues to be handled included; data flows to the Secretariat, improvement of data collection by Member States, analysis of statistical information and timely dissemination.
- b) Cooperation in Statistical Development - This recognizes the importance of harmonized statistics

at the regional and international level, exchange of skills among Member States, cooperation in methodological issues, data dissemination policies and the adoption of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa.

- c) Comprehensive Information System - This was to look at the development of a trade information network that reduces information asymmetries on trade opportunities in the region.
- d) Depository Library - In addition to documents and printed material, databases are envisaged as important for the development of the Comprehensive Information System.

## **GENDER AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

The Secretariat has a fully-fledged Gender and Social Affairs Division since 2009 to enhance its gender mainstreaming support to Member States and Secretariat, Advocacy on Gender Equality, Women Empowerment and Social Development. The first COMESA regional Gender Policy, which was developed and adopted by the COMESA Heads of State and Government at its Seventh Summit in May 2002 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and revised in 2015. The Gender Policy provides measures on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in policy and practice in all sectors.

### **Women Economic Empowerment Fund**

The idea for the establishment of the COMESA Women Economic Empowerment Fund (WEEF) was conceived at the COMESA First Ladies Round Table Meeting in Djibouti in 2006. It was endorsed during the Heads of State and Government Summit in Kinshasa, DRC in February 2014. The WEEF initial base fund was US Dollar 73.43 million

### **COMESA Social Charter**

The COMESA Social Charter was endorsed by Heads of States and Government in Kinshasa in February 2014. The Charter contains fundamental Social Rights that ensures that the social dimension of regional development is not neglected in the work of COMESA for the realization of the full regional integration aimed at improved living standards of women, men, youth and children.

## **COMESA Youth Programme**

The COMESA Youth Programme was adopted in 2015 by the Authority of Heads of State and Government. The goal of the Youth Programme is to empower young people in the COMESA region by promoting the creation of decent and productive work opportunities for youth in the private sector, and by enhancing youth's political participation, civic engagement and active involvement in the regional integration process.

### **50 million African Women Speak Project.**

In September 2016, COMESA secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the two RECs namely EAC and ECOWAS to jointly implement the 50 million African Women Speak Networking Platform Project. This followed the approval of USD 12.4 million grant for the project called "50 million African Women Speak" by the AfDB. The project is aimed at creating a networking platform dedicated to African women entrepreneurs. The grant will be spread between the COMESA, the EAC and ECOWAS.

The project is a digital/virtual marketplace intended to connect businesswomen and encourage peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and information and knowledge sharing. The platform is intended to cover 36 countries and will be accessible on mobile phones and shall also enable women to access business training, mentorship, financial services and locally relevant business information, while building their own networks of contacts. The project is an innovative social media platform to enable women to start, grow and scale their business through the dynamic exchange of ideas. This project is being implemented and will take three years starting from 2017.

## **COMESA Knowledge and Information Resources**

COMESA Resource Centre was established in 1992 under Article 142 of the COMESA Treaty with the following Mandate: *"Member States agree to recognize the status of the Library situated at the Secretariat as the official depository Library of the Common Market for storage of all documents; regulations, public notices, databases and other documents with regard to national development plans, official gazettes, Central Bank annuals, periodic reports and other documents as may be determined and notified by the Library from time to time, with respect to Member States."*

The Centre has a comprehensive collection of both printed and electronic information resources, all enhancing the documentation of the history of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa.

Currently the Resource Centre accommodates COMESA Programmes documentation, Publications from Member States, WTO references, subscribed online research databases, subject journals and magazines, general referencing and information referral services. It is designed to facilitate all citizens of the member states access to information and information resources so collected and documented.

## **IMMIGRATION AND FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS**

### **COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visa Requirements**

The Protocol relating to the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visa Requirements within COMESA (the Visa Protocol) was adopted and signed by the Authority of Heads of State and Government as far back as 1984.

The liberalization of the movement of persons is intended to facilitate particularly the movement of businesspersons within COMESA. The protocol is premised on two key elements; a ninety-day visa free regime and access to visa on arrival. Countries like Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Eswatini, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are to a large extent implementing the Protocol; providing ninety-day visa access and access to visa on arrival to at least half of the COMESA Member States. Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles have totally waived visa requirements to all COMESA citizens. In 2013, Zambia being the seat of the COMESA Secretariat, issued a circular waiving visas and visa fees for all COMESA citizens on official business.

The Visa Protocol recognizes that two or more Member States can maintain existing bilateral or multilateral arrangements (or enter new ones) among themselves in respect of free movement of persons which provide for more favourable treatment for their nationals than are provided for in the protocol. These measures are encouraged, and this is already the case for the East African Community and various bilateral agreements.

### **COMESA Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, the Right of Establishment and Residence**

The COMESA Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, the Right of Establishment and Residence was adopted in 2001 by the COMESA Authority of Heads and States and is in the process of being signed and ratified. The Free Movement Protocol was developed with the vision towards the operationalization of the COMESA Common Market and its objective is to remove all restrictions to the free movement of persons,

labour, and services and provide for the right of establishment and right of residence.

The implementation of the Protocol is in the following five stages:

Stage I: Part II – Articles 3 to 8

Objective: Gradual removal of visa requirements and co-operation in the prevention and the fight against crime.

Period: Being implemented.

Stage II: Part III – Article 9

Objective: Enhancing movement of skilled labour.

Period: Progressively implemented since 2004.

Stage III: Part IV – Article 10

Objective: Movement of services.

Stage IV: Part V – Article 11

Objective: Right of Establishment.

Stage V: Part VI – Article 12

Objective: Right of Residence.

Period: 2014 (20 years from date of entry of COMESA Treaty).

## **REGIONAL, CONTINENTAL AND MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS**

### **Tripartite Free Trade Area**

The Tripartite is an inter-regional co-operation and integration arrangement amongst 27 countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and of

the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It was established through a Memorandum of Understanding on Inter Regional Cooperation and Integration signed on 19 January 2011. The Tripartite was conceived in a meeting between the Chairpersons of the COMESA Authority and the SADC Summit held on the margins of the COMESA Summit in Cairo, Egypt in May 2001.

The decision to establish the COMESA–EAC–SADC Tripartite was informed by the overlapping membership of the Member States to the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The aim of the Tripartite is to create a single market through the amalgamation of the COMESA and SADC Free Trade Areas and the EAC Customs Union. The Tripartite adopted a developmental approach and is anchored on three complementary pillars: market integration; industrial development and infrastructure development. During their Summit in 2008, the Heads of State of the three RECs decided that to establish a single Free Trade Area for the 27 countries. Negotiations for the establishment of the Tripartite Free Trade Area were launched in 2011. A Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) Agreement was signed on the 10th of June 2015 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. As at April 2023, 22 countries had signed the Agreement and 11 countries ratified the Agreement. Fourteen ratifications are required for the TFTA Agreement to enter into force and implementation of the Agreement.

### **African Continental Free Trade Area**

The agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) entered into force on 30 May 2019 after 24 countries had deposited their instruments of ratification. Trading under the AfCFTA Agreement commenced on 1 January 2021 while negotiations on outstanding issues regarding tariff liberalization, rules of origin and trade in services continue. As of December 2021, 54 Member countries had signed out of which 41 countries had ratified. COMESA as one of the eight recognised African Union Regional Economic Communities, has been participating in the AfCFTA negotiations, providing support to COMESA and Tripartite Member States.

### **Support to Member States at World Trade Organisation Negotiations**

COMESA was the first regional trade organization of African countries to be notified to the WTO under the Enabling Clause, on 29 June 1995. To support the Member States, negotiate at the WTO meetings the Secretariat has prepared position papers for all the Ministerial meetings since the Seattle meeting of 1999 to date.

## **African Growth and Opportunity Act**

COMESA with the support of the Member States has been lobbying actively for increased access to opportunities offered under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the United States, passed into law by the US Congress in May 2000. Under this Act, 34 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries qualified to export close to 8,000 types of products to the US market duty and quota free. Most COMESA States have since qualified to benefit under the AGOA. In June 2015 AGOA and the third country fabric provisions were extended by 10 years through to September 2025.

## **ECONOMIC AND TRADE POLICY RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

### **COMESA**

#### **Annual Research Forum**

Since 2014 COMESA has been organizing Annual Research Forums to bring together the academia, think tanks, government officers and the private sector to discuss emerging topical issues in regional integration. This is made possible through call for papers under a contemporary theme which is informed by the COMESA Council of Ministers decisions, the tripartite free trade area or the continental free trade area negotiations and aspirations as well the global economic and trade dynamics. The final papers are published in the COMESA flagship publication "Key Issues in Regional Integration". To date (2023), 10 editions have been published together with the policy briefs. The policy implications from the papers are presented to COMESA policy organs and form the basis for policy decision making.

#### **COMESA Innovation Awards**

The innovation awards scheme was initiated to recognize and celebrate individuals and institutions that have used science, technology and innovation to further the regional integration agenda. The awards are conducted annually and presented during the COMESA Annual Research Forum. The awards recognize the exponential growth in scientific and technical knowledge in the 21st Century which provides great opportunities for Africa to solve its critical challenges related to meeting basic needs, participating in the growing economy, addressing ecological and climate change problems and improving governance. Winning innovators are supported with seed money to support patenting and marketing of their innovations.

## **COMESA Virtual Master's Degree Programme in Regional Integration**

The COMESA Master's Degree Programme in Regional Integration is a postgraduate virtual programme done through a collaboration involving 22 universities in COMESA. It seeks to provide a sound conceptual, policy and practical training on regional integration, as well as extending access to research opportunities and higher education on regional integration in the COMESA region. The programme covers, among others, economics, trade, law, political economy, governance, finance, IT and innovation. It is the only university programme in the region specifically tailored to advance regional integration. Nationals of the COMESA Member States, which are also members of the Organization of African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) covered under the Cotonou Agreement are eligible for scholarships.

## **PEACE AND SECURITY PROGRAMME**

The COMESA Treaty recognizes under Article 163 on Scope of Cooperation, that peace and security are fundamental prerequisites to social and economic development and vital to the achievement of regional economic integration objectives of the Common Market. The COMESA Heads of State and Government, at their annual Summit in 1999 also took a deliberate decision that COMESA must address the question of peace and security to facilitate regional integration and development.

The Authority mandated the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs to meet at least once a year to address issues of peace and security. This landmark decision, which is in compliance with Article 3(d) on Aims and Objectives of the Common Market as read with Articles 6 on Fundamental Principles and 163 of the COMESA Treaty launched the COMESA Programme on Peace and Security.

Subsequently, COMESA has established a three-tier structure composed of a Committee of Officials, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Heads of State and Government at the top to address issues of peace and security. This structure is complemented by the Committee of Elders, in consultation with other stakeholders in the region including the business community, civil society organizations and parliamentarians. COMESA addresses issues of peace and security in co-ordination with the African Union and other sub-regional organizations to avoid duplication of efforts. The focus areas are; conflict prevention, conflict management, post conflict reconstruction implemented in countries emerging from conflict; security (anti-money laundering and financing of terrorism legislation and programmes) and support for democracy and governance through election observation programmes. The "Trading for Peace programme", at the border areas of the Great Lakes region

which is designed to use trade and investment as a mechanism for peace and stability is also implemented at these areas.



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