

Tripartite Free Trade Area Officially Starts



Heads of RECs and other Regional Economic Mechanisms during the 6th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities in Accra, Ghana

July 25, 2024, marked a significant milestone in the journey towards economic integration in Africa as the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) Agreement officially came into force. This landmark agreement is set to reshape the trade landscape across Eastern and Southern Africa.

The TFTA Agreement aims to create a vast unified market by integrating the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This ambitious project, initiated to liberalize tariffs fully and eliminate non-tariff barriers, will foster regional trade and economic cooperation among Member States.

The Agreement has officially taken off following

the ratification by 14 out of the 29 Member States. Malawi, Lesotho, and Angola are the latest countries to join, meeting the required threshold for the agreement to come into effect. Other nations that have ratified the agreement include Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, and Zambia.

The TFTA aims to fully liberalize tariff lines, providing a significant boost to intra-African trade. It also addresses the complexities associated with membership in multiple regional economic communities by presenting best practices in transport and trade facilitation instruments and value chain development at regional levels.

These measures are crucial in enhancing trade efficiency and reducing costs for businesses operating across borders within the region.

The TFTA, signed in 2015, represents a monumental step towards economic unity in Africa. It comprises 29 countries, representing over 60% of the continent's GDP and a combined population of 800 million. The agreement's ambitious tariff liberalization schedule aims to fully liberalize tariffs, except for specific security exemptions, within five to eight years.

The Tripartite FTA offers significant opportunities for business and investment within the Tripartite and will act as a magnet for attracting foreign direct investment into the Tripartite region. The business community, in particular, will benefit from an improved and harmonized trade regime which reduces the cost of doing business as a result of elimination of overlapping trade regimes due to multiple memberships.

As the TFTA takes off, it promises to unlock

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COMESA, AKADEMIYA2063 Sign MOU to Support Agri-food System Transformation

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and AKADEMIYA2063 have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support evidence-based policy and program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) aimed at transforming agri-food systems in the COMESA region.

AKADEMIYA2063 Executive Chairperson, Dr. Ousmane Badiane and COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the MoU virtually on 19 July 2024.

Under the partnership, the two organizations will bolster their collaboration in support of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) by strengthening technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States for review, dialogue, M&E, and mutual learning.

COMESA and AKADEMIYA2063 will leverage data, innovative research, and tools to promote food security and nutrition, address the effects of climate change, and enhance market competitiveness and agricultural trade in the region.

"AKADEMIYA2063 is eager to partner with COMESA in supporting agri-food system

transformation in eastern and southern Africa through data, analytics, and capacity strengthening," said Dr. Ousmane Badiane, AKADEMIYA2063's Executive Chairperson.

"Signing of the MOU formalizes our ongoing collaboration in support of the CAADP implementation agenda and will expand it to new heights as we work together to tackle emerging topics of strategic importance to the region."

Ms. Kapwepwe noted that data-driven decision-making for agri-food systems transformation is crucial for the COMESA region, particularly in the face of climate change. She cited the frequent droughts and floods that have severely impacted agricultural production, food security, and livelihoods in the Member States.

"This partnership between COMESA and AKADEMIYA2063 will contribute to efficient and effective development and implementation of the Regional Food Balance Sheet, a platform to provide real-time and forward-looking data to inform evidence-based food security and trade policies as well as business and investment decisions that can spur regional trade and investment in agri-food systems," said the

Secretary General.

Key components of the partnership framework include promoting mutual accountability in the COMESA region by supporting agriculture Joint Sector Reviews at the country and regional levels and the continental CAADP Biennial Review. It will also strengthen technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States for evidence-based policy planning, implementation, and M&E.

Further, the two organizations will organize joint events at the country and regional levels and conduct joint fundraising for research, capacity building, and outreach.

AKADEMIYA2063 is a pan-African non-profit research organization with headquarters in Kigali, Rwanda and a regional office in Dakar, Senegal. Its overall mission is to create, across Africa and led from its headquarters in Rwanda, state-of-the-art technical capacities to support the efforts by the Member States of the African Union to achieve the key goals of Agenda 2063 of transforming national economies to boost economic growth and prosperity.



COMESA States Participate in Simulation Exercises to Tackle Emerging Pests

Tripartite Free Trade Area...

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new economic opportunities, drive growth, and strengthen regional cooperation. However, realizing its full potential will require addressing the existing challenges and ensuring robust implementation of its pillars

The announce of this milestone was made during the 6th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities held in Accra, Ghana on 21 July 2024. COMESA was represented by Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

The tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) is built on three core pillars: market integration, infrastructure development, and industrial development. COMESA spearheads market integration, while the EAC focuses on infrastructure development, and SADC takes the lead in industrial development.

Despite the progress, several technical and institutional challenges remain. A critical issue is the absence of a dedicated secretariat to coordinate and implement TFTA activities. Currently, coordination is handled on a rotational basis among the three RECs, but there is a pressing need for a regional headquarters to streamline operations.

Financial constraints also pose a significant challenge. While the market integration pillar is supported by the African Development Bank, negotiations on the infrastructure and industrial development pillars have been slower due to inadequate financing. These pillars are essential for fostering sustainable trade and development, and their delay could impact the overall effectiveness of the TFTA.

In the ongoing battle against agricultural pests, simulation exercises have become a critical component of global plant protection strategies. These scenario-based drills mimic real-world outbreaks, enabling countries to be at the forefront of tackling potential pest infestations. They are especially relevant for emerging pests and have recently been employed by national plant protection organizations as a prevention and preparedness tool against *Fusarium oxysporum* f.sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 (TR4), a significant banana pest.

The first *Fusarium* TR4 simulation exercise for the COMESA region took place in Kenya in May 2024, implemented under the COMESA Trade Facilitation Project, funded by the European Union. This was part of a wider capacity development programme which included the development of International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) guides and e-learning courses and in-person and virtual *Fusarium* TR4 diagnostic and surveillance training courses for representatives from the COMESA region.

The simulation exercise was led by the IPPC Secretariat, in partnership with FAO Mesoamerica and, as the first simulation exercise to be conducted in Africa, it was an important milestone for the region. Representatives from COMESA countries, namely Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Madagascar, Somalia, Burundi, Congo, Malawi, Sudan, Eswatini and Zimbabwe met in Nairobi for a simulation exercise that covered all stages from preparation to response to a first outbreak or positive case, to containment of infected plants.

The simulation scenarios were staged at possible entry points including on a farm and in a diagnostic

laboratory. Through these real-life simulations, in a controlled operating environment, participants were able to test and improve preparedness to respond to a *Fusarium* TR4 outbreak through capacity building, improving understanding of techniques, tools, and resources, and improving coordination and application of risk reduction techniques. As part of the exercise, participants worked on developing elements of a contingency plan to cover all key aspects of an emergency response system.

Core to the success of this simulation exercise was the transference of skills between FAO Mesoamerica and the COMESA region. As emphasized by COMESA representative Dr. Yoseph Mamo during the opening ceremony in Kenya:

"This simulation exercise, and all the preparatory work that has gone into planning it, has significantly benefited from the sum of capabilities and experience to train, update and define roadmaps and concrete actions in each of the countries that are participating in this first exercise. I specifically thank our colleagues from FAO and the IPPC Secretariat."

With the effects of climate change increasing the threat of emerging pests, strengthening phytosanitary preparedness and response capacities is ever more important. Following the success of the COMESA trade facilitation project, simulation exercises will continue to be a priority for the IPPC Secretariat, with the transfer of knowledge to other regions taking place within Pest and Outbreak Response System framework.

(Source: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news>)

Aviation Experts Convene in Juba for SAATM Awareness Workshop



Participants to the SAATM Awareness Workshop in Juba

More than thirty-five aviation experts gathered for a two-day Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) Awareness Workshop in Juba, South Sudan, from 15–16 July 2024. The workshop was organized by the East African Community (EAC) under the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) project in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) Region.

The Juba workshop aimed to help South Sudan fully understand the requirements and benefits of joining SAATM. Following the workshop, South Sudan is expected to work towards operationalizing the Single African Air Transport Market and strengthening the regulatory and institutional capacity of its civil aviation institutions.

Mr Benny Gideon Mabor, Under Secretary in the Ministry of East African Community Affairs, South Sudan emphasized the potential benefits of SAATM for the country.

“South Sudan, being the center of the continent to every destination in Africa and worldwide, has much to gain from the full operationalization of SAATM,” he said.

He highlighted that becoming a hub could create employment, boost trade and tourism, generate more revenue, and offer competitive fares.

“I believe that after this workshop, officials will clearly understand the benefits of the Single African Air Transport Market, the regulatory and institutional framework of the Yamoussoukro Decision, and the steps required to operationalize SAATM.”

COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, Dr. Bernard Dzawanda, thanked the EAC for facilitating the engagement, given that South Sudan is not a COMESA member. The EAC’s support towards the implementation of SATSD, funded by the European Union to the tune of eight million Euros, was also acknowledged.

“South Sudan is among the many African countries facing air transport challenges such as high fuel prices, expensive air tickets, and visa restrictions that hinder citizens’ access to other African destinations. “The main objective of this workshop is to create awareness of SAATM,” said Dr. Dzawanda.

He added that while many air transport markets outside Africa have been liberalized significantly, most intra-African air transport markets remain largely closed. This he said affects air connectivity within Africa as air travel costs remain prohibitive, limiting potential economic growth and trade.

He encouraged South Sudan to join the other African Union member states that already

benefiting from a liberalized African Air Transport Market. SAATM is one of the fifteen African Union flagship projects for Agenda 2063, aimed at creating a single unified air transport market on the continent to boost economic integration and growth.

Since its launch in 2018, 37 Member States have signed the Solemn Commitment to establish SAATM. Of the 18 Member States that have not signed, 15 are in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean Region.

One factor contributing to the slow uptake of the Decision’s principles is the lack of clear and specific information regarding the impacts and potential benefits of such liberalization.

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“South Sudan is among the many African countries facing air transport challenges such as high fuel prices, expensive air tickets, and visa restrictions that hinder citizens’ access to other African destinations,” Dr. Bernard Dzawanda.



Participants at the validation workshop in Kigali

ICT Experts Validate Business Models and Training Modules for Regional Associations

Experts in Information Communication and Technologies (ICTs) have endorsed the business models and training modules for Regional ICT Associations (RICTAs) affiliated to the East African Community (EAC), COMESA and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This was done during a three-day validation workshop on 17 – 19 July 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda and attended by 28 experts who represented regulators, operators and from the postal sector. Representatives of partner regional economic communities namely, EAC, IGAD and SADC attended the meeting.

The documents will now be presented to the General Assemblies of the different RICTAs before implementation. Once fully in use, the models and modules are expected to enhance the RICTA's organizational capacity with respect to business development and service delivery.

The validation is part of the deliverables under the European Union funded Enhancement of Governance and Enabling Environment in the ICT sector (EGEE-ICT) Programme being implemented in the East Africa-Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region.

Speaking during the opening session, Rwanda's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of ICT and Innovation Mr. Yves Iradukunda recognised the contribution that the RICTAs make to the ICT ecosystem and commended them for promoting ICT development at a regional level.

"Through the Regional ICT Associations, the region has seen practical solutions to topical ICT issues managed and discussed," he said.

Mr. Iradukunda revealed that at the recently concluded ITU Global Symposium of Regulators 2024 (GSR-24), which took place in Kampala early in July, the role of Regional ICT Associations was evident. However, he noted that Regional ICT Associations face challenges that affect their performance and inhibit them from achieving their mandates and reaching their full potential. They include limited budget, staffing challenges at the secretariats, limited visibility, slow pace of transposition/domestication of guidelines, organization sustainability and membership challenges.

Mr Leonard Chitundu, COMESA Telecommunications Officer said the support provided to RICTAs under the EGEE-ICT programme is key for the region as it will lead to an

efficient ICT sector. The programme supports the review and development of various ICT policy and regulatory frameworks that contribute to enhanced competition and improved access to affordable and secure ICT infrastructure and services.

Regarding RICTAs, the EGEE-ICT programme provides a set of support activities, all of which result into institutional and human build capacity building. The development of business models as well as the preparation and delivery of training modules is one such support activity for the RICTAs.

The five RICTAs are the East African Communication Organisation (EACO), Association of Regulators of Information and Communication in Eastern and Southern Africa (ARICEA), Communication Regulators Association of Southern Africa (CRASA), Southern African Telecommunications Association (SATA) and Southern Africa Postal Operators Association (SAPOA).

Regional Banks' Staff Trained on Financial Crisis Management and Resolution Strategies

In an initiative to build the capacity of regional financial institutions, the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) conducted a virtual training on "Financial Crisis Management and Resolution Framework for Banks and Non-Banking Financial Institutions", on 8 - 12 July 2024. It was attended by 40 delegates from seven COMESA Member States'

Central Banks namely Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The training was necessitated by the pressing need to improve crisis management tools to mitigate the negative impact of financial crises particularly in low-income countries in general, including those in the COMESA region. Moreover, macroeconomic and financial stress associated with shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted the complexities of managing a financial crisis and the necessity for adjusting universally applicable good practices to prevent such crises.

Among the key adverse effects of financial crises are job losses, reduced access to credit, large fiscal deficits, significantly enhanced sovereign debt levels, and decreased economic growth, among others. Thus, the training was designed to provide

participants with the knowledge and skills to identify, prevent, and manage financial crises in countries characterized by underdeveloped financial markets and weaknesses in legal and institutional arrangements required to facilitate bank resolution.

Addressing the participants, CMI Director Dr. Lucas Njoroge observed: "Since most countries in the COMESA region share similar characteristics, the training equips participants with the necessary tools and strategies to effectively manage banking or financial crises in their respective economies."

At the training, participants shared knowledge and country experiences on crisis management and resolution frameworks and gained skills on strategies and tools to effectively manage banking or financial crises in their jurisdictions.

AU-COMESA Observe Rwanda Elections

The African Union and COMESA recently deployed a Joint Election Observation Mission to the 2024 Rwanda General Elections. The Mission deployed 48 short term observers to all the four provinces of Rwanda including the capital Kigali. The mission was headed by H.E Jorge Carlos De Almedia Fonseca, former President of Cabo Verde and deputized by Rt. Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda, the former Prime Minister of Uganda. He is also a member of the COMESA Committee of Elders.

The joint AU-COMESA EOM based its assessment on the legal framework governing elections in



Rwanda and the OAU/AU Declaration on the principles governing democratic elections, standards and obligations stipulated in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

At the end of the mission, a preliminary statement was issued:- <https://www.comesa.int/joint-au-comesa-communique-2024-rwanda-general-elections/>



Chief Executive Officer of the AUDA Nepad, Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas (L) and Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signs an agreement for the deployment of technical officers to COMESA Secretariat under the Energise Africa Initiative. This was on 20 July 2024 on the sidelines of the AU meeting in Accra, Ghana.



Delegation from the Civil Aviation Authority of Zambia with COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics Dr. Bernard Dzawanda

Civil Aviation Authority Seeks Collaboration with COMESA

The Zambian Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is actively seeking collaboration with the COMESA to bolster the aviation sector through enhanced economic regulation and support to the Zambia Air Services Training Institute (ZASTI). This initiative underscores the CAA's commitment to elevating aviation standards and ensuring sustainable growth within the sector.

This collaborative effort was highlighted during a recent meeting on July 26, 2024, when the Aviation Authority Board Chairperson, Dr. Patrick Nkhoma, led a high-level delegation to the COMESA Secretariat. The delegation met with the Director of Infrastructure and Logistics to discuss potential areas of cooperation. This strategic dialogue aims to harness COMESA's extensive network and resources to drive improvements in Zambia's aviation infrastructure and training capabilities.

The Board Chairperson, Dr. Patrick Nkhoma pointed out that meeting was a dream come true for the aviation sector in Zambia adding that there is renewed hope for the success of the sector especially that CAA shall work with COMESA.

"This meeting is like a dream come true because with what I have seen in the COMESA treaty reminds me of exactly what we should have done years back when the Zambia Airways was folding. Had we done what I have seen we shouldn't have let the National Carrier to die," Dr Nkhoma said.

The delegation comprised prominent figures from the aviation industry, showcasing the depth of expertise and leadership within Zambia's aviation sector. Among the delegation were Mr. Llyod Chembo, a Board Member of the CAA; Captain Derrick Luembe, the Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority; and Eng. Nathan Kaluba, the Director of Aerodrome Safety & Standards.

Their combined experience and strategic insights are pivotal in navigating the complexities of the aviation industry and implementing robust regulatory frameworks.

Public Relations Manager Mrs. Sepiso Zimba also joined the delegation, underscoring the importance of effective communication and stakeholder engagement in advancing the CAA's objectives. The inclusion of Capt. Masiye Phiri, the Acting Vice Principal of ZASTI, and Eng. Frank B. Kafwari, Head of Training at ZASTI, highlighted the critical role of training and capacity building in the aviation sector. Their involvement signals a focused effort to enhance the training programs at ZASTI, ensuring that Zambia produces well-trained aviation professionals capable of meeting international standards.

Director of Infrastructure and Logistics at the Secretariat said COMESA represents a significant step towards fostering regional cooperation and

leveraging shared resources for mutual benefit. Dr. Dzawanda said that by aligning with COMESA, the CAA shall tap into a broader support system that can facilitate economic regulation, improve safety standards, and enhance overall operational efficiency within Zambia's aviation sector.

"The collaboration between the Zambian Civil Aviation Authority and COMESA marks a promising development in the pursuit of a more robust and competitive aviation industry in Zambia," Dr. Dzawanda further calling on the CAA board to expedite the process of formally putting in a request for the Secretariat's action.

The focus on economic regulation and training support is expected to yield long-term benefits, contributing to the sector's resilience and capacity to adapt to global aviation trends.

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