

## Countdown to the 23<sup>rd</sup> COMESA Summit Begins as Burundi Signs Host Agreement



Burundi's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Albert Shingiro (R) exchange signed Host Agreement with COMESA SG, Chileshe Kapwepwe

The countdown to the 23rd COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit has officially begun with the signing of the Host Agreement between the Government of Burundi and the COMESA Secretariat.

Burundi's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, Ambassador Albert Shingiro, and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, signed the agreement in Bujumbura, Tuesday 13 August 2024. The ceremony was attended by the Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry and Tourism, Madame Marie Chantal Nijimbere and senior officials from the Government and COMESA.

The Summit will take place on October 31, 2024, in Bujumbura. Its agenda will include a review of the state of COMESA integration, the priority issues on programmes and activities and reports from the

Council of Ministers and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. A Declaration from the COMESA Business forum will also be presented to the Summit.

This year's Summit will be anchored on the theme, "Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism."

"This theme acknowledges the need to tackle many of the challenges that are being faced by our continent, especially on climate resilient agriculture, regional value addition to move away from the export of raw materials and the need to create additional wealth and jobs, especially in support of the growing sectors such as mining and tourism," Ms Kapwepwe explained in a press conference after the signing.

Minister Shingiro said the focus on agriculture,

mining, and tourism was aligned with Burundi national development plan. He cited the promotion of climate smart agriculture, which is resilient to climate change as a key focus for Burundi.

During the forthcoming Summit, President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, will take over chairmanship of COMESA from President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia and henceforth Burundi will be chairing COMESA technical and policy meetings. Hosting the COMESA Summit is expected to shift attention to Burundi thus positioning the country as an investment destination and attracting potential investors in agriculture, mining and tourism.

Business entities will get the opportunity to engage with potential partners during the Summit meetings through side events and exhibitions leading to increased trade and investments for the

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Participants at the launch of the COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) National Chapter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## Ethiopia's Horticulture Sector Poised for Growth with CEHA National Chapter Launch

Ethiopia's horticulture sub-sector is set for significant growth following the launch of the COMESA-EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) National Chapter. This initiative, unveiled in Addis Ababa on August 13, 2024, is part of a broader strategy to tap into the vast potential of the horticulture industry across the region.

At the launch event, industry stakeholders praised the efforts of the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA-COMESA) and its partners. The CEHA program aims to drive sustainable growth in the horticulture sector across the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC).

H.E. Dr. Meles Mekonnen, Ethiopia's State Minister of Agriculture and Horticulture Development, highlighted the importance of the CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter in coordinating and accelerating the country's horticulture development. The initiative will focus on three key crops—potatoes, avocados, and onions—chosen for their potential to drive economic growth and align with development partners' investment priorities.

"These crops have been selected based on their production capacity, significant potential to drive economic growth, and development partners' investment priorities," said Dr. Mekonnen, represented at the event by his Advisor, Prof. Ali Mohamad.

The CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter is expected to unite key stakeholders and provide vital support

to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) within the selected value chains through matching grants and technical assistance. This approach is anticipated to create jobs, boost regional trade, and reduce postharvest losses, according to industry experts.

ACTESA-COMESA Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Mukuka underscored the initiative's potential impact. He revealed that under the 2021-2031 Strategic Plan, ACTESA-COMESA is committed to strengthening the horticulture sub-sector. Dr. Mukuka projected that the combined value of avocados, Irish potatoes, and onions could generate an additional USD 230 million annually for approximately 450,000 smallholder farmers in the region.

In 2023, avocados and onions collectively contributed USD 11.2 million in foreign exchange earnings for the region.

"There is significant headroom for growth and job creation through investments and modernisation in these value chains," Dr. Mukuka remarked. He also emphasized the pivotal role of women in the horticulture value chain and the need to embrace climate-smart technologies.

The implementation of the CEHA Ethiopia National Chapter will involve a series of targeted activities, including advocacy for policy reforms to enhance trade facilitation and market access, provision of financial resources, training, and capacity-building programs for value chain actors, and sector coordination.

Development partners, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA), participated in the event and pledged their support to ensure the program's success.

BMGF Senior Programmes Officer Mr. Rafael Flor highlighted the horticulture sub-sector's potential for job creation, economic development, and foreign exchange earnings. He noted that focusing on these three crops would help the government diversify beyond its traditional emphasis on grains.

FCDO Country Representative Ms. Nina Hissen affirmed the British government's commitment to fostering partnerships for growth and creating a world free of poverty. She praised CEHA as a prime example of such a partnership.

AGRA Country Director Dr. Yihenew Zewdie called for the harmonization of policies to facilitate cross-border trade within the horticulture sub-sector. He urged stakeholders to ensure the availability of necessary seeds in the right quantities and sustainable manner, expressing confidence that the CEHA initiative would spur innovation.

Established in 2022, CEHA is a collaborative effort to accelerate growth in the fruit and vegetable sub-sector. Ethiopia is the fourth country to launch the CEHA National Chapter, following Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.





# Countdown to the 23<sup>rd</sup> COMESA Summit...

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## Impact of Emerging Risks on Financial Stability

Financial stability is increasingly being tested by emerging Cyber, Fintech and Climate Change risks. These come amidst increased technological innovations in the financial sector to provide financial services efficiently, especially to the financially excluded.

Moreover, the entry of non-financial firms into the financial space is increasing competition in the financial sector, reducing the market share of financial institutions and introducing viability risks. In response, the COMESA Monetary Institute has embarked on a capacity building initiative to help the regional apex banks navigate through the risks by organizing trainings. The latest was on 29 July – 2 August 2024 conducted virtually, themed: *“Impact of Fintech, Cyber and Climate Change Risks on Financial Stability.”*

Eighty delegates from 10 COMESA member countries’ Central Banks, namely Burundi, Comoros, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Somalia, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended. COMESA Cleaning House was also represented.

In his address, the Director of CMI, Dr. Lucas Njoroge, observed that the gains in enhanced financial inclusion have predisposed financial services providers to fraud and cyber-attacks.

“This has increasingly exposed consumers of financial services to fraud and predatory services, undermining their income growth and ability to meet their financial obligations,” he noted.

At the same time, climate change has increased physical and transition risks, and financial

institutions are increasingly being held accountable for the consequences of their financial intermediation activities on the environment.

The main motivation for conducting the training, the Director noted, was to impart knowledge required to provide advice on the formulation of financial sector policies to mitigate and enhance the resilience of the financial system, given its vulnerability to these emerging risks.

At the training, participants were equipped with the necessary tools and skills to assess the impact that Fintech, Cyber and Climate Change Risks have on financial system stability.

Ultimately, the aim is to enhance their capacities to undertake stress tests on financial systems stability due to these risks. It will inform mitigation measures that could dampen the effect these risks would have on the financial system.

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**“This has increasingly exposed consumers of financial services to fraud and predatory services, undermining their income growth and ability to meet their financial obligations,” Dr Lucas Njoroge.**



country in the long run and improving cross border investment and enhanced regional trade and integration. The country’s share of COMESA trade is also expected to rise.

In 2023, Burundi’s total exports to the region increased by 12% from US\$ 69 million in 2022 to US\$ 77 million. Over the same period however, Burundi’s imports from the COMESA region decreased by 15% from US\$ 212 million in 2022 to US\$ 180 million in 2023.

Preceding the Summit, On 28 – 30 October will be the COMESA Business Forum, a high-level dialogue focusing on engaging public and private stakeholders on solutions that will support transformation of the COMESA region into competitive and sustainable growing economies for the expansion of regional and global trade and investment.

The dialogue will be led by a Ministerial Round Table, to discuss with private sector stakeholders on the measures to accelerate the economic growth of COMESA Member States, focusing value addition on agriculture, mining and tourism. The recommendations of the Business Forum will form part of the Forum’s Declaration to be presented to the Summit.

The last Summit was hosted by Zambia in June 2023.



Participants attending the Policy Dialogue on the Simplified Trade Regime

## Time to Reform the Simplified Trade Regime

On August 6–7, 2024, representatives from nine countries in eastern and southern Africa convened in Machakos, Kenya, for a critical Policy Dialogue on the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR).

The gathering aimed to tackle the policy and technical challenges that have emerged in the STR's implementation and to propose actionable reforms. Countries represented were Burundi, D.R. Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The STR was designed by COMESA in 2010 to assist small-scale cross border traders, to access the privileges of the COMESA Free Trade Area and to reduce the time spent at borders through simplification of border procedures. Its implementation is premised on four key tools that include the Simplified Certificate of Origin, the Simplified Customs Document, the Common List and the Threshold value of consignment set at US\$2000.

At the Dialogue, Dr Christopher Onyango, Director of Trade and Customs, COMESA stressed the need to continuously explore ways of improving its functioning, given the vital role played by Small-Scale Cross Border Traders in facilitating movement of goods and services across borders.

"For instance, trade under the STR is only for products that are on the agreed Common Lists. However, the Common Lists exclude some products that have originating status," he observed.

This, he added places small scale traders at a disadvantage as they would not obtain preferences for those products which are not on the Common List even though the products have originating status.

Stressing the same point, Mr Micheal Mandu, acting Secretary of Trade, in the Ministry of Trade and Investment, Kenya, urged governments of STR implementing countries to embrace the reforms for the STR to work effectively.

"From time to time, it may become necessary to adjust the way the STR is implemented, with the aim of making the STR more user friendly and to meet the expectations of the small-scale cross border traders," he said.

He noted that the STR Common List of eligible products, which is negotiated and agreed between two contiguous countries require updating, given the dynamics of trade and consumer tastes as well new products that may be produced in the COMESA countries.

Further, he said there is need for uniformity in the application and processing of the STR transactions and learning from best practices in East African Community and Southern African Development Community in the context of the Tripartite.

Small-scale cross-border trade, estimated to account for 40% of total trade, is predominantly conducted by women and youth. The products they trade are primarily essential food items. Through this trade, small-scale traders help balance supply and demand by moving goods from areas of abundance to those of scarcity, thereby stabilizing prices across countries.

Since 2018, the subsector has experienced a significant boost through the European Union-funded Small-Scale Cross Border Trade Initiative (SSCBTI). This initiative includes the deployment and training of Trade Information Desk Officers at selected borders, completion of several studies and collection of informal cross border gender sensitive trade data.

As the SSCBTI comes to an end this year, Dr Onyango called upon Member States and other beneficiaries to own and carry on with the activities to support small scale cross border trade.





# Empowering Madagascar on the Use of Gender Statistics



Director of Gender, Beatrice Hamusonde (L) presents a certificate to a participant in the gender statistics training

Gender statistics are crucial for informed decision-making. They highlight areas where gender disparities exist, ensuring that policies and programs effectively address the needs of men, women, boys, and girls for inclusive social and economic development.

In a novel initiative to enhance the collection, analysis, and use of gender-disaggregated data, the COMESA Secretariat, in collaboration with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility, organized a training workshop on gender-disaggregated data and statistics for Madagascar on 24 – 26 July 2024.

This workshop aimed to equip statisticians, researchers, and policymakers with the necessary skills and tools to better understand and address gender disparities across various sectors.

This initiative aligns with the COMESA Gender Policy, African Minimum Gender Indicators, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

By strengthening the capacity to produce and use gender statistics, Madagascar will move closer to achieving regional, continental and global targets on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Speaking at the forum, Mr. Rakotonaradany

Michael, Acting Director General of the National Statistical Institution of Madagascar, emphasized the transformative power of data.

"By enhancing our capacity to collect and analyze gender statistics, we can create more equitable and effective policies that benefit everyone in society. The importance of gender statistics cannot be overstated," he stressed.

He added, "The limited availability of gender data and statistics makes it challenging to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving targets and goals related to gender equality and women's empowerment."

Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde, Director of Gender and Social Affairs at COMESA, highlighted the significance of the workshop, towards building a more inclusive and equitable society.

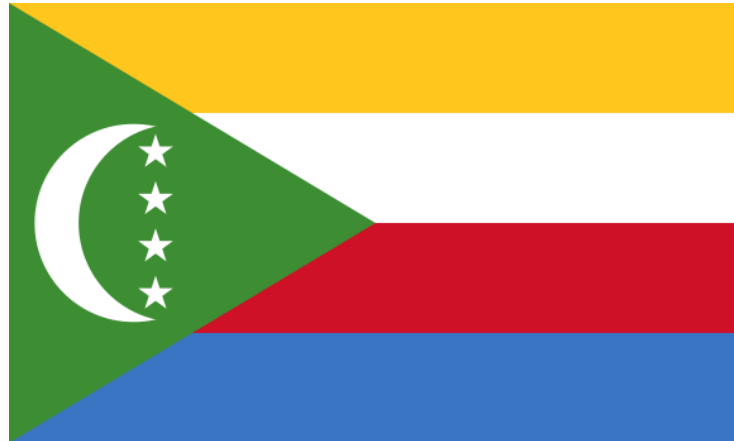
Participants were taken through various key topics including an introduction to gender and gender statistics to enhance understanding of the basics and importance of gender-disaggregated data.

Other topics were data collection techniques and best practices for collecting reliable and accurate gender data; data analysis and interpretation featuring tools and methods for analysing gender statistics and policy implications of using gender data and gender statistics to inform and shape policies and programmes.

This joint initiative by COMESA and the ICR Facility underlines their commitment to promote gender equality and empower institutions and individuals through capacity-building initiatives by providing the tools, knowledge and evidence-based research necessary to address critical gender issues.

The ICR Facility is co-funded by the European Union (EU), the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), together with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council. It is implemented by GIZ, the British Council, Expertise France, and SNV.

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## Comoros gets Training on the Use of Gender Statistics

The COMESA Secretariat partnered with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility to organize a three-day training workshop on gender disaggregated data and statistics for Comoros from 31 July to 2 August 2024.

The workshop held in the capital Moroni, aimed to equip statisticians, researchers, and policymakers from various sectors with the necessary skills and tools to better understand and address gender disparities across various sectors.

Gender statistics are crucial for informed decision-making. They highlight areas where gender disparities exist and ensure that policies and programmes effectively address the needs of both men and women, and boys and girls for inclusive social and economic development.

The training initiative aligns with the COMESA Gender Policy, Gender Reporting Framework, Council Decisions on Gender Statistics, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators in Africa, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Mr. Said Abdou Salime, Secretary General of Ministry of Trade, COMESA Coordinating Ministry, officially opened the workshop, and highlighted the importance of gender statistics to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

“The availability and quality of sex-disaggregated

statistics must be improved, and a gender perspective must be consistently integrated throughout the planning, implementation and dissemination processes of any statistical data collection project,” Mr Salime said.

He emphasized that gender inequalities within COMESA in different economic sectors influence women’s participation in trade and undermine trade integration in the region.

The Director of Gender and Social Affairs, Mrs Beatrice Hamusonde observed that the workshop was a significant step toward building a more inclusive and equitable society.

The areas in which participants were trained included an introduction to the basics of gender and gender statistics; data collection techniques and best practices for collecting reliable and accurate gender data. Also included was training on data analysis and interpretation as well as

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**“The availability and quality of sex-disaggregated statistics must be improved, and a gender perspective must be consistently integrated throughout the planning, implementation and dissemination processes of any statistical data collection project,” Mr Salime.**

implications of using gender data and gender statistics to inform and shape policies and programmes.

By strengthening the capacity to produce and use gender statistics, Comoros will move closer to achieving regional, continental and global targets on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. A steering committee comprised of representatives from the national statistics office and the gender commission was constituted to coordinate the collection of gender disaggregated data to feed into the COMESA dashboard on gender and social integration.

COMESA and the ICR Facility are committed to promoting gender equality and empowering institutions as well as individuals through capacity-building initiatives to provide the tools, knowledge and evidence-based research necessary to address critical gender issues. During the three-day workshop, participants were engaged in interactive sessions and hands-on exercises facilitated by a statistics expert.

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# COMESA Region Annual Inflation Rate Stood at 23.2% in June 2024

The year on year, inflation rate (annual percentage change) in the COMESA region as measured by the Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI-COMESA) stood at 23.2% for the month of June 2024, down from 23.7% registered in May 2024. A year earlier, the rate was 29.2%.

The participating Member States that contribute to HCPI-COMESA include Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo; Djibouti, Egypt; Eswatini Ethiopia; Kenya; Madagascar, Malawi; Mauritius; Rwanda; Seychelles; Tunisia; Uganda; and Zambia.

HCPI-COMESA comprises 12 divisions of expenditure whose performance was as follows: Food & Non-alcoholic Beverages (+24.5%); Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (+99.6%); Clothing and Footwear (+15.2%); Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas and Other Fuels (+12.1%); Furnishings, Household Equipment and Routine Household Maintenance (+22.7%); Health (+24.3%); Transport (+14.4%); Communication (+13.4%); Recreation and Culture (+15.1%); Education (+11.0%); Restaurants and Hotels (+15.2%); and Miscellaneous Goods and Services (+18.9%).

The participating Member States that contribute to HCPI-COMESA registered the following rates of total inflation in June 2024 compared to June 2023. Burundi (+19.7%); Democratic Republic of Congo (+20.2%); Djibouti (+0.4%); Egypt (+26.0%); Eswatini (+4.1%); Ethiopia (+23.3%); Kenya

(+4.6%); Madagascar (+6.9%); Malawi (+34.3%); Mauritius (+3.7%); Rwanda (+6.6%); Seychelles (+2.7%); Tunisia (+7.9%); Uganda (+3.9%); and Zambia (+17.1%).

With the COMESA-HCPI annual inflation rate pegged at (+23.2%) in June 2024, Malawi, Ethiopia, and Egypt had the higher rates of annual inflation relative to the regional inflation rate. The rest of the participating member states had annual inflation rates below the regional average of (+24.2%) with the Seychelles recording the least annual rate at (+2.7%).

Based on the main components of expenditure the Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco division registered the highest annual inflation rate of (+99.6%) whilst the Education division registered the least average price change of (+11.0%).

More on: <https://comesa.opendataforafrica.org/>

## COBEA Concludes COMESA Audit



The COMESA Board of External Auditors (COBEA) has concluded audit and handed over the 2023 audited financial statements for the COMESA Secretariat, the COMESA Court of Justice and other institutions.

The handover ceremony took place on Friday, 9 August 2024. Chairperson of COBEA, Mr Edward Akol (middle), who is the Auditor General of the Supreme Audit Institution of Uganda, handed over the signed Statements to Secretary General, Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe (left). At the event, Mr Akol also handed over the chair of COBEA to Malawi Auditor General, Mr. Thomas Makiwa (right). Other Auditors General in the COBEA team present were from Malawi, Madagascar and Tunisia.

### COMESA DIARY

Date	Activity/Event	Venue
16 August 2024	EU-COMESA Strategic Dialogue Meeting	Secretariat
19 – 20 August 2024	8th Regional COMESA Competition Commission Annual Sensitization Workshop for Business Reporters, Award Ceremony for the CCC writing Competition & 2nd Annual CCC Press Conference	Livingstone
26th to 29th August 2024	Dialogue on the COMESA Free Movement of Persons Programme and a Stakeholders Validation Workshop	Kigali
29 August 2024	Launch of CEHA Tanzania National Chapter	Arusha
31 August – 9 September 2024	Eswatini International Trade fair	Manzini
9 – 13 Sept 2024	I4C Conference and ASCENT day	Berlin, German



# COMESA Conducts RHRF Validation Workshop in Kigali to Strengthen Energy Regulation



*Participants to the Validation workshop for the Framework Report on Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) in Kigali, Rwanda*

Energy experts from across the COMESA region gathered in Kigali, Rwanda, from July 30 to 31, 2024, for a validation workshop aimed at harmonizing regulatory frameworks for improved electricity regulation. This initiative, funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB), seeks to bolster the sustainability of the energy sector across COMESA.

The workshop's focus was on validating crucial documents such as the Framework Report on Regional Electricity Regulatory Principles (RERP) and the Regulatory and Utility Key Performance Indicators (UKPI) for COMESA.

Speaking to the delegates during the opening ceremony, Director General of the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), Mr. Everyste Rugigana emphasized the importance of the workshop, stating, "The validation of these frameworks is essential for fostering a harmonized regulatory environment that will stimulate investment and ensure the reliability of electricity supply in the region."

He added that RURA plays a vital role in ensuring that Rwanda's energy sector operates under clear regulatory guidelines, promoting transparency and efficiency.

The AfDB's Rwanda Country Director, Madam Aissa Toure Sarr, asserted that an integrated power market is crucial for shaping Africa's energy transition pathway. She highlighted the need for sustainable and cost-effective exploitation of diverse energy resources, especially renewable energy, across the continent.

"While the Bank continues to finance key power interconnectors, we also recognize the importance of policy, regulatory, and institutional frameworks," she added.

Dr. Mohamedain Seif Elnasr, CEO of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators for Eastern and Southern Africa (RAERESA), noted the varying progress among COMESA members in terms of regulatory environments.

"Some countries have developed unbundled electricity market structures with autonomous regulators and active independent power producers (IPPs), which reduces market risks and encourages investment," he explained.

He further pointed out that COMESA has successfully developed and implemented several energy regulatory guidelines aimed at harmonizing

energy policies among its member states. "These guidelines are vital for improving efficiency and attracting investment in the energy sector," Dr. Elnasr stated.

COMESA's vision includes reducing barriers to renewable energy development by improving the enabling policy and regulatory environment across member states. "Our aim is to establish uniform, transparent, and enforceable regulatory frameworks that facilitate energy exchanges among COMESA members," he concluded.

Additionally, COMESA is partnering with the World Bank to enhance energy access for 100 million people and support the deployment of renewable energy. Ongoing programs include the Regional Infrastructure Finance Facility (RIFF) and the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Transformation in Eastern and Southern Africa Multi-Phase Programmatic Approach (ASCENT MPA), which aim to bolster regional energy initiatives.