



OPENING REMARKS BY
H.E CHILESHE MPUNDU KAPWEPWE – SECRETARY
GENERAL
DURING THE
REGIONAL MEETING TO FINALISE THE DRAFT COMESA
2021-2025 MEDIUM TERM STRATEGIC PLAN (MTSP)

17TH SEPTEMBER 2020
VIRTUAL MEETING

Distinguished Delegates from COMESA Member States;

Representatives of COMESA Institutions;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by welcoming you all to this meeting to finalise the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) 2021-2025. As you all know, COMESA implements its Treaty through SMART Medium-Term Plans and Annual Work Plans, and this has been the practice undertaken with the concluding 2016-2020 MTSP that was launched in Antananarivo, Madagascar in 2016. Thus, the process to develop an inclusive and sustainable successor strategy has been a key priority for us as your facilitating and coordinating office. It is important that we, as a Member State driven organisation develop a strategic plan that will enable the region to build on its successes and override its challenges.

The strategy formulation process undertaken to facilitate the development of the new strategy used a wide consultative approach with key stakeholders internally and externally. Consultations were undertaken at different levels including African Union Commission under Agenda 2063, SDG Centre for the Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) as well as with partner RECs to gather information for the upcoming strategy. As a result, alignment has been established at the Global, Continental, Regional and subject specific levels.

I believe that the all-encompassing methodology adopted will contribute to enhancement of our organisations performance over the long term. Our strategic plan will provide clearer communication of priorities, more effective management control of strategic initiatives and improve cooperation among those pursuing strategic objectives. The Strategic plan is also a useful tool to engage our strategic partners in the pursuit of Regional Integration to marshal both financial and non-financial resources. Further, it will also provide a framework with which detailed annual work programmes and budgets will be developed.

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

COMESA as a REC in the forefront of promoting Regional Integration Agenda, has continued to provide leadership in several initiatives.

COMESA has been and continues to provide technical, financial and organizational support to Member States and Institutions relevant to trade and investment activities including providing evidence based analytical work.

COMESA also provided leadership in facilitating negotiations leading to the launch of the Continental Free Trade Area and consolidating the Tripartite FTA. Negotiations progressed quite well warranting the holding of a Summit in July 2019 in Niamey Niger to launch the CFTA. Most Articles of the Main CFTA have been agreed on as well as the Annexes.

To support Member States in the implementation and domestication of Council Decisions, COMESA coordinated a number of consultancies, undertook broad stakeholder consultations and participated in evidence based analytical work to take stock of existing institutional and financing arrangements, trends, policies, strategies and programmes in, but not limited to, agriculture, statistics, customs union, Infrastructure development, climate change and gender mainstreaming.

With respect to harnessing strategic partnerships, the Secretariat obtained resources from development and cooperating partners such as the: European Union, United States Agency for International Development, World Bank, African Development Bank and the African Capacity Building Foundation to mention just a few. These resources were useful for enhancing COMESA's Capacity to deliver on its mandate within the Secretariat and in Member States.

On the other hand, the challenges towards attaining the seamless flow of goods, free movement of persons, capital and other objectives are still daunting. Intra-regional trade still remains extremely low - below 20 percent, transaction costs are still high and huge obstacles exist to the free movement of goods, capital, investments and people in form of non-tariff and technical barriers to trade.

Regrettably immigration laws and policies in many member countries are still harsh and discriminatory. Yet, the free movement of business persons remains a recurrent theme in policy discussions for the desired goal as stated in the strategy for achieving the Common Market.

Further, most COMESA Member States' economies still rely on the production and exportation of a few primary products without any value addition.

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Regional integration is considered as one of the prominent strategies for development among countries and regions. Regional integration promotes the economic growth and industrialization process through fostering intra-regional trade, infrastructure and investment. It provides huge market for parallel development of new industries which reduces external vulnerability through increasing bargaining power and in turn, the national income.

The need to transform our economies from an overreliance on primary commodities and low value-added products will continue to drive COMESA's planning and execution agenda. Such pursuit must involve developing the necessary strengths and resilience, as well as the capacity to enhance competitiveness, innovation and growth through industrialization and Trade Facilitation.

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, to be recommended for adoption to the Summit in 2021, is expected to contribute to structural transformation of the economies of the COMESA Member States so as to foster the overall economic development of the Member States through trade facilitation and investment promotion. It will do so by creating an enabling and conducive economic environment, with a focus on trade facilitation, market integration, infrastructure development, industrialisation (including small and medium enterprise development and regional industrial clusters), institutional and regulatory policies, capacity development as well as resource mobilization.

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The speed towards attaining regional integration agenda will come about when Member States and non-state actors fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Member States for example have a responsibility to domesticate the Strategic Plan through alignment with their National Development Plans (NDPs) and take on ownership of the implementation process. Let me mention that ownership of the Strategic plan is central towards attainment of the long-term goals of COMESA.

We are also urging 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.

As I conclude, I invite you to spend the next 2 days validating your Strategic Plan for the next 5 years for onward consideration by the higher Organs including the Authority at the next Summit. I wish you good deliberations and hope that your engagements will deliver a good outcome.

Thank you for your attention and God bless you.