

COMESA-ASCENT Launch Event

Lusaka, June 4

Opening Remarks by - Ms. Boutheina Guerhazi World Bank Director of Regional Integration - Africa, Middle East And North Africa

- Good morning, Hon. Secretary General of COMESA, Hon. Minister of Energy of the Republic of Zambia, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.
- **On behalf of the World Bank Group, I am delighted to join this momentous event** that launches COMESA's Regional Energy Access Acceleration Platform under the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation program, the ASCENT.
- **First, I want to thank COMESA for bringing us all together** to recognize the urgency of achieving universal energy access to spur economic growth, and to create jobs and new opportunities for the youth. **I would also like to thank the delegations from the 16 African countries** for making time to join this 3-day event.
- **Ensuring access to reliable and affordable energy for all is a key element of the World Bank Regional Integration Strategy for Africa.** It is essential to strengthen regional integration, giving boost to trade in goods and services, allowing digital transformation, attracting investments, and allowing faster flow of knowledge and innovations.
- **The ASCENT program is a flagship initiative, and a game changer that seeks to help countries provide electricity to 100 million people across Eastern and Southern Africa by 2030.** It includes support for expanding the national grid, providing distributed energy solutions, and increasing share of clean cookstoves. The COMESA regional platform is expected to facilitate all stakeholders, governments, private sector, donors, and civil institutions to work together towards ASCENT program's goal.

- **Many of the participating countries have demonstrated unprecedented results over the past decade and are at a critical juncture in their efforts to ensure electricity access and sustainable economic development for all their citizens.** Increasingly, the unelectrified populations are rural, low income and vulnerable. We need to build collaborative solutions to help communities in borderlands, and people affected by natural disasters and conflicts.
- **Achieving Universal energy access is therefore a shared goal.** Experiences from across the world shows that significant progress is possible, even in a relatively short time. It requires political commitment, a collaborative approach, stronger public-private partnerships, and an enabling environment for private sector participation and capital mobilization.
- **Also, learning from each other and combining efforts is going to be crucial.** This is why we have convened here this week to explore how we can harness our collective efforts and strengthen to place Eastern and Southern Africa on the path to universal energy access. With 365 million people without electricity access and 558 million people without clean cooking access, the region accounts for more than half of the world's unelectrified population, and nearly a quarter of the global population without access to clean cooking. This is a tremendous challenge.
- **Recent technology breakthroughs, digitization, data revolution, innovations in private sector-led business models, and the emergence of new sources of finance are opening unprecedented opportunities** for leapfrogging energy access in the region and for promoting regional integration for increased trade and commerce.
- **Rising consumption from newly electrified users will boost regional electricity trade,** and at the same time achieve more equitable distribution of economic growth across urban and rural areas and across income levels. Building larger regional markets for distributed renewable energy will be essential for unlocking economies of scale and reducing cost, which is useful to mobilize private capital and create more green jobs.

- **At the World Bank, we are excited to embark on this ambitious journey with all of you.** I hope we can strengthen our collective commitment to energy access for all in the Eastern and Southern Africa region.
- Thank you for your kind attention.