

COMESA NEWS

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COMESA Labour Migration Statistics Report **LAUNCHED**



CHAIRPERSON

SECRETARY GENERAL

Editorial

Labour Report may nudge countries to domesticate the free movement protocols

The first COMESA Labour Migration Statistics report has been published and it is quite an interesting read. Long, overdue, this report is a joint effort of COMESA and its partners notably among others, Statistics Sweden (Stat Sweden), Statistics Africa/ African Union Commission of the African Union, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Southern African Migration Management, funded by the European Union, under the European Development Fund (11 EDF). The report uses data captured for the purpose of a continental report that was launched in November 2021, which was collected under the AU-ILO-IOM-UNECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa. Thus, COMESA and partners deliberately chose to launch this report during the joint meeting of Ministers in charge of labour and immigration. This had the effect of bringing to the front burner the issues regarding the slow domestication of the COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visas, (the Visa Protocol) and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, Right of Establishment and Residence, generally referred to as the Protocol on Free Movement. The implementation of these two hold the greatest promise of achieving free movement of factors of production across COMESA Member States and deepening regional integration. The labour migration statistics in the report provides evidence on the potential benefits that freer movement of people would bring forth to the regional economies. Every country has its own comparative advantages amongst its populations. These can be exchanged for mutual benefits such as excess skilled manpower which can bridge gaps in another state to enhance its productivity while at the same time benefitting the source countries with remittances. It is hoped the report will encourage policy makers to consider favourably the domestication of the visa and the free movement protocols.



Mwangi G

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COMESA Competition Commission
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Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz

New COMESA HQs project boosted

Saudi Arabia contributes \$2m towards the project

Plans to construct a new headquarters of COMESA received a major boost in July after the Government of Saudi Arabia donated two million dollars towards the project.

Saudi Ambassador to Zambia H.E. Ali Saad Alkahtani, presented the cheque to COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka on 24 July 2023.

Ms Kapwepwe described the contribution as significant, as it puts COMESA a step closer to the beginning in earnest of the construction of the new headquarters.

"This donation is very opportune as we embark on a full-fledged resource mobilization effort to raise funding for the construction of the COMESA headquarters," she said.

The project is estimated to cost USD 35 million.

Amb. Alkahtani, said the motivation to support the construction of the new COMESA headquarters stems from the strong relations that exist between the Kingdom and the COMESA bloc based

on mutual respect and joint action in all fields.

It also comes as an affirmation of the Kingdom's support for efforts being undertaken by COMESA to achieve its goals which include strengthening relations among the Member States, promoting trade, encouraging peace, stability and promoting economic development, he added.

The Saudi donation came shortly after the 22nd COMESA Summit, in Lusaka, on 8 June 2023 which directed the Secretariat to work with the Government of Zambia to hasten the implementation of the project. Zambia President Hakainde Hichilema, who is the current

chair of COMESA, also undertook to oversee the construction of the new headquarters as one of his priorities.

The decision to construct a new headquarters was made by the COMESA Heads of State and Government several years ago. In 2015, the Government of Zambia provided ten acres of land for this project, near the main international airport.

Currently, COMESA Secretariat is based in downtown Lusaka in office premises procured in 1997. Over time, this facility has become constrained owing to the expansion of the organization in terms of the number of projects and staff complement.



Saudi Ambassador to Zambia H.E. Ali Saad Alkahtani, presents USD 2 million dummy cheque to COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (R) and Zambia Minister for Labour and Social Security Hon. Brenda Mwika Tambatamba launches the COMESA Labour Migration Statistics Report with Labour Minister Hon Florence Bore, (Kenya) and Home Affairs Minister Hon. Kenneth Zikhale Ng'oma (Malawi).

COMESA Labour Migration Statistics Report launched

The first report on labour migration statistics in the COMESA region was launched at the joint meeting of Ministers responsible for immigration and labour held in Livingstone, Zambia, on 18 August 2023.

The report covers data for the decade 2010 to 2019 which was collected under the AU-ILO-IOM-UNECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa. The report contains the results on both the regional (COMESA) and the national levels.

Key findings of the report include the steady rise of the total population within COMESA from 488 million in 2010 to 567 million in 2019 representing an annual growth rate of 2.7 per cent. There were 223.8 million males and 224.6 million females in 2010, compared to 2019 where males were 283.6 million and females 283.9 million.

The working-age population in the region was estimated at 338.4 million in 2019, which implies an increase of 27.2 per cent since 2010. The female working-age population grew by around 26.7 per cent over the period, while the

corresponding growth rate for men was 27.7 per cent.

During the period, male labour force, which refers to all persons of working age, accounted for 57.4 per cent of the total labour force with females at 42.3 per cent.

“This suggests that greater efforts need to be invested into the development of policies and strategies aimed at removing the obstacles that prevent women in Africa from entering the labour market,” the report states.

Sudan, Rwanda and Zimbabwe recorded the highest labour force participation rates in COMESA region.

Regarding labour migration, the report notes a steady rise, as indicated by estimates of the international migrant population of the region, which increased from 5.7 million in 2010 to 9.6 million in 2019. The estimated number of working-age international migrants in COMESA region increased from 4.1 million in 2010 to 7.2 million in 2019.

The population of young international migrant workers in the region grew

from 1.2m to 2m between 2010 and 2019 constituting about 38% of total international labour force migrant population.

The volume of remittances sent by international migrants within the COMESA region and by those living and working outside COMESA increased from US\$ 20 billion to US\$ 39.6 billion from 2010 to 2019. The volume of remittances increased by 98 per cent under the period of review.

At the regional level, the report recommends the establishment of a system for regular reporting on migration statistics by Member States and for regular production of labour migration statistics based on administrative data sources. Facilitate the use of harmonized definitions and indicators relating to labour migration in each of the regions.

At the national level, it recommends the effective sharing of migration data which is aligned with international standards and definitions with COMESA. This is in addition to establishing mechanisms for the dissemination of labour migration data at the national level with relevant disaggregation.



Workshop on the development of the draft National Strategy on the Elimination of NTBs in Kenya

Initiative to assist MS develop NTBs elimination strategies

About 29% of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) reported through the tripartite online reporting, monitoring and eliminating mechanism are in the intra-COMESA trade. Majority of them, 82% emanate from operational issues including on Rules of Origin while the remaining 18% are policies/measures that result in NTBs.

Currently, the tripartite NTBs system, which is a joint initiative of the regional economic blocs, COMESA, the EAC and SADC is used to maintain vigilance on the NTBs as they pose the greatest hindrance to intra-regional trade.

COMESA Member States are therefore under obligation to establish the recommended institutional and regulatory frameworks. These include strengthening the NTB implementation framework at national level, including setting timelines for their elimination as they occur.

Notwithstanding, some Member States

lack the capacities to report, monitor and resolve such trading disputes, according to COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango:

“Besides, multiple memberships to various RECs also pose a challenge to harmonizing the various mechanisms for resolving trade disputes across regional and international markets,” Dr Onyango said.

He was addressing delegates at the Kenya National Workshop on the Development of the National Strategy on Elimination of NTBs conducted in Mombasa, Kenya on 3 – 7 July 2023.

“The importance of eliminating NTBs cannot be overemphasized. Worldwide, NTBs have become an unfortunate trade policy tool to protect domestic economies,” Dr Christopher Onyango

The strategy is expected to facilitate reduction in NTBs affecting Kenya’s trade through a systematic identification and efforts to eliminate stringent non-tariff measures regulating imports and exports and expounding policy interventions for resolving policy related NTBs.

The workshop was part of COMESA’s technical support to Member States to establish appropriate institutional and regulatory frameworks for dealing with NTBs. The COMESA regulations on elimination of NTBs provide basis for the development of national NTBs elimination strategies at national and regional levels.

The strategy is expected to set out the general policy framework for Kenya’s engagement with regional trading partners as well as the AfCFTA and World Trade Organization frameworks and effectively address some of the long standing NTBs between the country and

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Initiative to assist MS...

Continued from page 3

its key trading partners.

Similar support has been provided to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar and Malawi. More are planned for Comoros, Egypt and Tunisia.

Kenya is among the Member States complying with the legal provisions of the NTBs regulations. This includes the formal establishment of functional NTBs institutional arrangements specifically the National NTBs Focal Points and formal establishment and notification of its National Monitoring Committees.

"The importance of eliminating NTBs cannot be overemphasized. Worldwide, NTBs have become an unfortunate trade policy tool to protect domestic economies," Dr Onyango stressed.

Most of these measures, including sanitary and phyto sanitary and technical barriers to trade are hardly reported, yet significantly hinder intra-regional flow of goods and services in the region.

The use of NTBs increased steadily after the 2007 – 2008 financial crisis and has escalated following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some NTBs have remained unresolved for periods ranging from one year to more than a decade.

Participants at the workshop included members of the national monitoring committee, members of the Kenya cross border trader's association, representatives of the transporters association and the private sector. It was funded by the European Union through the European Development Fund 11 under the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.



Burundi stakeholders' awareness workshop on the single African air transport market in Bujumbura

Awareness campaign towards open skies concludes in Burundi

The first round of an awareness campaign to enlist regional States that have not yet signed the commitment to establish the single African air transport market to do so, concluded in Burundi on 20 July 2023. The one-month campaign was conducted by COMESA under the Support to the Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme. It covered Somalia, Malawi, Seychelles and Burundi.

Targeted were stakeholders in air transport and related sectors primarily in government and private sector, to create awareness of the establishment of Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and to underscore its benefits.

The four countries are part of the remaining 16 in Africa that are yet to sign to the SAATM, with 13 being in the region covered by the SATSD programme: the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region.

Since its launch in January 2018, 36 AU Member States have signed up to establish SAATM, which the Burundi Assistant Minister for Transport Industry and Tourism Hon. Kanene Jean Claude described as "a clear indication of the commitment that the continent has on realising the economic growth and integration agenda."

Hon Kanene was speaking during the SAATM awareness workshop in Burundi conducted on 19 – 20 July 2023 in Bujumbura. He underscored

the commitment of Burundi during the implementation of the entire Support to Air Transport Sector Development programme.

Outlining the benefits that countries stand to gain from acceding to the single air transport market, the team leader of the SATSD programme Mr Adikiny Olwenge, cited a study conducted before COVID-19 on costs and benefits on "Open Skies" in Burundi.

"There will be an increase in traffic by more than 66%, which will attract more than 9,380 new jobs directly and indirectly and result in an annual increase of 0.19% of the total GDP," he noted.

The study focused on air transport in the East African Region. It highlighted the fact that liberalization will offer a means of restructuring the existing carriers in the region, increasing their profitability by expanding into new markets, accessing a wider pool of investment thus reducing fares and harmonizing taxation of air passengers across the region.

COMESA is spearheading the Support to Air Transport Sector Development programme on behalf of the other regional economic communities, namely East African Community, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Indian Ocean Commission, and the Southern African Development Community. The SATSD is an eight million euros programme funded by the European Union.



Immigration and labour ministerial meeting in Livingstone, Zambia

Fresh Thrust Towards Free Movement in the COMESA Region ...as Immigration, Labour Ministers Meet

Ministers responsible for immigration and labour matters in COMESA have renewed their countries' commitment to implement regional protocols on free movement as a critical step towards unlocking the benefits associated with having free movement of factors of production in the region.

In their meeting conducted on 18 August 2023, in Livingstone, Zambia, the ministers welcomed the initiative to revise the strategy for the implementation of COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visa, and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, Right of Establishment and Residence.

The two protocols have been in existence for a long time but have not yet attained the required ratifications by Member States to enable full implementation. Hence the Ministers adopted the immigration and labour experts' recommendations to have a strong component on capacity building for migration stakeholders in the implementation of the Protocols as well as the past Decisions of the COMESA Council of Ministers relating to migration.

The ministerial meeting was preceded by the joint meeting of heads of immigration and labour and the COMESA Migration

Dialogue (MIDCOM) hosted jointly with the International Organization for Migration with the support of the European Union.

Addressing the ministers, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said there cannot be meaningful integration of the region and the attainment of the aims and objectives of COMESA without the facilitation of seamless movement of goods, services and investment across the region.

"Trade is on-going in goods, provision of services, investment, tangibles and intangibles. However, for the goods, services, and investment to move across borders, there is need for a human interface between them to facilitate an effective delivery of those goods and service," the Secretary General said.

Currently, intra-COMESA trade potential is valued at over US\$100 billion which could be unlocked through enhanced movement of goods and services across the region.

Making a case for enhanced cross border trade, the Regional Director of the International Organization for Migration, Mr. Ashraf el Nour called for facilitation of the safe, orderly and regular movement of small-scale cross border traders who

constitute the largest segment of regional trade. Particularly, he called for ending the informality associated with cross-border trading.

"We do not call for 100% regularisation because that may bring the risk of losing the flexibility that is needed for such trade to grow, to blossom and to expand. So, we need to strike the right balance between ending the informality and bringing some interdisciplinary support to such movement," Mr. Nour said. The Chief Guest at the ministerial meeting Hon. Cornelius Mweetwa, Provincial Minister for Southern Province, Zambia called for more public awareness about the regional initiatives on migration including the protocols on free movement.

"As we implement programmes to facilitate the movement of persons across our borders for development, let us make sure that we also carry our people with us on board," Hon Mweetwa said. "That is the only way we shall be able to address negative perceptions of migration."

At the meeting, the first report on Labour Migration Statistics in the COMESA region and the COMESA Regional Migration Database were launched. The report covers data for the decade 2010 to 2019 and contains the results on both the regional (COMESA) and the national levels. The Database and the report are available on www.comesa.int



The last RECAMP PSC Meeting in Malawi

Taking stock of the regional enterprise competitiveness and access to markets RECAMP focused on products value chains

The COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), comes to an end in December 2023. Launched in January 2020, the programme has been advocating for practical and realistic ways in which to increase private sector participation in the regional and global value chains.

Funded by the EU under the 11th European Development Fund, RECAMP focused on agro-processing, leather and leather products and horticulture value chains.

“There value chains are crucial to our region not only in promoting trade and value addition, but to further provide an opportunity for creating the much-needed jobs for the women and youths in the region,” said the Director of Agriculture and Industry at COMESA Secretariat Mrs Providence Mavubi.

She was speaking during the 3rd and final Programme Steering Committee (PSC) meeting for RECAMP held on 3 – 4 July 2023 in Lilongwe, Malawi. Mrs. Mavubi described the programme as crucial in the regional enterprise space as it has helped improve access to markets for Member States.

“It is encouraging that COMESA Member States have continued to prioritise improving competitiveness, market access and improving the investment climate as a corner stone to growing the regional enterprise across different value chains,” she added.

The objective of the four-year initiative was to contribute to the consolidation of COMESA’s regional integration by enhancing the competitiveness and market access of the private sector in regional and global value chains.

The program has been concentrating on removing barriers to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) access to regional and worldwide markets in the horticulture, agro-processing, and leather and leather goods value chains.

Thirteen member States, namely Comoros, Eswatini, DR Congo, Djibouti, Kenya, Mauritius, Malawi, Uganda, Tunisia, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe participated in the meeting. The COMESA Secretariat and four of its institutions; The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), African Leather and Leather Products Institute, COMESA Business

Council, COMESA Federation of Women in Business and the Regional Investment Agency (RIA) which are the implementing partners of the programme were present.

The meeting provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to interact on matters of mutual interest, take stock of the activities implemented since its inception in January 2020, share experiences, and provide overall strategic guidance towards consolidating the effective implementation of pending activities.

Further, the PSC meeting provided an opportunity take stock of the successes and challenged of the different implementation partners undertaking RECAMP activities as well as developing an exit strategy for sustainability of the activities implemented under this action.

Speaking when he officially opened the meeting, Assistant Director at the Ministry of Trade in Malawi, Mr Mufwa Munthali, stressed the importance of the RECAMP to SMEs in the region. He urged Member States to continue building on the established collaboration efforts and address matters related to competitiveness, access to markets and value chains.



Participants in the 13th Meeting of the Committee on Trade in Services in Mombasa, Kenya

Unlocking the Potential of Trade in Services in Accelerating Intra-Africa Trade and Regional Integration

The service sector has emerged as the driving force towards reshaping economic landscapes across the world. With 54 African countries, 1.3 billion people and \$3.4 trillion in GDP, it is time to leverage significant opportunities for export-led growth, economic diversification, inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) and integration into regional and global value chains.

To this end, the ongoing negotiations on trade in services liberalization programme at COMESA, African Free Continental Trade Area (AfCFTA) and World Trade Organization (WTO) levels are a key step towards accelerating regional economic integration.

At the 13th COMESA meeting of the committee on trade in services, which took place on 24 – 28 July 2023 in Mombasa, Kenya, COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango, described trade in services as a game changer towards unlocking the potential of regional and global trade.

He underscored the relevance of undertaking inventories of legislation, regulations, institutions, and policy measures in the service sector as well

as analysis of the participation of foreign service providers and trade liberalization commitments.

The service trade has been proven to promote greater inclusiveness, particularly for female and young workers and entrepreneurs as well as micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The importance of the sector has been fueled by technological changes and its increasing role as intermediate inputs into production and delivery of other goods and services.

The meeting was directed towards finalisation of the schedules for priority services, review of initial offers from Member States and consideration of the draft procedures for the implementation of article 25(5) of the COMESA regulations on Trade in Services. Dr. Onyango further stated that the introduction of an online platform to facilitate ongoing negotiations will assist in addressing obstacles to trade in services and reaping the potential benefits its liberalization offers.

Afreximbank has been supporting the establishment of the online platform to facilitate these negotiations.

“We hope the capacity building to be provided by the bank enables Member States to fully utilise the platform during the negotiations to develop well informed and analytical decisions both under COMESA, continental and WTO negotiations,” he said.

Recent studies by the COMESA Secretariat have established important roles being played by small-scale cross-border traders in various service sectors. This is consistent with the studies by service and service Bank (2022), which established that 59 per cent of service women worked in the services sector and nine out of ten service firms were MSMEs in 2021.

The European Union, Afrexim Bank, WTO, WTI and the World Bank supported the initiatives.

Over 17 COMESA countries, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Burundi, Uganda, Zambia, Egypt, Kenya, Comoros, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, DRC Congo, Madagascar, Libya, Eswatini, Seychelles and Djibouti participated.



Participants at the COMESA AU/AGA Meeting in Lusaka

COMESA and AU/AGA Push for second Phase of Youth Engagement Project

The pilot phase of the Joint AU/AGA-COMESA Project on Youth Engagement in Democratic Governance and Socio-economic Development Processes in Africa was conducted on 29 - 30 June this year, as the implementing and cooperating partners held the Fourth Project Steering Committee at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia.

The meeting brought together representatives from the African Union Commission (AUC), African Governance Architecture (AGA) Secretariat which was COMESA's implementing partner, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which was the co-operating partner.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General (Admin & Finance) Dr Dev Haman presided over the opening of the meeting. He lauded the project as a great success, citing the capacity-building of youth leaders, support for youth networks and development of knowledge products that were undertaken since implementation began in June 2019.

Ms Patience Chiradza, Director for Governance and Conflict Prevention at

the AU congratulated the partners upon the successful execution of the pilot phase, adding that the AU recognizes the critical role citizens play in democratic governance, conflict prevention and sustainable peace.

"The African citizens, particularly young women and men are important stakeholders in unpacking governance and holding our institutions accountable. The project also has a healthy balance between issues of democratic governance and socio-economic development which are different faces of the same coin," Ms Chiradza said. "This is why we need to double down on our efforts and ensure that phase 2 of this project happens."

On behalf of SDC, Ms Sarah Fankhauser, head of finance, personnel and administration spoke of the "need to celebrate the project's achievements" and praised its coping mechanisms in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are very happy that targets were achieved even far beyond what was set out," Ms Fankhauser said, adding that "strong leadership and ownership" had been crucial and making young people

drivers of change was key.

The deliberations of the two-day meeting focused on the findings of the final evaluation of the project, presentation of the financial report and audit report and the way forward following the pilot phase.

Dr Haman thanked SDC and the AU through AGA Secretariat "for the quality of partnership which we enjoyed during the pilot phase of this project."

"I wish to affirm COMESA's readiness to continue working with SDC and AUC-AGA and I look forward to continuing our discussions on obtaining support for the implementation of the second phase," he stated.

Other delegates at the meeting included Amb Salah Hammad, Head of the AGA and APSA Secretariat, Ms Beatrice Hamusonde, Director for Gender and Social Affairs, Amb Salvator Matata, COMESA Liaison Officer with the African Union and SDC Senior Regional Governance Adviser (Eastern and Southern Africa), Ms Annonciate Ndikummasabo, among others.

Small Scale Cross Border Traders Trained on Trade Facilitation

Close to 90 Small Scale Cross Border traders at Nakonde in Zambia and Tunduma border posts in Tanzania have been trained in trade facilitation processes. The training included aspects of crossing the border formally, preparing to cross the border, dealing with harassment, corruption and bribery, working together as a group and formalizing growing their businesses.

The training modules were developed by the International Trade Centre (ITC) who are co-delegates implementing some activities under the overall coordination of COMESA. This is under the 15 million Euros COMESA Small Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative funded by the European Union under the EDF 11 which aims to facilitate trade by small scale cross border traders.

Nakonde District Commissioner Mr. Marvellous Sikapizye, spoke at the closing of the training and presented certificates to the participants. He thanked the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, the EU, COMESA and ITC for working in collaboration with the Cross Border Traders Association in Zambia to enhance formalisation of the informal trading and other business activities.

The training at Tunduma was held 26 – 27 June and covered the same modules as Nakonde. It attracted participation from the Ministry of Trade, TanTrade and the leadership from the newly formed CBTA for Tunduma as well as the traders.

The next course of action was to conduct similar training at Kasumbalesa after which the launch of the training programme was planned in Lusaka later in the year. The traders in Chirundu, Mwami/Mchinji have already been trained.



Participants at the RFBS Project Focal Points/Experts at Quality Data Production Training in Nairobi

Regional Food Balance Focal Points Trained in Production of Quality Data

Focal persons working on the COMESA-led Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) from six pilot countries have been trained in production and management of quality data. This will enable them to capture accurate and clean data into the RFBS system and in the production of analytical reports to be used in decision-making.

The RFBS is a multi-stakeholder engagement where COMESA is collaborating with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), as well as a range of analytical and technology partners to provide reliable, timely, and accurate data for food trade, and food security-related decision-making in many Eastern and Southern African countries.

It seeks to generate a more predictable trade and policy environment in the region, which will lead to increased food security and enhance regional trade and investment. The six pilot countries are Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi and Zambia.

The training of the focal points was conducted on 26 – 28 June 2023, in Nairobi, Kenya and provided an opportunity for the delegates to share data sources for the RFBS, the opportunities presented by the initiative, the success achieved this far, the challenges they have encountered and the way forward for the initiative.

Kenya's Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Mr Kello Hassam, who addressed the delegates commended the RFBS as a timely initiative that will help address food security and support the development of a trade integration policy in the COMESA region.

In his speech presented by the Director Agriculture at the State Department for Crop Development Mr Kangi Douglas, the PS underscored the importance of innovation in food production, transformations, predicting trade patterns and increasing stability and affordability of food in the region and beyond.

Agriculture Economist at COMESA Secretariat Mr Joel Okwir reiterated the importance of timely and accurate data in policy, trade and investment decisions for food systems transformation in the region and the commitment of the Secretariat to developing and driving the RFBS initiative.

Other partner institutions involved in the RFBS initiative includes the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD), NASA Harvest/UMD, Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy (BFAP) and Tetra Tech.

The initiative is funded by Rockefeller Foundation, The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), USAID and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Users of the Digital Women Empowerment Platform Rise

..as COMESA, EAC focal points meet

National focal points for the 50 million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP) met Tuesday 27 June to review progress on the implementation of the initiative in the COMESA Member States and East African Community (EAC) Partner States. It was the first-time focal points from the two regional economic communities (RECs) came together to discuss ways to improve the platform.

The one-day meeting attracted focal points from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Opening the meeting, COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde thanked the focal points for their commitment to supporting the platform, which she said had contributed to its sustained growth.

"The women of Africa continue to endorse the platform as a valuable tool for supporting their business needs, thereby affirming its viability as a vehicle for the economic empowerment of women and youth," Mrs. Hamusonde said.

As of December 2022, the platform usage stood at approximately 375,000 users, up from 240,000 in December 2021. As of 31 May 2023, these numbers have grown to 470,000 users.

On her part, the EAC Principal Gender and Community Development Officer Ms Generose Minani lauded the move to conduct a joint meeting which would provide the Member and Partner States the opportunity to share updates on activities which have been undertaken, share experiences and provide feedback.

The national focal points were urged to explore opportunities for increased promotion of the platform as well as funding of platform-related activities at national level. Among the proposals tabled during the meeting included enhancing platform accessibility for users with disabilities, organizing webinars to provide skilling for women and holding more regular review meetings.

The 50 million African Women Speak platform is a women's economic empowerment initiative which is jointly implemented by three RECs, namely COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS. It seeks to address the business information needs of women entrepreneurs and provides information or resources on starting and growing a business, market access, access to finance, business training and financial literacy, among others.

It also boasts a social networking component which allows women to network with one another in real-time, showcase their goods and services and to learn from each other. The African Development Bank funded the first phase of the 50MAWSP.

Funding for COMESA Peace and Security Programme Increased

COMESA and the African Union Commission have signed an Addendum to the Grant Contract for the implementation of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to increase funding to the programme to €5,248,310 from the initial allocation of €2,400,000. This is in recognition of the high rate of implementation of the APSA IV program by COMESA.

The contract was initially signed between the two on 1st March 2020. Then on 29 June 2023, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of finance, Dr Dev Haman and the AUC Director of Governance and Conflict Prevention Ms Patience Zanelie Chiradzsa signed the Addendum at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

The APSA IV program covers three strategic objectives, namely effective early warning and African Stand by Force and improvement of conflict cycle management, enhanced cooperation and coordination among APSA actors including Civil Society Organizations. It also includes youth and children affected by armed conflicts.

The signing took place on the sidelines of the steering Committee of an AUC/COMESA project on youth participation in political governance processes and socio-economic Development funded by Swiss Development Cooperation.



Eight papers presented at the 10th COMESA Research Forum

A total of eight research papers prepared by researchers from across the African region were presented at the 10th COMESA Annual Research Forum conducted virtually on 11 – 13 September 2023.

The forum whose theme was “30 Years of COMESA Regional Integration: Retrospect and Prospects” was attended by policy makers, academia, think tanks, government representatives and the private sector.

The annual event is part of capacity building initiatives in economic and trade policy research and analysis to strengthen integration and trade in COMESA region and the African continent. It is intended to narrow the gap between academia, private sector and policy makers in economic integration and regional trade policy formulation process.

Key topics in focus included the role of the COMESA Free Trade Area in promoting trade efficiency; value added production and market linkages in COMESA and the Nexus between trade, Trade policy and climate change adaptability. Others were the Role of transport (road, rail, air and maritime) and intra-COMESA trade; Digitalization and small-scale enterprises/ cross border trade in COMESA and Emerging trends in circular economy in COMESA.

The policy implications from the research papers are presented to COMESA policy organs and form the basis for various policy decisions.

Speaking at the opening of the forum, Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe, described it as one of the key avenues through which COMESA Secretariat harnesses knowledge and policy insights from eminent scholars, researchers, academics, and policy makers.

As the regional bloc approaches its 30th anniversary, next year, she said it was important to take stock of its regional integration journey, its achievements, its challenges, and the prospects for promotion of further regional economic integration as an instrument for sustainable economic growth and development.

She cited the growth of intra-COMESA exports from US \$1.5 billion in 2000 to US \$12.8 billion in 2021 as part of the significant achievements under the free trade area regime.

“Despite this growth, intra-COMESA exports remain low at about nine percent of its total exports. Recent studies indicate that inter-COMESA export potential is in excess of US \$100 billion,” she said. She added that a lot more work, including

research, was required to unlock the potential and enable Member States to better utilize the preferences embedded in the Free Trade Area regime.

Some of the constraints hindering exploitation of the export potential include weak productive capacities, poor infrastructure connectivity, high transport costs, non or slow implementation of COMESA free trade agreement, non-tariff barriers, and trading in similar products. Assistant Secretary General of COMESA in charge of programmes, Dr Mohamed Kadah, assured the participants that the outputs of the two-day forum would be integrated in planning for regional integration programmes to be implemented.

Speaking at the forum the Executive Secretary of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), Mr. Mamadou Biteye applauded COMESA for sustaining the research since it was initiated in 2014 with funding from his organization. He underscored his organization’s commitment to continue supporting capacity building.

Other organizations that have supported the research forum include the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union.



Handing over equipment to enhance border security

COMESA, EU provides €120,000 worth of equipment to bolster security at regional border points

COMESA and the European Union have provided the Government of Zambia with information and communication technology equipment and metal detectors valued at Euro 120,000 to be used by its Road Transport and Safety Agency (RTSA) and the police service.

The equipment which includes metal detectors and ICT devices were handed over to the beneficiaries in a short ceremony conducted at the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry in Lusaka, Zambia on 1 September 2023. This is part of the Zambia Border Posts Upgrade Project whose implementation is underway.

The equipment is expected to enhance safety and security measures related to

trade, goods and most importantly, the well-being of the public within the COMESA region. They will have a direct impact on the operations of the three One Stop Border posts, namely Chirundu, Mwami and Nakonde.

Further, the equipment will facilitate the implementation of the Single Window and the Coordinated Border Management projects under the Zambia Revenue Authority, as the lead agency.

COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of programmes Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, and the EU Programme Manager, Ms. Christiane Haziyo, jointly handed over the equipment to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Ms. Lillian Bwalya, who passed them on to Deputy Inspector General of Police, Ms. Alita Mbahwe and Chief Executive Officer of the RTSA, Mr. Amon Mweemba.

In his remarks, Dr Kadah emphasized the importance of securing national borders by delicately balancing effectiveness of control and efficiency in clearance of people and cargo.

“The ICT equipment will help to secure and protect the borders in detecting illegal trade

as well as trade in dangerous products and at the same time allow legitimate trade and travel to flow,” he said.

PS Bwalya said the COMESA- EU support in trade facilitation has led to increased trade volumes especially at the Mwami - Mchinji one stop border post between Malawi and Zambia which was launched in December 2022. From trade worth 50 million Kwacha (\$2.5m) then, it has increased to 70 million Kwachas (\$3.5m) between January and August 2023. In her Statement, the EU Programme Manager Ms. Christiane Haziyo stressed the significance of collaboration between different government entities, the private sector, and the community at large.

“It is through this unified approach that we can effectively address the multifaceted issues that affect the free movement of people, goods and services in the COMESA region,” Haziyo added.

The Zambia Border Posts Upgrade Project is financially supported under the Eleventh European Development Fund (EDF) – COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme, with a total budget of 48 million Euros.



.....
The ICT equipment will help to secure and protect the borders in detecting illegal trade as well as trade in dangerous products and at the same time allow legitimate trade and travel to flow,” Dr Mohammed Kadar.



Customs and IT officers trained on the integrated customs management system

About 103 Customs and IT officers from COMESA Member States were trained on functional and technical courses on the Automated System for Customs Data also known as ASYCUDAworld, which ran from March 2022 to September 2023.

In addition, the COMESA Secretariat has finalized the process of procurement of servers, software license and computer software training for the implementation of the COMESA Customs Automation Regional Support Centre (CARSC) and the COMESA Regional Trade Information Portal (CRTIP).

This was revealed during the opening of the 2nd Meeting of the COMESA technical working group on Customs Automation held virtually on 13 and 14 September 2023.

The objective of the meeting was to consider progress in the development of the CARSC and the CRTIP and provide a platform for the Member States to share their experiences in modernizing customs management systems. The

two programmes are funded under the COMESA EDF 11 – Trade Facilitation Programme.

COMESA is implementing the regional Digital Free Trade Area Action Plan, hence the CARSC and CRTIP are among the prioritized components of the Digital FTA.

“Considering the progress made so far, we are hoping that the CARSC and the RTIP systems will be deployed on the COMESA database Centre and launched before the end of this year,” COMESA Director of Trade and Customs, Dr Christopher Onyango said at the meeting.

The COMESA Council of Ministers adopted the Regional Digital Free Trade Area Action Plan to provide traders with the necessary digital tools and infrastructure for enhancement of intra trade and global trade. It has three thrusts, namely E-Trade, E-Logistics and E-Legislation. Customs Automation Regional Support Centre (CARSC) and Trade information Portal (TIP) are

among the prioritized components of the Digital FTA Instruments.

The meeting agreed that the implementation of CARSC and other inter-connectivity platforms requires the Customs Automation Experts (Customs Procedures and IT Experts) at regional and national levels to work closely and collaborate with stakeholders from public and private sectors and share experiences and information through consultations, meetings and other methods.

To further push this agenda, the Technical Working Group on Customs Automation was established to initiate work and studies on all aspects of the use of Information Technology and the management of information systems in the Customs area. This will allow for greater trade facilitation, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Customs control, and identify the potential for improving existing systems and reducing costs of doing business.



COMESA Hands Over Stewardship of the Tripartite to SADC

The stewardship of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) changed hands in July with COMESA handing over the chair of the Tripartite Task Force (TTF) to the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The handover was conducted on 14 July 2023 during the 36th TTF meeting conducted on the sidelines of the 5th Africa Union Mid-Year Coordination Review Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya.

TTF is responsible for the coordination of the TFTA programmes, and its leadership rotates among the chief executives of the three regional economic blocs. COMESA took over the chair from the East African Community in July 2022.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe handed over to her SADC counterpart Amb. Alias Mpedi Magosi.

Speaking at the function, Ms Kapwepwe underscored the importance of the Tripartite FTA in addressing economic development challenges and fostering Africa's continental economic integration.

She highlighted the achievements realized during COMESA's tenure under the three pillars of the tripartite, namely market integration, infrastructure development and industrial development.

Specifically, under market integration pillar, she said 11 Member States had so far ratified the Tripartite FTA and that only three were required to reach the requisite 14 ratifications. Substantial progress has however been realized under negotiation of Tripartite Rules of Origin and developing of systems to address non-tariff barriers to trade.

She emphasized the need to strengthen coordination and collaboration between the TFTA and the AfCFTA processes to avoid duplication of efforts, wastage of resources and possible conflicts. She also thanked SADC and EAC Secretariats for their steadfast support in driving the Tripartite agenda and called for even greater efforts towards enforcement and implementation of various programmes and activities.

Amb. Magosi appreciated COMESA's leadership and for laying a strong foundation for eventual actualization of the tripartite FTA. He underlined the importance of ratification of the tripartite agreement to unlock other activities, including resource mobilization, effective coordination structures and implementation of all the three pillars.

Further, he undertook to prioritize the ratification of the Tripartite and affirmed commitment to work with COMESA and EAC.

Present was the EAC Deputy Executive Secretary Hon. Andrea Aguer Ariik Malneth who affirmed EACs commitment to the realization of the objectives of the Tripartite and called for establishment of an effective coordination mechanism.



Rwanda Minister of State for Infrastructure, Eng. Patricie Uwase addressing the 13th meeting of infrastructure ministers

Closing the regional infrastructure gap: COMESA ministers call for enhanced resource mobilization

The 13th meeting of Ministers of infrastructure took place in Kigali, Rwanda with a call for enhanced mobilization of funds from national resources, public private partnerships, foreign direct investment and development partners to close the rising infrastructure gap.

The joint meeting, which was attended by ministers and ministerial representatives responsible for transport and communications, information technology and energy, noted that since the onset of the COVID -19 pandemic, the infrastructure gap has increased as resources were shifted towards the needs of the pandemic.

It is estimated that African infrastructure gap increased in the year 2020 to between \$59 billion and \$96 billion.

Rwanda Minister of State in the Ministry of Infrastructure, Eng. Patricie Uwase, who opened the meeting, said despite the positive efforts of Member States, regional infrastructure is still lacking in terms of its quantity and quality. In addition, national

policies sometimes hinder ease of trade, mobility and logistics.

"Inadequate networks of road, rail, air and waterways make transport costs in Africa to be among the highest in the world. For the landlocked countries, these costs account for as much as 70 percent of the value of export," she added.

She called on the ministers to provide policy guidance to facilitate development and adoption of practical solutions to mitigate the infrastructure challenges. This will ensure adequacy of the infrastructure in relation to current and future demand.

Making a case for the participation of the private sector in infrastructure funding, Secretary General of COMESA, Chileshe Kapwepwe called for clear Public Private Partnership frameworks, which guarantee legal protections for investors, easy acquisition of required investment permits and reduced legal and operational risks.

"As you may be aware, public funding itself is not enough to bridge the infrastructure

gap, and we therefore need private sector participation. The private sector favours projects with adequate risk returns and with predictable and stable revenues," she stated during her virtual address to the meeting.

Burundi Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Hon Leocadie Ndayisaba who chaired the meeting, stressed the importance of developing climate resilient infrastructure.

The ministers meeting was preceded by the 13th Joint Technical Committees on Transport and Communication, Information Technology and Energy who reviewed the progress on the implementation of regional infrastructure programmes and made recommendations that were presented to the ministers for decision making.

Among the programmes discussed were the Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility Project, the Tripartite Transport and Transit facilitation Programme, the Establishment of the Navigation Line between Lake Victoria and the Mediterranean Sea Project, the Support to Air Transport Sector Development Programme, the Enhancement of the Governance and Enabling Environment in ICT Sector among others.

In his address to the committees, Assistant Secretary General in charge of COMESA programmes, Dr Mohamed Kadah, urged member States to ramp up utilization of trade COMESA trade facilitation instruments. This will avoid unnecessary delays in transportation of goods, which result in higher costs of doing business and ultimately harm regional competitiveness.

"Notably, the transport facilitation instruments that COMESA have developed are now being used by non-Member States and replicated in other regions and across the continent," he stated

The next joint meeting of ministers of infrastructure responsible for transport and communication, information technology and energy will be hosted by Burundi in 2024.



Inadequate networks of road, rail, air and waterways make transport costs in Africa to be among the highest in the world. For the landlocked countries, these costs account for as much as 70 percent of the value of exports," Eng. Patricie Uwase



Zambia and UNCTAD sign deal to Modernize Customs Procedures

The Government of Zambia, through the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI) signed an agreement with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in July this year to modernize customs procedures using the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA).

ASYCUDA is an integrated customs management system for international trade and transport operations in a modern automated environment. It has advanced software applications which are designed and developed for customs administrations and the trade community to comply with international standards when fulfilling import, export and transit related procedures.

The Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) is a key beneficiary of the system which is being provided under the MCTI Zambia Border Posts Upgrading (ZBPUP) Project, funded under the 11th European Development Fund, COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.

The ASYCUDA support to ZRA is valued at €548,000 and will involve strengthening of existing automated customs processes through harmonisation of clearance processes in all customs offices and ensuring that there is adherence to the agreed customs and trade facilitation principles and

procedures.

It will involve automation of the remaining processes and deployment of new ASYCUDA functionalities. These improvements will be made available and configured with the use of the latest ASYCUDA World version of the software, already deployed at ZRA, to maximize the benefits for the customs authority.

Once fully operationalised, it is anticipated that, this support will ultimately speed up customs clearance processes, improve revenue control and reduce legacy related administrative challenges faced by the private sector when utilizing the ASYCUDA world system. Specifically, the latter will involve development of a user-friendly ASYCUDA World system, which will improve access and increase utilisation of the system in the private sector.

According to the EDF 11 Trade Facilitation Programme team leader Mr Charles Chaitezvi, Zambia is in the process of reducing the number of border agencies and encoding coordinated border management principles within the operational framework for border agencies.

"This is key to unlocking trade facilitation challenges as it will improve collaboration between border agencies and the private

sector thus having goods and services moving and clearing faster and cheaply," Mr Chaitezvi said.

More importantly, he added, the move will ensure better connectivity and enhancements in the information and communication technology management systems as a result of this support, which is key to increase intra-regional trade flows of goods, persons and services. This will be done by reducing the costs/delays of imports/exports at specific border posts and reduction of non-tariff barriers across the borders, and overall advance the coordinated border management along the corridors.

The ZBPUP is anchored on the sub-delegation agreement signed between Zambia and COMESA in November 2022 valued at €6.8 million. The project focuses on improving operational environment through improving the legal and regulatory framework and procedures, enhancing ICT systems and interconnectivity, upgrading of soft border infrastructure and capacity building and sensitisation and awareness related interventions. The three border posts targeted for support in Zambia include Chirundu, Mwami and Nakonde.



Uganda trains law enforcement agencies on dealing with financial crimes

“LEAs are generally the weakest link in the recovery of proceeds of crime”

Uganda commenced training its law enforcement agencies (LEAs) on financial investigations and asset recovery (FIAR) in July 2023. This is in line with a recent COMESA Ministerial decision that underscored the importance of strengthening anti-money laundering (AML)/countering financing of terrorism (CFT) regimes in the region. This will ensure that existing gaps in support to Member States are covered.

According to the Head of Governance, Peace and Security at the COMESA Secretariat, Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga, it has been observed that LEAs are generally the weakest link in the recovery of proceeds of crime hence the importance of the training.

“In general, LEAs have been the weakest link in the fight against money laundering globally, which is mostly attributed to their wider mandate that goes beyond the aspects that are important to financial crimes,” she added. “We also need to capacitate all jurisdictions to ensure that the criminal activities do not exploit the weaker

jurisdictions to continue with the illegal activities.”

She was speaking during the opening of the training in Uganda.

The training was opened by the Director for Compliance and Training at the Uganda Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA) Mr Samuel Wandera. He observed that the LEAs in the country would greatly benefit from the training and that is why his government had requested COMESA for the support.

He further stated that the training would help address the gaps identified in the 2016 Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) for Uganda and would thereby contribute to the concurrent processes of drafting one compound law to standardize asset recoveries.

The five-day training on 17 – 21 July 2023 was attended by stakeholders from the Ministry of Ethics and Integrity, Directorate of Public Prosecutions, Inspectorate of Government, Financial Intelligence Authority

(FIA), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) and the Uganda Police Criminal Investigations Directorate with its various wings.

While the training was intended to benefit more participants from Uganda, few LEAs from Kenya, Seychelles and Somalia also participated as a way of enhancing coordination, cooperation and communication among the Member States. Similar trainings have been conducted in Zimbabwe and Rwanda.

The FIAR regional trainings have been prompted by the ever-changing trends in financial crimes and other offences which are further complicated by structural vulnerabilities in Member States including gaps in AML/ CFT legal regimes.

These include corruption and general limited capacity to investigate, prosecute and recover proceeds of ill-gotten assets and wealth in line with national legislation and international Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Standards.



COMESA Climate Change Programme Steering Committee (PSC) meeting in session

COMESA – GEF Climate Change programme steering committee meets for the first time

The first COMESA Climate Change Programme Steering Committee (PSC) meeting for the Global Environment Facility - funded Capacity Building Initiative for enhanced Transparency (COMESA-CBIT) project was conducted on 5 September 2023. This was on the margins of the Africa Climate Summit and Africa Climate Week in Nairobi, Kenya.

The project is supporting four COMESA Member States; Eritrea, Comoros, Seychelles, and Zambia, to build capacity for enhanced transparency in climate change monitoring, reporting and verification as defined in the Paris Agreement.

The PSC meeting brought together diverse groups of stakeholders and experts who play pivotal roles in shaping the direction and success of the COMESA-CBIT Project. They included government officials from Comoros, Seychelles and Zambia as well as representatives from Conservation International (CI) and Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD).

COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohammed Kadah. Discussions centred on the project's overarching objectives,

emphasizing the key priorities and goals and outlining the preliminary timelines with key milestones to guide its progress. Also discussed was resource allocation and budget planning to support the project's various components.

Further, the meeting underlined the need to leverage on the current COMESA-CBIT project to mobilize additional financial resources from GEF and other potential funders, given that most COMESA Member States face financial stress due debt burdens and budget deficits.

Dr. Kadah expressed appreciation to the project's Member States and the two partners, CI and RCMRD, for their technical assistance, which has collectively entrenched a collaborative spirit and commitment.

"The success of our inaugural Steering Committee meeting reinforces our dedication to delivering exceptional results with the COMESA-CBIT. We are confident that the collective expertise and experience of our committee members will propel us toward achieving our project goals."

He expressed COMESA's commitment to maintain transparency and provide regular updates on the progress of the COMESA-CBIT project.

"As the project unfolds, stakeholders and the public can expect to hear more about COMESA's efforts to build the technical and human capital of Member States to meet the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) requirements. These are critical, as Parties to the UNFCCC and Signatories to the Paris Agreement are required to report under the new ETF regime on their Green-House Gases (GHG) data inventories," he added.

Member States representatives at the meeting pledged to support the implementation of the project, while RCMRD which hosted the meeting, committed to continue the technical support. Equally the CI representative committed to continue supporting the project and promised further collaborative resource mobilization efforts through upcoming funding windows such as GEF 8 and GEF 9.

Going forward, the PSC will facilitate collaboration among the stakeholders, monitor project progress, review key deliverables, and ensure that the delivery of the project goals and the broader objectives are in line with the Paris Agreement and development goals of Member States. It will be meeting bi-annually to review project progress and provide overall guidance and strategic direction for the project. The next PSC meeting was scheduled for January 2024.

Prior to the PSC meeting, Dr Kadah paid a courtesy call on the Director General of RCMRD, Dr. Emmanuel Nkurunziza where they discussed potential collaborative projects between their organizations. They appreciated the critical role of geospatial mapping to ascertain the resource endowments of COMESA Member States and promote sustainable utilization of natural resources and achievement of sustainable development.

They identified key thematic areas of collaboration including climate change, ecosystems monitoring and biodiversity, food security and common challenges faced by Member States.



Participants to the SAATAM Awareness workshop in Mahe, Seychelles

Seychelles targeted in air transport market liberalization programme

A third two-day National workshop to create awareness about the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) to Member States was held in Mahe, Seychelles, on 11 - 12 July 2023. This was the third in a series of workshops whose objective was to enlist regional States that have not yet signed up to establish the SAATM to do so.

Participants at the Seychelles workshop were drawn from the Ministries responsible for transport, trade, finance, tourism and agriculture as well as the Civil Aviation Authority and Seychelles Airlines. Seychelles Minister of Transport Mr. Anthony Derjacque opened the workshop.

In his statement, the Minister stressed the need to establish an enabling legal and institutional framework at the continental, regional, and national levels, along with the necessary infrastructure that will ensure safe, effective, and efficient air

“.....
Once the national awareness raising workshops are completed, the next step is to initiate a programme that will assist the Member States to meet SAATM requirements,” Mr Adikiny Olwenge

transport systems. This is the prerequisite to operationalize the single African air transport market.

“This requires putting in place appropriate institutions, infrastructure, and procedures,” he said noting that the workshop would strengthen the aviation systems in pursuit of liberalization plans to enhance connectivity and foster regional integration.

Team Leader of the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) programme Mr Adikiny Olwenge, observed that Island States faced many challenges in transport and logistics and shared common features and vulnerabilities such as geographic remoteness that emphasizes the importance of reliable, sustainable and resilient transportation systems, in particular maritime and air transport.

“Once the national awareness raising workshops are completed, the next step is to initiate a programme that will assist the Member States to meet SAATM requirements,” he added.

The workshop was conducted under the EU funded SATSD programmes which covers Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region.



COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe (2nd right) and delegates touring the exhibition stands at the launch of the BIAWE Project in Nairobi

€20m regional business incubator programme for women launched

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) working with the Spanish Government and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) in July launched the implementation of the second phase of the Business Incubators for African Women Entrepreneurs Project (BIAWE). The Spanish Government will commit €20 million towards the project.

BIAWE 2 project is designed to provide comprehensive support to women entrepreneurs, including business incubation services, mentorship, training, access to markets, and financial assistance. It represents a notable advancement in empowering African women entrepreneurs and promoting inclusive economic development.

Building upon the achievements of its precursor, BIAWE 1, the BIAWE 2 seeks to empower women entrepreneurs in Africa by equipping them with essential assistance and resources for business incubation and is now being replicated in Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda.

Speaking during the launch on 17 July 2023 at the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) in Nairobi, COMESA Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe highlighted the importance of addressing the challenges women entrepreneurs encounter in the region.

She noted that the BIAWE project through its first phase has supported women entrepreneurs in producing high value products which are certified authorities such as the Kenya Bureau of Standards. However, more still needs to be done to help the women.

“Women entrepreneurs still face significant challenges due to a lack of business planning, marketing and management skills. This is compounded by limited access to financial services so this second phase of the BIAWE project has come at the right time,” she noted.

AUDA-NEPAD Director of Technical Cooperation and Programme Funding Mr Symerre Gray-Johnson emphasized

the importance of investing in women entrepreneurs as they can have a profound impact on local communities.

He underlined AUDA-NEPAD’s commitment to equip women with resources, tools, and opportunities that will enable them to unleash their entrepreneurial potential and achieve success. The agency collaborates with international financial institutions, UN agencies, and Africa’s development partners to support the continent’s development efforts.

In his statement, the Head of Mission at the Embassy of Spain to Kenya Amb. Alba Espino Gomez said her government is committed to supporting the BIAWE project and will disburse Five million Euros this year, 2023 for project implementation.

During the event, a sanitary pad making machine which was procured by the project for KIRDI was launched.



Tracking Progress in Implementing Gender and Social Affairs Programmes

The COMESA region has made progress in advancing gender equality and women empowerment including measures to support women and girls to rebuild after the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMESA Secretariat and Member States have over the period April 2021 – June 2023 implemented Council Decisions and other initiatives to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region. Among them, the development of the COMESA gender management system and gender-based violence in the workplace policy and training on gender and gender statistics for the Gender Technical Working group.

Speaking during the opening of the 14th Meeting of the COMESA Technical Committee on Gender and Women's

Affairs held virtually on 24 July 2023 Assistant Secretary General, Dr Dev Haman said these are aimed at strengthening gender mainstreaming gender at the Secretariat and COMESA institutions.

On dissemination and sensitization of stakeholders on the COMESA Gender Policy and Guidelines, the Secretariat undertook missions to Member States to conduct workshops to promote the COMESA gender policy, gender policy implementation plan, gender planning guidelines, checklists and indicators.

Progress has also been recorded in the culture and creative industries where the Secretariat has won a grant in collaboration with the Indian Ocean Commission to develop cultural and creative industries in the East Africa

region through the European Union sub-grant from HEVA (finance, business support and knowledge facility for creative industries) and the British Council in Kenya.

COMESA's partnerships and networking efforts became more vibrant in this period as evidenced by close collaboration with organisations such as the African Union, International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) among others. All these were part of efforts to promote the participation of women in trade and the regional economy, leadership and in decision-making.

The report from the 14th meeting was presented to the ministerial meeting on gender and women's affairs held in August 2023.



President William Ruto of Kenya at the COMESA stand in Nairobi

Stakeholders' outreach activities conducted in four MS

The COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the COMESA Business Council (CBC) participated in two International Trade Fairs held in Kenya and Uganda in September and October this year. The first was in Nairobi, September 25 – 01 October and the second in Kampala 02 - 11 October 2023.

COMESA's presence is part of an outreach strategy to reach and interact with a wide spectrum of key stakeholders in one venue. These include businesspeople, policymakers, institutions of learning, researchers, students and the public.

Besides sharing information of the ongoing COMESA regional integration programmes, the events provided an opportunity to introduce to the public the newly launched CBC Pre-paid card. This is part of the Digital Financial Inclusion programme targeting micro-small and medium enterprises. The overall goal is to expand the use of the regional digital retail payments platform thereby improving cross

border trade.

Kenya's President Dr William Ruto, whose first stop at the Nairobi International Trade Fair was at the COMESA booth was particularly keen with this initiative and asked for more reading material about it which was provided.

The digital platform is low-cost and inherently resistant to fraud. With MSMEs forming the bedrock of the economy and often led by women in agro-industry and trade, the program strives to empower and uplift these crucial players by transforming them into dynamic participants in the digital marketplace.

This innovative platform promises to streamline transactions, promote transparency, and usher in a new era of efficiency for MSMEs. By lowering transaction costs and providing real-time financial capabilities, the platform is poised to foster increased volumes of intra-COMESA trade and cross-border transactions.

Key issues raised at the trade fairs related to the critical need for regional markets information, access to regional markets for various products produced in Kenya and Uganda including farm produce and manufactured products. Inquiries on available support from COMESA, including financial and logistical support small scale traders access the regional markets were common. In addition, the COMESA Masters Programme on regional integration also attracted numerous inquiries.

The 50 million African Women Speak Project was part of the initiatives demonstrated at the trade fair in Uganda.

In June and July 2023, the Secretariat and CBC similarly exhibited at the Zambia and Rwanda Trade Fairs held in Ndola and Kigali respectively. The activities were supported with funding from the EU/European Development Fund.



Participants at the COMFWB RECAMP training in Lusaka

COMFWB conducts RECAMP Training in Zambia

The COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) conducted a five-day training, 24 – 28 July 2023 for women entrepreneurs in Zambia to equip them with skills in marketing, branding and business management.

The training was conducted in Lusaka, under the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), a COMESA project funded by the European Union.

The objective of the training was to increase private sector participation in sustainable regional and global value chains. Participants were drawn from micro, small and medium-sized enterprises involved in agri-business from Lusaka province and the surrounding areas.

Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Mrs Lillian Bwalya, who addressed the meeting, said Zambian Government appreciated working with cooperating partners in strengthening the capacity of the local enterprises and improving the country's competitiveness. For this reason, Mrs Bwalya said her government was reviewing laws to

strengthen intellectual property rights enforcement to encourage and protect innovation and creativity as well as development of the national e-commerce strategy.

"I am aware that the COMESA treaty recognises the importance of women as a vital economic link within the chain of agriculture, industry and trade and, therefore, this programme you are undertaking will contribute to the attainment of the COMESA treaty provisions on private sector development," the PS said.

COMFWB Board Chairperson Ms Maureen Sumbwe urged the women entrepreneurs to embrace the digital technology to fit in the national as well as regional markets. She said:

"Business trends are now moving into the digital space and therefore the need for all players to utilize the technology for purposes of advertising and marketing

products, procurement of raw materials including payment systems."

Some of the challenges hampering the private sector include poor production capacity and technology, limited access to end-markets and trade, poor value chain finance, and weak enabling business environment amongst many others.

COMFWB Acting Chief Executive Officer, Mr Chikakula Miti said the RECAMP project provided technical assistance and advisory services for SMEs to improve business management performance and coordination among SMEs and other value chain players.

"Specifically, the focus of the advisory services is to overcome pre-identified barriers to internationalization and value-addition in the targeted value chains," he added. Hence the training would ensure that entrepreneurs are better prepared to turn business ideas into successful new ventures that have a greater-than-average chance of success.

“ Business trends are now moving into the digital space and therefore the need for all players to utilize the technology for purposes of advertising and marketing products, procurement of raw materials including payment systems.”



Ethiopian Law Enforcement Agencies Trained on Tackling Financial Crimes

Ethiopia conducted a five-day training of law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in July on financial investigations and asset recovery (FIAR). The training was intended to build the capacity of LEAs in the region to address the menace of transnational organised crime.

Early Warning Expert at COMESA Secretariat, Mr Raymond Kitevu said this activity arose from the decisions of the 18th meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Lusaka, Zambia in June 2023.

In this meeting, the Ministers stressed the importance of strengthening anti-money laundering (AML)/countering financing of terrorism (CFT) regimes in the region to ensure existing gaps in support to Member States are covered.

“This Decision was informed by research

findings that identified LEAs as generally the weakest link in the recovery of the proceeds of crime,” Mr Kitevu said. Hence the training was tailored to address the ever-changing trends in financial crimes and other predicate crimes which are further complicated by structural vulnerabilities in Member States.

Director-General of the Ethiopian Financial Intelligence Service, Mr. Muluken Amare, who opened the workshop on 24 July 2023, appreciated COMESA Secretariat for organising the training which he said came at an opportune time when Ethiopia was strengthening its AML/ CFT laws. This was being done through the drafting of a new law called the Prevention and Suppression of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism draft Proclamation.

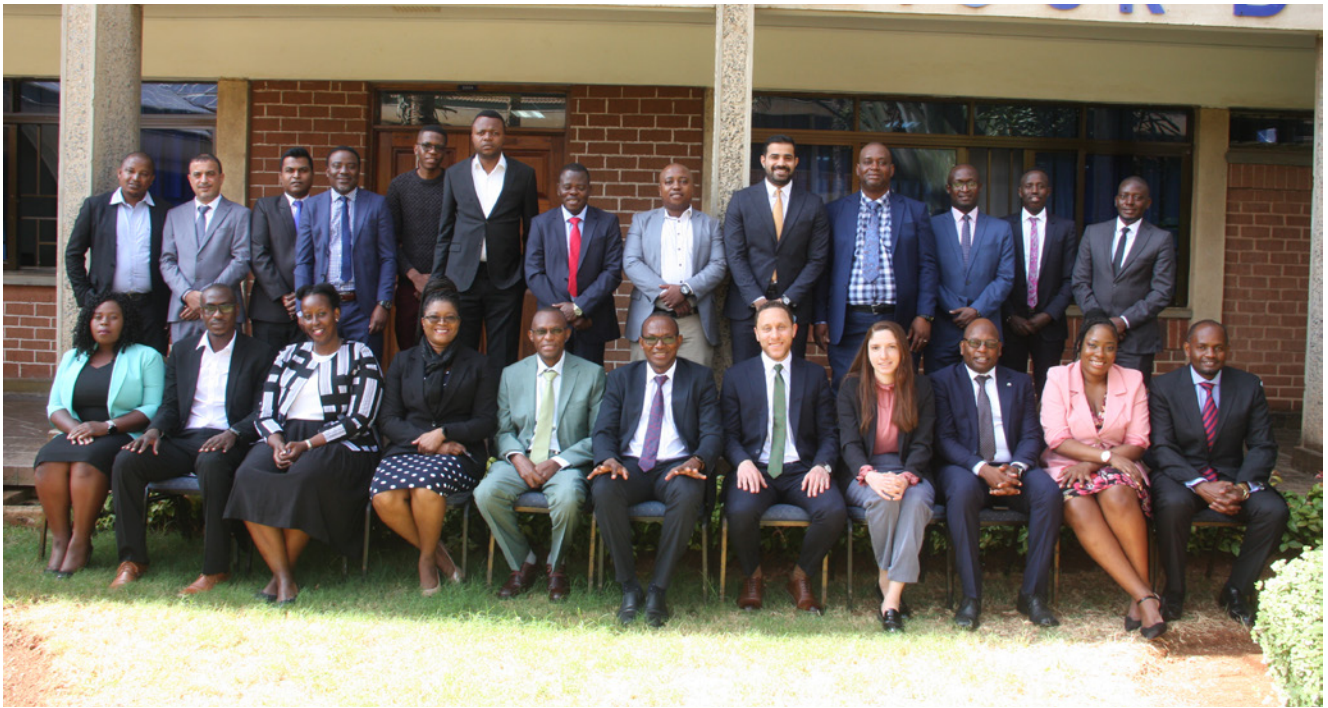
In addition, the training would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Ethiopian

LEAs in investigations and the forfeiture of proceeds of crime, including internal cooperation among the different law enforcement entities represented.

Officials from various Government ministries, departments and agencies, including the ministry of justice, the police as well as the Ethiopian Financial Intelligence Service participated.



This Decision was informed by research findings that identified LEAs as generally the weakest link in the recovery of the proceeds of crime,” Mr Raymond Kitevu



Banking Supervisors and Financial Stability analysts from regional Central Banks attending the validation workshop for the User Guide on Basel III.

Banking Supervisors and Financial Stability Analysts Trained on Basel III and Macro-prudential Surveillance

Twenty-two banking supervisors and financial stability analysts from 11 Central Banks of COMESA Member States attended a validation workshop for the User Guide on “Basel III and Macro-prudential Surveillance” conducted on 06 – 10 March 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The User Guide was developed to enhance better understanding of the Basel III standards, principles and detail the applicable tools and techniques for conducting supervision under the revised Basel III framework by COMESA member countries. Hence the validation workshop provided a platform to get feedback on the User Guide to further improve its content.

Central banks of Burundi, Congo DR, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe were represented at the event.

The User Guide provides an easy-to-use document on Basel III standards and principles within the context of conducting supervision under this revised framework for the COMESA region. Basel III is an international regulatory accord that introduced a set of reforms designed to mitigate risk within the international banking sector.

In his address to the delegates,



“COMESA member countries are making progress at implementing the different facets of the Basel accords, with the User Guide providing a critical input that will ensure harmonization and comparison of progress,” Dr Lucas Njoroge.

the Director of the CMI, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, underscored the need for the implementation of Basel III framework within the internationally agreed timeframe to strengthen the resilience of the banking system, improve market confidence and promote a level playing field.

“COMESA member countries are making progress at implementing the different facets of the Basel accords, with the User Guide providing a critical input that will ensure harmonization and comparison of progress,” he said.

He added that the Guide will be an important knowledge product to enhance the implementation of the COMESA Financial System Development and Stability Plan as it provides a detailed exposure to Basel III standards and elaborates in detail the tools and techniques for conducting supervision under Basel III framework.



File: A training session at the COMESA Monetary Institute

Understanding Financial Market Volatility is Critical for Implementing the COMESA Framework for Assessing Financial Stability

Twenty-one staff from 10 Central Banks in COMESA Member States namely: Burundi, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been trained on modelling and forecasting financial markets volatility.

The training was organized by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) on 27 - 31 March 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. Its objective was to develop the capacity of the bank staff to better understand the policy direction in the context of the current challenging macroeconomic environment that the region is facing. These include severe exchange rate pressures owing to multiple global shocks of elevated inflation, adverse effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

Addressing the participants, CMI Director, Dr. Lucas Njoroge noted that Central Banks were confronting

high inflation thus compelling them to accelerate monetary policy tightening to avoid inflationary pressures from becoming entrenched.

“The tightening global financial conditions associated with interest rate hikes in some advanced countries has disrupted capital flows, leading to financial market volatility especially in small open economies, including those in the COMESA region,” he noted.

Given the on-going turmoil in the external environment, he added, there is renewed need for a better understanding of financial variables volatility, their estimation and forecast, as this is important for gauging the vulnerability of financial markets and the economy. A better understanding of financial market volatility is therefore critical for the implementation of the COMESA Framework for Assessing Financial Stability.

Region's Annual Inflation Rate Rose to 125.4%

The year-on-year annual inflation rate in the COMESA region stood at 125.4% for the month of December 2022 as measured by the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI-COMESA). This was an increase from 99.3% registered in November 2022. A year earlier, the rate was at 147.5%.

The January 2023 HCPI-COMESA Monthly News Release by COMESA Statistics stated that the inflation rate represents price changes recorded in the 12 divisions of expenditure.

These include food and non-alcoholic beverages, clothing and footwear, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels. Others are furnishings, household equipment, health, transport, communication, recreation and culture, education, restaurants and hotels among others.

Based on the main components of expenditure, the housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels registered the highest annual inflation rate of +171.0% while restaurants and hotels registered the least average price change of +55.3%.

Member States that contribute to the HCPI-COMESA were Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



File photo: 2022 COMESA Council of Ministers

Pushing for the Implementation of Council Decisions

The COMESA Task Force that is following up progress on the implementation of legal instruments and Council of Ministers Decisions by Member States was in Madagascar on 25 – 28 July 2023 to track progress.

The team specifically focused on the ratification and implementation of the Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visas (Visa Protocol) and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Service, Labour and the Right of Establishment and Residence (Free Movement Protocol).

This was part of the Task Force's mandate to build capacity in Member States on the free movement of persons

and the implementation of legal instruments and Council of Ministers' Decisions.

Meetings were conducted with officials of the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, labour, employment, public services and social legislation. Other meetings were with officials from the public security industrialisation, trade and consumption and the National Assembly and Senate. Madagascar is the 11th COMESA Member State to hold bilateral talks with members of the Task Force.

The Task Force presented the report of their findings to the Joint Meeting of Ministers of Migration and Labour

held from 14 - 18 August in Livingstone, Zambia.

The team was established through the Decision of the 4th Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Immigration held on 17th March 2011 in Lusaka, Zambia. Its objective is to, inter alia, build capacity of Member States in readiness for rolling out of the COMESA Free Movement agenda, as well as developing a roadmap on the implementation of the protocol on the movement of persons, labour, services, right of establishment and right of residence.



COMESA Trains Central Banks Experts in Banking Interconnectedness

COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) conducted a training for member Central Banks' experts on "Analysis of Payments System, Banking Interconnectedness and Systemic Risk using Network Analysis framework", in Nairobi, Kenya, on 17 - 21 July 2023.

The training was meant to familiarize Member States with banking system interconnectedness, i.e., a relationship which is created among banks through financial transactions, such as borrowing and lending from each other, linkages in their payments system and exposure to a common economic sector, among others. and systemic risk using COMESA money market data.

The workshop attracted twenty delegates

from 10 Central Banks of COMESA Member States namely: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Eritrea, Kenya, Libya, Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Greater interconnectedness among banks means that stress from one bank tends to spread more rapidly and extensively across the financial system, leading to reduced provision of financial services such as lending to the real economy.

Participants were also exposed to a step-by-step approach in the deployment of Network Framework to the assessment and analysis of banking and payments system interconnectedness.

According to CMI's Director, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, the motivation for the training was the concern that financial institutions have expanded regionally, upscaling cross-border transactions and in turn creating regional interlinkages.

Hence the training would enhance the implementation of the COMESA financial system development and stability plan as it adds to the suit of analytical tools that COMESA member countries can use to inform data-driven policy.



COMESA ministers of gender meet to review progress

The 12th meeting of the COMESA Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs was held on 3 August 2023 as the region took stock of the progress made in advancing gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, as well as social and cultural development. The meeting, which was being held for the first time since 2021, was virtual.

It was organized to allow the ministers to consider and adopt the report of the 14th Meeting of the COMESA Technical Committee on Gender and Women's Affairs held 24-25 July.

COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe delivered the opening remarks at the meeting. She said that the COVID pandemic had made the region much more aware of how unforeseen calamities can have a disproportionate impact on women compared to men, or girls compared to boys.

"The pandemic pushed more women out of employment because they dominate the services sector which were shut down to prevent the spread of COVID. Moreover, according to a 2021 survey by the International Labour Organization, only 43.2 per cent of the

world's working-age women were likely to be employed post-COVID, compared to 68.6 per cent of working-age men. Women were also more likely to lose their jobs permanently compared to men," she said.

She added that in the event of disasters and epidemics, such inequalities get reinforced and amplified.

"This should not be accepted as normal, and I am in no doubt that you are all already seized of the need to move with speed to make our region more equal, and a place where everyone be it male or female is respected, protected and afforded the social and economic opportunities to be able to realize their full potential."

COMESA is collaboration with the Indian Ocean Commission to promote the cultural and creative industries in the East African region through a grant secured from HEVA Fund and the British Council in January this year. The aim of the project is to strengthen policy framework on cultural and creatives industries, which contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the region through tourism and art.

She made a case for continued

empowerment of women, highlighting various initiatives undertaken by the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) as well as the 50 million African Women Speak digital platform for women in business which continues to grow.

"If women are equipped with the necessary resources, skills and opportunities to start stronger businesses, and pursue the growth potential of these enterprises, this would contribute significantly to poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment generation, and improved well-being for millions of the citizens of our region," the Secretary General affirmed.

Ministers in attendance commended the progress made on advancing gender equality and lauded the Secretariat for its good work in supporting various gender-related activities in the Member States, including the training provided to enhance capacity to collect gender-sensitive statistics. In the same meeting, the Member States which are yet to ratify the Social Charter were urged to do so.



Mission Leaders with observers ready to be deployed to the Zimbabwe elections.

AU-COMESA jointly observe elections in Zimbabwe

Once again, the African Union and COMESA launched a joint Elections Observer Mission (EOM) to the 23 August 2023 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe. The AU-COMESA EOM followed the invitation by the Government of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Subsequently, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, approved the deployment of the joint short-term AU-COMESA EOM to assess and report on the conduct of this election.

The joint EOM was led by H.E. Goodluck Jonathan, former President of Nigeria in collaboration with Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, former Prime Minister of Uganda and Member of the COMESA Committee of Elders. It comprised of 86 Short Term Observers (STOs) that included Ambassadors accredited to the African Union, officials of election

management bodies, members of African civil society organisations, African election experts, human rights specialists, gender and media experts, and representatives of youth organizations.

The observers were drawn from 23 countries including Benin, Botswana, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Liberia, Libya, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia. Observers were deployed to all 10 Provinces and 16 electoral districts in Zimbabwe.

The EOM based its assessment on the legal framework governing elections in the Republic of Zimbabwe and the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections, the standards and obligations stipulated in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the Principles for

Election Management, Monitoring and Observation (PEMMO), COMESA Elections Observation Guidelines and the International Declaration of Principles (DoP) for International Election Observation among others. The assessment was based on the electoral process's regularity, transparency, equity and fair conduct.

In a Joint Preliminary Statement issued after the voting, AU and COMESA noted that although there were challenges in the process prior and during voting such as delayed delivery of ballot papers and long queues observed up to mid-afternoon of day one of voting, the process was largely orderly.

The detailed report for the AU-COMESA Joint EOM will be presented to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission in October 2023.



ILO Director Mr Wellington Chibebe (L) meets Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe during the presentation of his letter of accreditation.

New regional ILO chief accredited as special rep to COMESA

Mr Wellington Chibebe, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Director in-charge of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique was appointed as the Special Representative to COMESA in August this year.

Mr. Chibebe presented his Letter of Credence to Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Friday 11 August 2023.

The two organizations are working together in the Southern African Migration Management (SAMM) project, which is promoting effective migration management and governance. ILO has also provided technical support to promote the implementation of the COMESA Treaty, COMESA Protocols and Decisions of the COMESA Council of Ministers and Ministers Responsible for Immigration under the COMESA Free Movement of Person programme.

Other areas that the two organizations have collaborated on include the development of the COMESA Labour Migration Statistics Report. In addition, the COMESA Secretariat, through its gender and legal departments, is also working with ILO on the study on skills recognition under the Joint Labour Migration programme.

Mr Chibebe said ILO has the capacity to continue providing support to COMESA through technical assistance to strengthen the implementation of COMESA protocols on Migration and ILO conventions. This can be extended to the promotion of the signatures and ratifications of the COMESA Free Movement Protocol as well as the migration-related ILO conventions that some COMESA Member States have not yet signed or ratified.



L-R: Amb. Michael Gonzales presents his credentials to COMESA Secretary General Chileshe

US Appoints Special Representative to COMESA

The US Government has appointed Amb. Michael Gonzales as Special Representative to COMESA. The envoy, who is also the US Ambassador to Zambia, presented his Letter of Credence to Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe in Lusaka on 18 September 2023.

“COMESA and the USA have a long partnership and have enjoyed cordial relations for a long,” noted the Secretary General when she received the accreditation.

“I would like to underscore the value that we place on this cooperation and partnership with your government. We look forward to strengthening the current cordial relationships even further.”

On his part, Amb. Gonzales said the United States has invested more than \$226m to strengthen COMESA's capacity to provide its Member States a solid foundation for

bolstering regional integration through increased intra-regional trade and shared economic growth.

“We look forward to continuing to support COMESA and co-creating activities that further our shared goals of increasing trade

and investment and strengthening African food security,” Amb. Gonzales said. In 2022, the USA was ranked 6th of the region's export destination markets. The value of COMESA's exports to the USA increased by 7% from US\$6.3bn in 2021 to US\$6.8bn in 2022.



“COMESA and the USA have a long partnership and have enjoyed cordial relations for a long.” Chileshe Kamwepwe



Zambia – Tanzania border post €2.6m upgrade is underway

Trade flow along the Zambia – Tanzania corridor is set for better times once a Euros 2.638 million project to upgrade the Tunduma border post is completed. The project which is being implemented through a sub delegation agreement between COMESA and the government of Tanzania kicked off on 15 August 2023 when the site was handed over to the contractor.

The finalization of the award of contracts for works and supplies at the border post now paves way for the commencement of the construction of a modern market for small scale traders, a verification shed and warehouse all of which are expected to contribute to improved service delivery.

The upgrades will also include installation, configuration and commissioning of ICT equipment such as desktops, laptops, printers and smart gates among others.

This development is being done through COMESA with support from the European Union 11th Development Programme. The EU is funding the upgrading of selected corridors and border posts in the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite bloc.

The COMESA-Tanzania sub-delegation agreement is worth Euros 2.638 million and covers the construction of a market for small-scale cross-border traders at Majengo and various priority infrastructure interventions. All these are being implemented under the Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP).

Speaking at an event to handover the site to the contractors on 15 August 2023 in Songwe, Tunduma, Director of Regional Integration in the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Tanzania Mr Ombeni Mwash

commented the European Union for the support. He said the project would benefit all users of the One Stop Border Post which handles 75 percent of cargo destined for countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

He noted the limited timeframe remaining to deliver on the TFP and called for close collaboration between the Tanzania Revenue Authority, Ministry of Trade, COMESA Secretariat and the contract managers.



Stakeholders at the Tunduma project site



Enhancing apex banks' expertise in Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence

The COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI) has embarked on a programme to build the capacity of the central banks in the region on the utilization of Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The program is aimed to equip the regional bank' staff with comprehensive knowledge regarding Big Data, including its origins, characteristics, value, acquisition methods, and potential implementation challenges they might encounter. It is part of the CMI's workplan which was approved by the Bureau of the Committee of Governors of Central Banks in November 2022.

The need for the training is further informed by the nature of interconnectedness of AI and Big Data due to the vast amount of data generated and AI's capability to proficiently manage such data analytics.

Hence, according to the CMI director, Dr Lucas Njoroge, the training will enable the adoption of Big Data technology and AI, along with relevant use cases in the financial and banking sector, particularly within Central Banks.

He was speaking during the training titled "Utilizing Big Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the realm of central banking," conducted in conjunction with the Central Bank of Egypt on 27 – 31 August 2023 in Cairo.

He added: "The massive data generated and AI's ability to expertly work with such big data analytics make the two, AI and Big Data now seemingly inseparable."

A total of 29 delegates from nine Central Banks of COMESA member countries attended this training. They included Burundi, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Libya,

Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Addressing the participants, Advisor for Africa Affairs to the Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt Dr. Naglaa Nozahie described the training as an answer to the emergence of new financial products and services in the private sector, such as digital wallets, mobile payment applications, and novel digital assets like cryptocurrencies and stable coins.

"The rapid convergence of technological advancements, demographic shifts, and evolving consumer behaviour, underscores the imperative for central banks to enhance their competencies in the domains of Big Data and AI region," she stressed.

The training covered among other topics, the evolution, and the overall ecosystem of Big Data and AI applications in central banking, Machine Learning and the potential benefits in the financial and banking sector and understanding digital and cryptocurrency and their impact on Central Banks.



Dr Lucas Njoroge

Trainers Session on COMWARN (SVAs) and the AU Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA) held from 11 - 13 September 2023 in Uganda.

The training attracted more than 30 participants from Government agencies and Civil Society groups from seven COMESA Member States. They included Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Seychelles, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Acting Director for Regional and International Political Affairs in Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Amb. Philip Odida, who spoke at the training, underlined the importance of this methodology. He said it opens avenues for strengthening resilience to counter the negative effects of pandemics, epidemics and climate change, among others.

He called for continued engagement of all stakeholders including local, national and the international community to ensure national local ownership of these theory informed, data-driven and evidence based (scientific) methodologies.

In her remarks, Head of the Governance, Peace and Security Unit at the COMESA Secretariat Ms. Elizabeth Mutunga noted the remarkable progress recorded with each training of trainers' session, including having new entrants such as Malawi and Seychelles.

In addition, Kenya has also volunteered for the AU CSVRA processes which seamlessly blends with COMWARN SVAs by further extending the assessment and development of response strategies to the grassroots level. So far, more than one third of the region – eight Member States - have hosted national multi-stakeholder consultations on SVAs.

COMESA and AU will also be focusing their efforts during the year to support the commencement and finalisation of the Kenya and Zambia CSVRA/ CSVMS processes, respectively.

Partners organisations that participated in the TOT included the African Development Bank, International IDEA and Save the Children.



Youth leaders visit COMESA: express interest in trade information

A group of leaders from the Youth Motion Kenya visited the COMESA Secretariat for an information sharing session. They were in Lusaka to attend the African Continental Free Trade Area Youth Symposium, held on 21-23 August 2023. The visit to COMESA Secretariat was held on Wednesday 23rd August 2023. They were interested in COMESA trade related initiatives which present good opportunities to young people from the region, especially those who are in cross-border business.

Region steps up efforts to enhance peace and prosperity



Participants in the training in Uganda

COMESA Member States have developed new targets to enhance the implementation of the COMWARN Structural Vulnerability Assessments (SVAs) at the national level. This is done through early identification of future potential country-specific and regional

drivers that, if managed early through actionable response options would promote achievement of higher targets of peace and prosperity for a country.

Uganda is one of the States that has done so as revealed during the 5th Training of



file photo: effects of conflicts

COMESA and ECOSOCC leverage CSO networks in conflict prevention

Twenty-five Representatives of Civil Society Organisations from the East African region have been trained in the African Union Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (AU CSVRA) and the COMESA Conflict Early Warning System Structural Vulnerability Assessments (COMWARN SVA) as a way of empowering them to play an active role in conflict prevention.

The training conducted from 14 – 16 September 2023 in Kampala, Uganda signified substantial strides made in promoting peace and security across the continent.

Speaking at the opening session of the training, Head of Governance, Peace and Security at COMESA Secretariat Ms Elizabeth Mutunga expressed the organisation's commitment to working with CSO in the area of peace and security. She revealed that the Secretariat has so far registered 30 CSO from 16-member states.

"As COMESA, we have over the years established a solid relationship with CSOs and we recognize their crucial role in conflict prevention, management and resolution starting from the grassroots level taking into account their deep understanding of local dynamics," Ms Mutunga said.

She highlighted some of the complex challenges existing on the continent which include issues of governance that threaten its prosperity.

The Head of ECOSOCC Secretariat Mr William Carew emphasized the significance of the training in

empowering CSOs and further commended the partnership with COMESA in building the capacities of African CSOs and aligning this with the African Union's focus on the crucial role of CSOs in advancing peace, security and stability.

The three-day training, which was supported by the European Union through its fourth Support Programme to the African peace and Security Architecture (EU APSA IV), tackled various topics including understanding the SVA methodology, bolstering its usage in the region and strengthening collaboration among others.

“.....
As COMESA, we have over the years established a solid relationship with CSOs and we recognize their crucial role in conflict prevention, management and resolution starting from the grassroots level taking into account their deep understanding of local dynamics,” Ms Elizabeth Mutunga



Small scale cross border programme undergoes review

The project steering committee (PSC) of the COMESA, Small Scale Cross-Border Trade Initiative conducted its 4th meeting in Lusaka, Zambia 18 – 20 September 2023 to review progress of the project’s implementation, five years since its inception.

The project is funded by the European Union with a total investment of 15 million Euros and focused on facilitating the transition of informal sector traders into the formal trade sphere. Among the activities under implementation is the construction of border markets to provide decent trading spaces for the traders. This is in addition to training the traders on trade facilitation to equip them with knowledge on the importance of formalizing their businesses.

Specifically, the Cross-Border Trade Initiative has supported the design and implementation of trade facilitation policies and instruments such as the Simplified Trade Regime and the Green Pass. It has assisted development of tools and systems for reduction in corruption, bribery and harassment at the selected border posts and collection of gender disaggregated data on small scale cross border trade.

“The SSCBTI has focused on these important aspects, to increase the formalization of small-scale cross-border trade flows in the COMESA/tripartite region,” Dr Mohamed Kadah, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA said at the meeting.

“Ultimately, this will lead to higher revenue collection for governments at the borders, increased security and higher incomes for small-scale cross-border traders.” His statement was presented by the COMESA Director of Gender and Social Affairs Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry of Zambia,

Mrs. Lillian Bwalya encouraged Member States, to provide the guidance needed to deliver benefits to the small-scale cross border traders so that the activities remain impactful and sustainable.

Speaking at the event, the European Union Head of Cooperation to Zambia and COMESA, Cladio Bacigalupi called for faster implementation of the initiative across the selected border crossing.

The PSC meeting is the 4th since the programme started in 2018 and brought together representatives from Small Scale Cross-Border Traders’ Associations from Malawi, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In attendance were representatives from the European Union, the International Organization for Migration, the International Trade Centre, and delegates from ministries that coordinate COMESA activities at the national level.

The project is poised to close by December 2024.

“.....
The SSCBTI has focused on these important aspects, to increase the formalization of small-scale cross-border trade flows in the COMESA/tripartite region,” Dr Mohamed Kadah



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