

Spotlight on Consumer Rights in Air Transport at Regional Training

1



Officials handling consumer welfare in air transport attending training in Uganda

Consumers of aviation services in Africa often lack protection from poor service delivery and are largely unaware of their rights. Even when informed, they frequently encounter institutional challenges such as weak enforcement and limited access to relevant information.

Recognizing the importance of air transport consumers in effective aviation regulation, regional economic communities (RECs) emphasize the need for their involvement. To achieve this, there is a pressing need to establish a framework that operationalizes consumer protection units across member states, RECs, and at the continental level, benefiting air transport consumers across the region.

In light of this, COMESA and the African Civil

Aviation Commission (AFCAC), through the European Union funded, Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme, have organized capacity-building workshops for regional states.

The first workshop, held in Kampala, Uganda from August 26–30, 2024, focused on reviewing national laws, regulations, and policies related to air transport consumer protection. It targeted Consumer Protection Officers from countries in Eastern and Northern Africa, which are member states of the East African Community (EAC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and COMESA.

The workshop aimed to enhance understanding of air passenger rights, specifically under Article 9.6

of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) on Consumer Protection Regulations. The YD seeks to liberalize Africa's air transport market.

Eng. Nicholas Ndema, Aviation Expert at COMESA, addressed the delegates, highlighting the fact that many African states continue to protect their national carriers. This approach has stunted the growth of the continent's air transport industry, even as new entrants, like low-cost carriers, seek to foster competition.

"This has ushered in competition in the air transport industry hence the need to ensure our regulations protect air passengers from "false" advertising, tarmac delays, baggage pilfering, and baggage loss," Ndema said. "There is a need to give them access to information necessary to facilitate compensation when required."

to page 3



Ambassador Karolina Stasiak (L) exchange signed financing agreement with COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe.

COMESA, EU Launch New €40 Million Regional Circular Economy Programme

The European Union (EU) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) have launched a new regional Circular Economy Programme, following the signing of a €40 million financing agreement for the “SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa (SWITCH-2-CE in ESA)” initiative.

The agreement was signed on 16 August 2024 by the Head of the European Union Delegation to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, Ambassador Karolina Stasiak, and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe in the margins of a strategic dialogue conducted at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

The initiative focuses on the inclusive transition from a linear to a circular economy, while promoting sustainable business models, impact investments and creating jobs for the future.

SWITCH-2-CE in ESA will contribute to reverse environmental degradation and recover natural capital, improve resource efficiency and reduce waste and pollution. More specifically, the

programme will target the Packaging & Plastic Waste, as well as the Electronics & E-Waste value chains development within the COMESA region.

As such, it establishes a close link to the sustainable sourcing of critical raw materials in East and Southern Africa.

At the dialogue, attended by Ambassadors

“Our joint regional programmes have been instrumental in addressing key issues, such as trade facilitation along key transport corridors, the development of regional value chains, facilitating market access, infrastructure development, and capacity building. These regional initiatives have not only strengthened our partnership but have also contributed to upgrading the lives and increase prosperity in our regions.” Amb. Karolina Stasiak

and representatives of EU Member States, discussions focused on aligning key priorities, and exchanges on institutional developments, as well as on the ongoing and new cooperation and partnership projects.

The EU confirmed that its political priorities for 2025-2029 will continue to champion partnerships promoting sustainability, green, circular and digital transformation, as reflected in the Global Gateway Strategy, the European Green Deal, the Digital Strategy, and the Africa-EU Partnership, which frames our relation as the closest neighbours.

In view of geopolitical uncertainties, but also of geopolitical challenges and opportunities, the EU will further invest in economic resilience with its closest strategic partners.

Ambassador Stasiak emphasized, “Our joint regional programmes have been instrumental in addressing key issues, such as trade facilitation along key transport corridors, the development of regional value chains, facilitating market access, infrastructure development, and capacity



building. These regional initiatives have not only strengthened our partnership but have also contributed to upgrading the lives and increase prosperity in our regions.”

The Ambassador also congratulated COMESA on the recent entry into force of the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) with SADC and EAC – an important milestone towards the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Ms Kapwepwe underlined COMESA's commitment to working closely with the EU to deepen this partnership and ensure its continued success.

“This Strategic Dialogue provides an opportunity



Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, Amb. Matthias Reusing and Assistant SG - Administration and Finance, Dr. Dev Haman



to review the progress and effectiveness of ongoing EU programmes within the COMESA region, explore potential areas for future cooperation and new programme development, align our strategic goals and ensure that upcoming initiatives are well-coordinated and mutually beneficial.”

EU and COMESA have a long-standing cooperation and partnership, built on a shared vision of regional integration and connectivity, dismantling barriers to regional trade, to increase policy coherence, and to stimulate sustainable economic growth and development.

Spotlight on Consumer Rights....

➡ continued from page 1

Ndema emphasized the need for harmonized consumer protection regulations across Africa, or a specialized set of rules focused on air transport consumer rights.

Mr. Fred Bamwesigye, Director General of the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority, stressed the importance of balancing consumer protection with the sustainability of the air transport industry. “Building consumer confidence in the aviation sector requires protecting their rights while ensuring the industry’s continued growth,” he said.

He added: “This workshop should therefore identify specific consumer issues that need prioritization, identify capacity gaps, share global best practices in consumer protection. Above all identify ways and means of implementing or “harmonizing” consumer protection policies, laws and regulations.”

Mr. Paul Christan Rwegasha, Principal Civil Aviation Officer at the East African Community, urged government authorities to create consumer protection laws that balance the interests of consumers with industry competitiveness. These laws must consider the diverse social, political, and economic contexts of African states while maintaining aviation safety and security.

Dr. Zacharia Kingori, IGAD’s Infrastructure Coordinator, outlined the benefits of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) for consumers.

“Liberalization increases competition, leading to better services, lower prices, and more choices,” he noted. “However, it also requires robust protection of consumer rights related to flight cancellations, delays, and lost baggage.”



Dr Lucas Njoroge (R) presents certificate to a participant accompanied by Dr. Naglaa Nozahie (centre) and other guests.

Advancing Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Central Banks

As part of an initiative to accelerate the adoption of Big Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Machine Learning in the financial sector, the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) is conducting a training program for regional Central Banks. The main objective is to build capacity for adopting Big Data technology and AI, with a focus on relevant use cases within the financial and banking sectors. This initiative is aligned with the CMI's 2024 work plan, which was approved by the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks in November 2023.

One of the most recent trainings was held in Cairo, Egypt, from August 18 to 22, 2024, under the theme "Applications of Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Central Banking." The event saw the participation of 50 delegates from 11 COMESA member Central Banks, including representatives from Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In her address to the delegates, Dr. Naglaa Nozahie, Governor's Advisor for Africa Affairs at the Central Bank of Egypt, emphasized the importance of the training in light of new private sector financial products and services. She highlighted the impact of digital wallets, mobile payment apps, and emerging digital assets such as cryptocurrencies and stablecoins, all of which are driven by

technological advances, demographic shifts, and evolving consumer behaviour.

"These technological advances are largely powered by Big Data analytics and artificial intelligence," Dr. Nozahie stated.

Echoing the importance of technology in modern banking, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, Director of CMI, emphasized the synergy between AI and Big Data. He noted that the vast amounts of data generated, combined with AI's capability to process and analyze such data, make the two technologies almost inseparable.

The training provided participants with a step-by-step approach to understanding the application of Big Data Analytics and AI in central banking. It began by exploring the need for these technologies, their evolution, and the broader ecosystem surrounding them.

In addition to expanding their knowledge of Big Data—its origins, characteristics, and implementation challenges—participants also gained insights into Machine Learning (ML) and its potential benefits for the financial and banking sectors, particularly for central banks. The delegates shared their knowledge and experiences and committed to advancing the adoption of these technologies in the daily operations of their respective central banks.



Dr. Mohamed Kadah

COMESA, IOM Dialogue on Free Movement Protocol

COMESA and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) convened a two-day dialogue on the COMESA Free Movement Agenda and Stakeholders' Validation Workshop in Kigali, Rwanda. The event focused on the "Draft Impact Assessment Report" on the economic and social benefits of free movement of labour and skills mobility within the region.

Participants included migration and trade experts from the 21 COMESA member states, alongside representatives from the African Union Commission, the European Union Delegation, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Director for Southern Africa, and the Regional Director/Country Representative of the IOM.

The workshop was officially opened by Dr. Alexis Kabayiza, Chief Technical Advisor in the Ministry of Trade and Industry for Rwanda on August 26-27, 2024. He called on the participants to come up with recommendations to ensure the implementation of the free movement protocol for the benefit of the region.

"These bilateral and trilateral instruments are most welcome as they are in line with the principle of variable geometry and edge the



COMESA, IISD Sign MOU to support sustainable development in eastern and southern Africa

COMESA and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to co-operate in areas of common interest in pursuing their respective mandates and strategic objectives of contribution towards sustainable economic growth and development.

Under the partnership, the two organizations will bolster their collaboration in support of the responsible and sustainable agriculture and industry investments by strengthening technical and institutional capacities of COMESA Member States.

Issued on 23 August 2024, the MoU coverage is focused on the fields of amongst others; Responsible investment in agriculture and food systems, policy to attract sustainable investment, Sustainable production, consumption and trade of agri-food products, Sustainable industrialization through research and development and climate change support.

These efforts are guided by the Medium-Term Strategy Plan (2021-2025) for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic (2019-2023) and the IISD Strategic Plan (2020 – 2025).

Vice President, Global Strategies and Managing Director, Europe Natalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder, and COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signed the MoU on behalf of their respective organizations.

“This MoU represents a critical step forward in our shared commitment to fostering sustainable development in the region. By combining our expertise and resources, we will strengthen the capacities of COMESA Member States, ensuring that investments in agriculture and industry are not only responsible but also sustainable,” said Europe Natalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder.

COMESA and IISD will leverage on innovate research, analysis, knowledge sharing and technical assistance to promote food

security, responsible agriculture investments. This partnership between COMESA and IISD will contribute to efficient and effective development and implementation of COMESA programmes that will enhance regional trade and investment in agri-food systems.

“This partnership is poised to contribute significantly to the efficient and effective development and implementation of COMESA programmes, which will, in turn, enhance regional trade and investment in agri-food systems,” Kapwepwe stated adding that “By working together, we can achieve our shared vision of a more sustainable future for the region. This MoU is just the beginning of what I believe will be a fruitful and impactful partnership,” concluded Kapwepwe.

Further, the two organizations will organize will provide technical assistance, capacity building and sensitization workshop to COMESA Member States. IISD is an independent think tank that champions solutions to the planet's greatest sustainability

Digital platform for women entrepreneurs now has new resources for learning

In a bid to enhance its support for women entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment, the digital platform for women in business – 50 Million African Women Speak – has introduced a new section which provides a broad range of learning resources on various aspects of business.

The resources are available via the landing page of the platform (www.womenconnect.org) and through the 50MAWSP app.

They were generated through the boot camp for African women entrepreneurs which the 50MAWSP implementing RECs, namely COMESA, East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States jointly organized with the African Development Bank (AfDB) between March and July this year.

Approximately 1,000 women entrepreneurs from more than 25 African countries signed up for the

business training boot camp, which was conducted online.

The newly added content is designed to be relevant to users irrespective of the country or region they come from and covers areas which include: starting a business, structuring the operations of your business, developing go to market strategies, e-commerce and building an effective online presence, structuring a scalable business and financial structuring and funding options for entrepreneurs.

COMESA's Director for Gender and Social Affairs Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde said the new addition to the platform would facilitate self-learning for women in business and enhance their capacity in key areas such as marketing their businesses online, managing finances, identifying opportunities for funding and scaling their enterprises.

“The resources which the platform is making available were generated following a survey

where women entrepreneurs who use the platform indicated which areas they needed their capacity to be enhanced, so we are confident that they will facilitate them to do business better, while also going a long way in enriching our platform,” Mrs Hamusonde remarked.

“We are grateful to our implementing partners, EAC and ECOWAS, as well as the AfDB and 50MAWSP national focal points who all played a critical role in ensuring that the boot camp for women entrepreneurs took place and through it a wealth of knowledge was generated for the benefit of women who may not have been able to participate in the live training sessions,” she added.

The learning resources are available in text and video formats.

COMESA and China Strengthen Ties!



Ambassador Mr. Han Jing presents accreditation to COMESA SG Chileshe Kapwepwe

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is set to formalize a major partnership with China during the upcoming Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This MoU will focus on key areas like capacity building, agricultural development, and investment opportunities across various sectors.

Key areas of focus include capacity building, agricultural development with a focus on value addition and post-harvest loss management, as well as investment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Other priorities include the development of the leather industry, public and private sector investment, and technological advancements in irrigation systems and logistics.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe disclosed this during a ceremony at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia, on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, where she received credentials from the Chinese Ambassador to Zambia, Mr. Han Jing, accrediting him as Special Representative to COMESA.

Key areas of collaboration include hydropower and

solar energy, industrialization, trade—particularly e-commerce—and infrastructure development. Additionally, the focus extends to digital payment systems for clearing goods and sovereign currency settlement, fostering globalization through both blue and green economies, and addressing climate change mitigation.

“China remained one of the major sources of imports for the COMESA region commanding a market share of 19% of COMESA’s imports in 2023,” the SG noted.

In 2023, the value of imports from China reached US\$ 49 billion rising by 1.8% from US\$ 48 billion in 2022. COMESA’s exports to China grew by 3% from USD 24 billion in 2022 to USD 25 billion in 2023. The China export market accounted for 13% of COMESA’s global exports in 2023.

Since 2016, China and COMESA have jointly operated the International Centre on Small Hydro Power in Hangzhou. Earlier this year, COMESA and the International Centre organized a capacity-building workshop on small hydro power development standards, aimed at policy

makers and energy project developers, at COMESA Headquarters. The workshop was funded by the International Development Fund through the UNIDO Small Hydro Power Program. In addition, China, through its Ministry of Water Resources, and COMESA signed a cooperation agreement establishing a visiting scholar program. This initiative is designed to support COMESA’s development while deepening China-Africa cooperation.

As part of this initiative, the COMESA Secretariat received one Chinese visiting scholar for one year from 1st June 2023 to 31st May 2024. The scholar served as focal point for strengthening collaboration between China and COMESA. This year, China has provided 10 COMESA Staff with scholarships for short-term training in various universities in China.

Ambassador Jing pledged to uphold the strong relationship between his Embassy and COMESA, highlighting the organization’s crucial role as Africa’s largest regional economic bloc.



Immigration and Trade Experts during a two-day dialogue on the COMESA Free Movement Agenda and Stakeholders' Validation Workshop in Kigali, Rwanda.

COMESA, IOM Dialogue on Free Movement

➡ continued from page 4

Member States incrementally closer to realizing the full benefits inherent in free movement of factors of production within the Common Market," Dr. Kabayiza stated.

Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes, COMESA, Dr. Mohamed Kadah, emphasized the importance of the free movement protocol, noting that the region cannot achieve proper regional integration if factors of production, such as labour and capital, cannot move freely across borders.

He acknowledged the challenges posed by negative political sentiments toward migration, including xenophobic attacks, modern slavery, and the violation of migrants' rights, particularly those of migrant workers. However, he stressed that an effective migration management system can lead to economic development and growth.

"Our ability to manage migration effectively also depends on having reliable migration data at both regional and national levels," Dr Kadah said, announcing that the COMESA Council had decided to develop a regional migration database.

This database will link with existing regional and international databases, such as those of the IOM and the SADC Labour Migration Observatory.

Dr Kadah also highlighted the increase in bilateral agreements among member states, noting that as of August 2024, several agreements had been signed between countries like Burundi, Zambia, Rwanda, and Eswatini. These agreements, ranging from social protection to defence cooperation, reflect a positive impact on COMESA's migration programme.

He commended Rwanda and Seychelles for fully

implementing the free movement protocol by removing visa requirements for African citizens.

IOM Director Mme. Mariama Cisse noted that the dialogue presented a great opportunity for the COMESA Secretariat and member states to address challenges related to labour migration.

"Protocols on the free movement of persons, labour, services, rights of establishment, and residence were developed to create a true common market within the region," she said.

She emphasized that the movement of people is central to regional integration, as it strengthens the political and cultural bonds within a region. Additionally, enabling the movement of people helps create opportunities in labour markets, particularly for the millions of youth entering the workforce each year.

COMESA to Participate in Climate Conference in Berlin, Germany

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is set to participate in the upcoming Innovate for Climate (I4C) Conference, as well as the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation (ASCENT) Programme.

(ASCENT) Day event, scheduled to take place at the Estrel Congress Center in Berlin, Germany, from September 10th to 13th, 2024. This involvement is part of COMESA's commitment to advancing sustainable and clean energy solutions under the ASCENT Programme.

The I4C conference aims to enhance awareness about carbon markets and energy planning tools. The ASCENT Programme's participating countries, along with other stakeholders, will engage in discussions to address the specific needs of ASCENT-qualifying countries, focusing on climate finance and the adoption of digital technologies. The Innovate for Climate (I4C) platform will facilitate dialogue between the public and private sectors, showcasing opportunities and innovations for

low-carbon, resilient development. It will also foster knowledge exchange to promote investments in transformative climate-smart solutions.

The ASCENT Day, a key feature of this conference, is being jointly organized by the World Bank and COMESA. The COMESA delegation shall be led by Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah.

In collaboration with the World Bank, COMESA has extended invitations to two participants from each ASCENT country, including a Focal Point for Digitalization Tools and a Focal Point for Climate Finance/Carbon Markets. These representatives will play a pivotal role in implementing ASCENT activities at the national level and will serve as key contacts beyond the conference.

During the three-day conference, COMESA will showcase various components of the ASCENT Programme at a dedicated pavilion. The Programme Implementation Unit (PIU) will provide

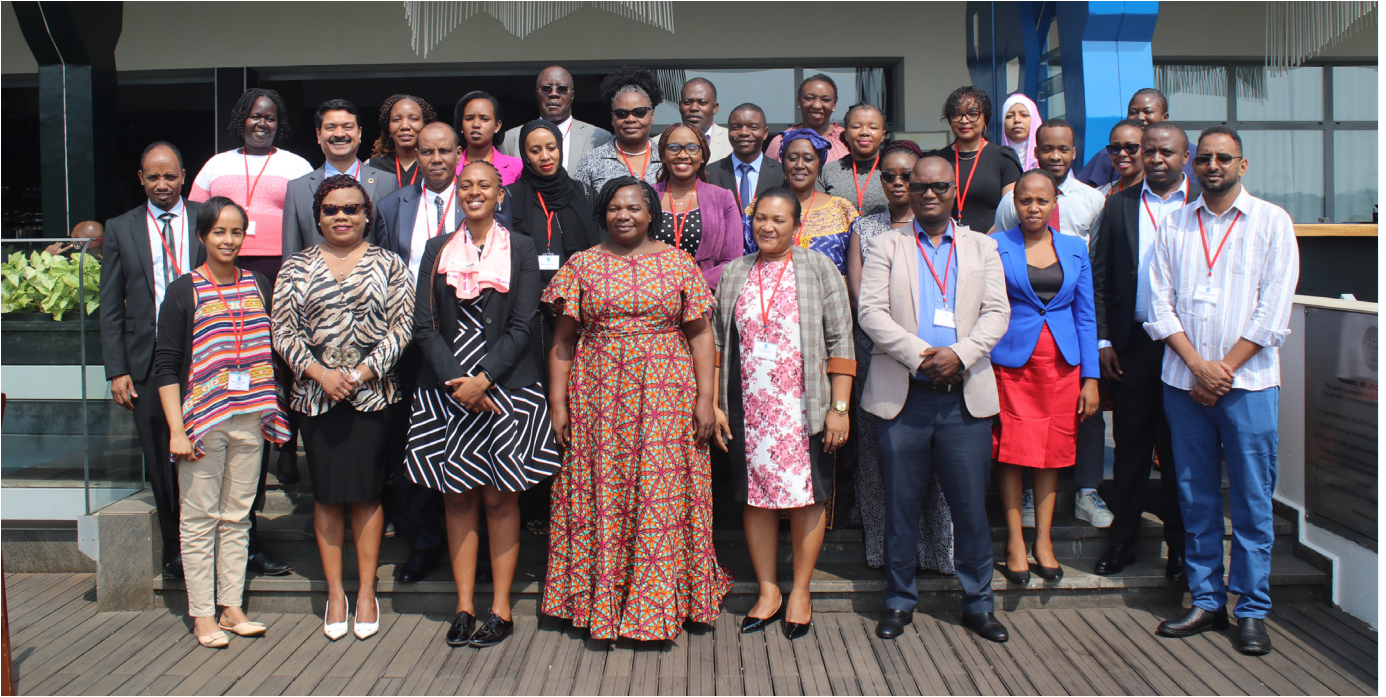
detailed explanations of ASCENT's initiatives, including digital planning tools for energy that will be displayed by potential collaborators.

Key components of the ASCENT Programme include the Digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (D-MRV) Platforms for Energy Access and Climate Finance, the Project Preparation Facility, the Advisory Support Facility, and initiatives focused on knowledge exchange, skills development, and consumer engagement.

The ASCENT Programme, financed by the World Bank with an investment of US\$5 billion, is an ambitious energy initiative aiming to leverage an additional US\$10 billion from other investors and financiers and provide electricity access to over 100 million people across more than 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa over a seven-year period. It seeks to accelerate energy access efforts through both grid-based and Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) solutions, as well as promoting clean cooking technologies and fuels.

COMESA DAIRY

Date	Activity	Venue
31 – 8 Sept 2024	56th Eswatini International Trade Fair	Manzini Eswatini
02-06 Sep	Capacity Building Training Workshop on Air Transport Consumer Protection under The Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) Programme	Livingstone, Zambia
9 - 13 Sep	Innovate for Climate (I4C) Conference & Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation (ASCENT) Programme Day	Berlin, Germany
17 – 19 Sep	COMESA Annual Research Forum	Virtual
17 – 18 Sep	COMESA Technical Committee on Health Meeting	Lusaka
19 Sep	The Second Meeting of the Ministers of Health	Lusaka
24-27 Sep	Validation workshop of communication strategy, action plan and corporate brand for SPS programme in Africa	Lusaka



Participants to the Regional Networking and Mentoring Meeting for Women in the Pharmaceutical Sector

Kigali Hosts Regional Networking and Mentoring Meeting to Drive Gender Equality in COMESA

A Regional Networking and Mentoring Meeting for Women in the Pharmaceutical Sector took place in Kigali, Rwanda, from August 27 to 28, 2024. The gathering offered women in the pharmaceutical industry across the COMESA region and beyond a valuable platform to network and collaborate.

The meeting was focused on leveraging existing policies, such as the COMESA Gender Policy and the COMESA Social Charter, to create more opportunities for women in the sector. It also aims to align regional initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those that emphasize gender equality, decent work, and economic growth.

Participants from the 15 COMESA member states involved in a three-year, Africa Development Bank-funded project attended the workshop. The project aims to bolster the pharmaceutical industry through enhanced capacities of regional regulatory bodies, quality control systems, and research institutions, ensuring the effective manufacturing of safe and high-quality pharmaceutical products.

In her opening remarks, Guest of Honor, Madam Martine Umuhoza, Deputy Director General of the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority, highlighted the importance of collaboration and networking among women in the pharmaceutical

sector.

“Our goal for the next two days is to improve networking, mentorship, and leadership opportunities for women in the pharmaceutical industry across the 21 Member States, with a focus on advancing gender equality in this crucial sector,” she stated.

Despite progress in economic integration, Madam Umuhoza noted that significant gender disparities persist, which hinder the sector’s ability to innovate and address diverse needs. She emphasized that the meeting was a critical step toward overcoming these challenges.

The Director of Gender and Social Services Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde reiterated COMESA’s commitment to health and well-being, citing the Health Framework that provides strategic direction to member states in addressing health priorities and challenges. However, she also pointed out the lack of comprehensive data on gender participation in the pharmaceutical industry, despite the growing presence of women.

According to the COMESA Gender Policy of 2016, women’s participation in intra-regional trade and investment remains suboptimal, despite the region’s progress in economic integration.

Mrs. Hamusonde, speaking at the event,

underscored the importance of women’s participation at all levels of the pharmaceutical sector, from research and development to leadership.

“This meeting is more than just a discussion; it is an action-oriented forum where we will explore the challenges, identify opportunities, and develop concrete strategies to enhance the participation of women in the pharmaceutical sector,” she concluded.

The COMESA Support towards Regional Pharmaceutical Sector Development project continues to play a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the pharmaceutical industry in the region.

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“Our goal for the next two days is to improve networking, mentorship, and leadership opportunities for women in the pharmaceutical industry across the 21 Member States, with a focus on advancing gender equality in this crucial sector,” Madam Martine Umuhoza



Delegates attending the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulation awareness meeting in Eswatini

COMESA Drives Rapid Implementation of Seed Trade Harmonization in Ethiopia and Eswatini

COMESA, through its Specialized Agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), has launched awareness campaigns and policy dialogue meetings in Ethiopia and Eswatini to accelerate the implementation of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations. These efforts are aimed at advancing the regulations both nationally and regionally.

The meetings, held on August 7th in Ethiopia and August 13th in Eswatini, marked the official launch of the gazetted National Aligned Seed Regulations. These events were designed to enhance understanding and assist the two COMESA Member States in strategizing the operationalization of the COMESA Seed System at the national level.

During the Eswatini meeting, Nelson Mavuso, Eswatini's Director of Agriculture, emphasized the importance of the COMESA Regulations in reducing barriers to cross-border seed trade. He noted that harmonizing seed regulations across the region is crucial for minimizing trade bottlenecks that affect seed movement.

"The COMESA regulations are crucial in contributing to solving the problem of inadequate quality seeds in the COMESA region," Mavuso said. "The process of availing quality seeds to farmers requires a true public and private seed

stakeholder partnership as demonstrated by the cordial partnership between the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and COMESA/ACTESA since 2010 in moving forward with this harmonization."

ACTESA Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Mukuka highlighted the significance of the Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations in improving farmers' access to quality, effective, and affordable seeds. He pointed out that only 20 percent of the 90 million smallholder farmers in the COMESA region have access to quality and improved seeds. This limitation impacts approximately 130 million people out of the 610 million COMESA population, leaving them food insecure and trapped in chronic poverty and hunger.

"Regional seed market is still fragmented into small national markets; each country operates its seed policies and regulations differently from other COMESA Member States," Dr. Mukuka noted. "This fragmentation is costly for seed companies and leads to delays in getting quality seeds to small-scale farmers. The COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations are designed to address these challenges."

This is not only costly for the seed companies but also results in prolonged delays before the seed of good quality can find its way to the small-scale farmers, these are some of the challenges that the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Regulations

seeks to address.

Dr. Mukuka also highlighted the development of the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP) as a testament to COMESA's commitment to advancing the Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations.

COMSHIP is aimed at enhancing seed production, reliability, and trade, while boosting the competitiveness of the seed industry in the Southern and Eastern African (ESA) region. It represents an ongoing process to adapt the seed regulations, facilitate trade between COMESA member states, and support local companies and small-scale farmers.

The four strategic objectives of COMSHIP are: preparing for and supporting phased domestication, raising awareness of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations, monitoring and improving the implementation strategy, and building capacity in seed production and support for smallholder farmers.

Since its facilitation, COMSHIP has led to the gazetting of the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations in May 2014 in ten COMESA Member States: Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Malawi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.