

COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin Launched in Eswatini

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Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe (2nd right) handing over laptops to the Acting Commissioner General, Eswatini Revenue Service, Mr. Gugu Mahlinza, during the launch of the COMESA e-CO in Eswatini

Eswatini has become the first COMESA Member State to launch a Pilot Implementation of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (E-CO). This transformative development is poised to be a game-changer in trade facilitation that will offer the customs authorities, a more robust system of certification verification, allowing for better control over goods entering and leaving respective countries

The Certificates of Origin are issued to exporters within the COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA) to confer preferential treatment to goods originating from an FTA Member State. The eCO initiative is implemented by the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme funded by the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

COMESA e-CO will benefit both businesses and customs authorities including reduction in

processing times and lower costs, enabling goods to move across borders more efficiently.

Eswatini Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Hon Manqoba Khumalo and COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe, symbolically launched the e-CO at the Eswatini Revenue Services (ERS) offices on 7th November 2024 in the presence of Ambassador Designate and Head of the EU Delegation, Eswatini, Mr Karsten Mecklenburg.

During the launch, Kapwepwe also handed over 17 laptops to the ERS for use in the execution of the system.

Speaking during the ceremony the Minister stated that the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin resonates well with the country's vision for the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap, which is

"To transform Eswatini into a one-stop, paperless and climate-smart seamless trade hub with digitalized processes"

The COMESA e-CO replaces the traditional, paper-based Certificate of Origin, which the Minister said has served the County well over the years.

"However, in today's digital age, the demand for a faster, more secure, and reliable system has grown exponentially. The eCO is designed to meet these demands by providing a digital platform that simplifies the certification process, minimizes paperwork, and reduces the time needed for verification and approval," Hon. Manqoba said.

Secretary General said a fully operational eCO will unlock new economic opportunities, including reduction of processing and clearance costs

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Members of the COMESA Central Bank Governors' Bureau during their meeting in Eswatini

Regional States Urged to Embrace the Regional Payments and Settlement System

Central Banks in COMESA Member States have been called upon to utilize Regional Payments and Settlement System (REPSS) for intra-COMESA transactions, owing to its potential to enhance regional trade. The REPSS was designed to enable importers and exporters in COMESA Member States to settle and receive payment for goods and services through an efficient and cost-effective platform. Currently, only nine apex banks are active on the platform.

Addressing the 44th Meeting of the Bureau of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks in Ezulwini, Eswatini, on November 6, 2024, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said REPSS has high potential to spur regional development.

"The collaborative approach being taken will ensure that REPSS significantly contributes to the expansion of intra-COMESA trade, and I urge all member central banks to expeditiously use REPSS for payment of their intra-COMESA transactions," she said.

The Governors meeting was convened to among others, review and endorse the financial plans of the COMESA's Clearing House (CCH) which

implements the REPSS, and the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI).

The Secretary General noted that ongoing negotiations in critical service sectors such as finance, transport, and energy are critical in overcoming trade barriers and accelerating regional trade and investment. However, she also acknowledged the challenges faced by the region, including geopolitical tensions, climate issues, and a global cost-of-living crisis that threaten economic stability and integration efforts.

"These disruptions are straining regional economies, leading to persistent issues such as global supply chain disturbances and rising inflation," she said and stressed the importance of incorporating these risks into monetary policy frameworks and supporting sustainable development initiatives to mitigate adverse effects.

Further she said: "Despite significant advancements in regional integration, with intra-COMESA trade rising from \$1.5 billion in 2000 to \$14 billion in 2023, it still represents only 7% of the region's total trade. To address this, I wish to reiterate the crucial roles of the CMI and CCH in achieving financial integration objectives."

Governor of the Central Bank of Eswatini and Chairperson of the Committee, Dr. Phil Mnisi, emphasized the central banks' vital role in economic convergence and policy coordination. He acknowledged the challenges in harmonizing monetary policies, stressing the need for a resilient financial ecosystem that benefits all member states. He expressed concern over the low participation in REPSS.

Mnisi highlighted the necessity for modernized payment systems and financial inclusion to adapt to evolving economic landscapes. He urged all central banks to leverage REPSS to enhance trade within the region.

He informed the meeting about imminent upgrade to REPSS, including mandatory migration to the ISO 20022 standard, aimed at improving interoperability with other regional payment systems.



COMESA Electronic Certificate...

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and time by removing manual operations and bureaucracy of administrators.

ECO will increase efficiency and transparency through the real-time tracking, monitoring of processes and certificates and enhancing security through the digital signature and secure data exchange, and improved compliance with national and regional legal requirements. She added that there will also be increased government revenue by reducing the forgery of certificates and improving volume of trade.

"Our vision is clear: a COMESA region where trade and investment flows freely, efficiently, and securely. While we congratulate Eswatini for its achievements, we also call upon other Member States to embrace the full implementation of the COMESA electronic certificate of origin as soon as possible.

She stressed that the introduction of the eCO not only emphasizes COMESA's commitment to regional integration and trade facilitation but also aligns with global trends towards paperless trade systems.

Ambassador Mecklenburg, said the implementation of the COMESA eCO is a small part of a long-standing cooperation and partnership between the European Union (EU) and COMESA, built on a shared vision on regional integration and connectivity, dismantling barriers to regional trade, to increase policy coherence and to stimulate sustainable economic growth and development.

"By adopting this technology, we are supporting our businesses to become more competitive in the international market, while also addressing issues of fraud and authenticity verification that can sometimes arise with paper documents," he said.

Besides, Eswatini, the other two Member States which are ready to pilot the eCO are Malawi and Zambia. COMESA is expected to launch the regional eCO during the forthcoming Council of Ministers' meeting on 28 November 2024 in Lusaka, Zambia.



Burundi's Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry, and Tourism, Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere and DRC's Minister of Foreign Trade, H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya after the signing of the implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime

Burundi, DR Congo Launch Implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime

Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed and launched the implementation of the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) at their joint border of Gatumba-Kavimvira, on 30 October 2024.

Burundi Minister of Trade, Transport, Industry and Tourism Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere and DR Congo Minister of Foreign Trade H.E. Julien Paluku Kahongya presided over the ceremony which marked the onset of robust small scale cross border trade amongst the two COMESA states.

The STR programme was initiated by COMESA to help increase trade by small scale cross border traders dealing in small quantities of goods. The programme aims at simplifying clearing procedures as well as reducing the cost of trading. This is by making it possible for the small-scale cross-border traders' goods to benefit from the removal of customs duty (COMESA Preferential treatment) if those goods are on the Common Lists.

The two countries are among the eight countries

which are benefiting from the implementation of the STR at border posts.

The commencement of the implementation of the STR by the two States is part of the activities being supported by the World Bank-funded Great Lakes Trade Facilitation and Integration Project for the Great Lakes Region of Eastern Africa, through COMESA.

Dr Mohammed Kadah, COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes, congratulated the two countries, noting that small-scale traders who cross the borders with small consignment of goods are critical in fulfilling consumer demands across various borders.

The event was attended by government officials from the two countries, local leaders, representatives of World Bank and COMESA staff including Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance Dr Dev Haman.

COMESA Validates Policy Framework to Transform Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

The COMESA Policy Framework and Reform Strategy (PFRS) has been validated, marking a significant step toward the sustainable growth and enhancement of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the COMESA region. The PFRS was officially validated during a meeting held in Kampala on 25 September 2024.

The validation meeting brought together Directors of Fisheries from 18 COMESA Member States, including Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Eswatini, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles.

This regional framework aims to guide and advance fisheries and aquaculture development, addressing critical challenges while promoting sustainable practices.

Participants also included representatives from two regional fisheries bodies—the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organisation (LVFO) and the Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA). Prominent civil society organizations such as the African Women Fish Network (AWFISHNET), which supports women in fisheries and aquaculture across the continent, and the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association (UFPEA), representing industrial fish processors in Uganda, were also present.

Mr. Omanyi Paul, the Commissioner for Fisheries Quality Assurance and Safety in Uganda's Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, officially opened the meeting on behalf of the Minister. He emphasized the timeliness of the reform strategy, highlighting lessons learned from two fish export bans imposed on Uganda due to non-compliance with market requirements. He encouraged other member states to use these insights and the PFRS to develop robust national policies, expressing gratitude to COMESA for hosting this high-level meeting in Uganda and reaffirming the support of H.E. the President of Uganda for COMESA's initiatives.

Ms. Providence Mavubi, Director of Industry and Agriculture at the COMESA Secretariat, remarked on the significance of the newly developed PFRS in advancing fisheries and aquaculture across the region. She called on Member States to align their national policies with this regional framework and expressed appreciation for AU-IBAR's support, urging continued collaboration to aid COMESA member states in this alignment.

Ms. Hellen Guebama, representing the AU-IBAR Director, underscored the importance of the continental PFRS as a strategic guide for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. She commended COMESA for aligning its policy framework with the continental strategy and encouraged member states to do the same.

The meeting, facilitated by technical teams from the COMESA Secretariat and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), successfully concluded with the validation of the PFRS.

This validated PFRS serves as a comprehensive blueprint designed to transform the fisheries and aquaculture sectors across the COMESA region. It aims to address existing challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and promote sustainable practices to ensure the long-term viability and prosperity of these sectors. Fisheries and aquaculture are vital to the region's socioeconomic and environmental well-being, contributing to food security, livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation.

Additionally, the framework provides sector leaders with necessary policy direction, reforms, and strategies that can be tailored at the national level to enhance sector management and development. The meeting received support from AU-IBAR under the EU-funded FishGov 2 project, with partners pledging ongoing assistance to the COMESA region to ensure the successful implementation of the PFRS.

Users of the African women Networking Platform Rises to 700,000

In the last one year the number of users on the 50 Million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP) has grown from 520,000 to 700,000 to date, marking an increment of approximately 34 percent.

This was disclosed during a virtual meeting of National Focal Points for 50MAWSP on 22 October 2024, called to review progress on the implementation of the initiative in the COMESA Member States and East African Community (EAC) Partner States.

It was attended by focal points from Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tunisia, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. Opening the meeting, COMESA Director for Gender and Social Affairs Ms Beatrice Hamusonde said the forum was an important platform for Member and Partner states to share experiences with regard to what has worked, what can be improved and what challenges prevail and possible solutions to address the challenges.

During their 2023 meeting, the focal points requested the 50MAWSP to provide capacity building for women entrepreneurs which resulted in multistakeholder dialogues for women and youth in business. The dialogues which are supported by funding from the European Union under the EDF Programme have benefited hundreds of women and youth entrepreneurs in DR Congo, Kenya, Madagascar and Mauritius by sensitizing them about various regional trade instruments as well as the women in business digital platform.

Since then, the focal points have promoted



Regional Women Economic Empowerment Strategy

COMESA Secretariat held a consultative meeting on 25 October to discuss the draft Regional Women Economic Empowerment Strategy (RWEES) with Member States. The meeting sought to ensure Member States' contribution to the development of the strategy as well as alignment with the needs, priorities, and unique challenges faced on the advancement of women's economic empowerment in the region.

The strategy which is a work in progress is being developed with the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility' support. 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.

The Secretariat organized the virtual consultative meeting in collaboration with ICR with participation of Member States which included Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tunisia and Zambia. COMESA institutions which were represented included

the Trade and Development Bank (TDB) and the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB).

COMESA Assistant Secretary General in charge of Programmes Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah opened the meeting and observed that the consultative process was crucial in shaping a strategy that addresses the unique challenges women face in accessing and benefiting from economic opportunities across the COMESA region and beyond.

"We believe that gender equality and economic empowerment of women are critical factors to sustainable development and serve as cornerstones for inclusive national and regional development policies and programs," Amb. Dr. Kadah remarked.

"Women's economic empowerment is not only a matter of social justice, but also a proven catalyst for broader economic growth and development. In the COMESA region, where women make up a significant portion of the workforce, particularly in agriculture, trade, and small enterprises, it is imperative that we create an enabling environment where women can thrive, innovate, fully realize their economic potential, and

contribute meaningfully to sustainable economic growth of their families, communities, countries, and our region at large," he added.

The Assistant Secretary General thanked the Investment Climate Reform Facility (ICRF) for its partnership with COMESA on women economic empowerment. In addition to the development of the strategy, the ICR Facility has supported activities including capacity building of national statistical institutions on gender statistics to enhance the availability of gender data and knowledge for evidence-based policy making and programming.

It has also supported Public-Private Dialogues (PPD) on gender responsive frameworks in selected borders, and the development of resource materials for women in business which will be disseminated through the 50 Million African Women Speak digital platform (50MAWSP).

The consultative process to develop the strategy is an ongoing exercise which will involve member states, COMESA institutions, and the Secretariat.



COMESA Regional Training Workshop on Horticulture in Lilongwe, Malawi

Framework for Conducting Horticulture Production Surveys Developed

COMESA Secretariat through the Statistics Unit has developed a framework for conducting production surveys in the horticulture sector. The framework was developed in close consultation with Member States and funded by the European Union Development Fund (EDF11) through the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP).

The Framework will respond to demands by policymakers for statistics in the horticulture value chain.

At the 15th COMESA Committee Meeting on Statistical Matters Meeting held virtually on 14 – 15 October, the Framework was presented to the delegates for review and adjustments were made before it was adopted.

Head of the Statistics Unit at COMESA Secretariat Mr Themba Munalula said the Framework will now be presented to the COMESA Intergovernmental Committee Meeting for adoption.

Prior to this development, a Technical Working Group comprising of relevant COMESA departments, institutions and representatives from 14 Member States namely Burundi, DR Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Somalia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe met on 14th February 2024 and provided content for further adjustment of the Framework to cover all key areas.

Mr. Munalula revealed that this was a crucial step in the consultative process, aimed at gathering valuable insights from stakeholders for the completion of a comprehensive framework of horticulture production surveys.

Other key steps have been conducted such as a capacity building and validation workshop held on 15 – 19 April 2024 and a virtual dissemination event held on 30 July 2024.

The main objective of the dissemination was to comprehensively communicate the data requirements for horticulture production surveys to stakeholders as well as garner their support to fulfill these data needs. The event was attended by relevant COMESA divisions, institutions, Member States and development partners.

The COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan Productive Pillar places a strong emphasis on the establishment of value chains. Among these is the horticulture value chain. However, agricultural surveys in most Member states are focused on major cereals and legumes. As such little or no data exists on the extent of horticultural production. From a conceptual perspective, the surveys in Member states would have to be augmented with a specific methodology for capturing horticultural production.

Users of the African women Networking...

various platform activities, including the African Women Entrepreneurs Capacity Building Boot camp which provided skilling to 1,000 women in business and enriched the resources of the platform while contributing to its continued growth.

“The women and youth of Africa continue to endorse the platform as a valuable tool for accessing some of the resources they need for their businesses,” Hamusonde noted.

On her part, EAC’s Principal Gender and Community Development Officer Ms Generose Minani thanked COMESA for keeping the platform running smoothly. She challenged the national focal points to use the meeting to strategize on improving the 50MAWSP initiative. The meeting urged the national focal points to explore opportunities for increased promotion of the platform while focal points were briefed about upcoming platform feature enhancements which will make the platform more user-friendly and improve its content and networking functionality.

The 50 Million African Women Speak platform is a women’s economic empowerment initiative which is jointly implemented by COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS. It addresses the business information needs of women entrepreneurs and provides information 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 50MAWSP first phase.



Professor Derek Johnson (3rd right) Ms Providence Mavubi (2nd right) and COMESA and DFM colleagues

COMESA, University of Manitoba to Collaborate on Fisheries Initiative

In an effort to strengthen food systems and bolster climate resilience, COMESA is set to be the focal point for the Small Fish Food Systems Project—a multi-donor, multi-year, and multi-country initiative focused on expanding sustainable fisheries in Africa, particularly within the Great Lakes region.

On October 11, 2024, the COMESA Secretariat welcomed a delegation from the Dry Fish Matters (DFM) project, headed by Professor Derek Johnson of the University of Manitoba, Canada. This meeting aimed to establish a collaborative framework to replicate the successes of the DFM project in the COMESA region.

Given COMESA's extensive experience in governance and its strong connections with member states and fisheries sector stakeholders, particularly within the Blue Economy framework, the organization is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in this partnership. The meeting was facilitated by COMESA's Industry and Agriculture Division alongside

the Resource Mobilization and International Cooperation Unit. During the discussions, both teams identified multiple avenues for collaboration, marking a significant step toward formalizing their partnership. COMESA plans to leverage its institutional capacity and regional influence to mobilize resources and coordinate stakeholders across the region.

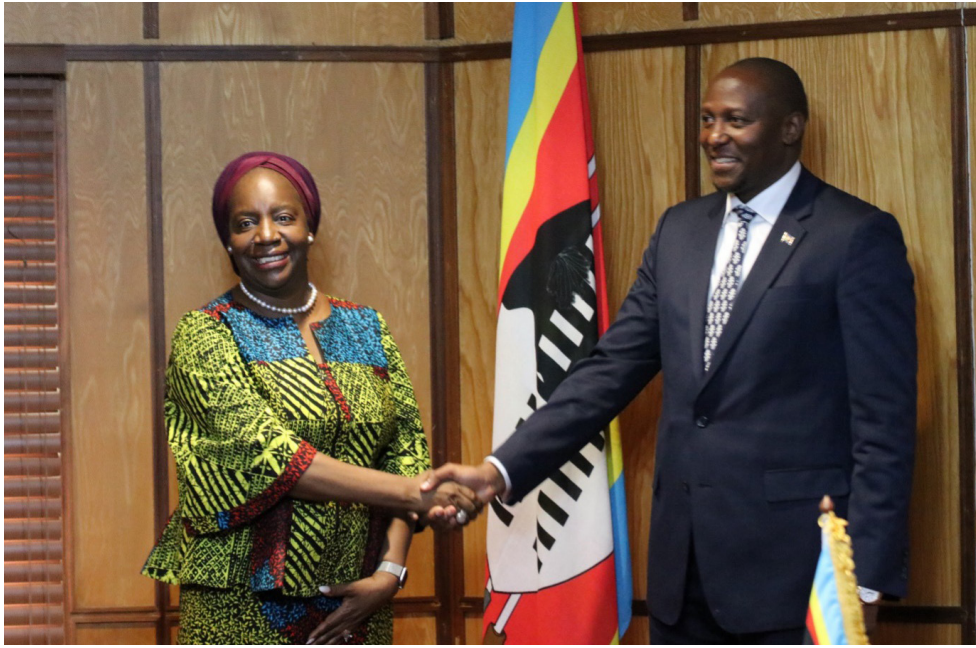
In her welcoming remarks, Director of Industry, Ms. Providence Mavubi, emphasized that this partnership reflects a forward-looking approach to addressing key regional challenges such as food and nutrition security, gender equity in the fisheries sector, and climate resilience.

"This collaboration will not only support research into critical challenges facing our fisheries sector but also bring impactful projects to the region," said Ms. Mavubi. "Through the new Small Fish Climate Change (SFCC) project, we aim to tackle pressing issues, including climate change, using a value-chain approach. We are committed to sustainable development that benefits our

member states and strengthens resilience."

Professor Johnson shared optimism about the partnership's potential in Africa, noting the DFM project's success in other regions. "Our experience with the DFM project has shown that small fish can make a big difference in improving livelihoods, food security, and nutrition, especially for vulnerable populations," he stated. "We look forward to working with COMESA to extend these impacts across the Great Lakes region in Africa."

The Small Fish Food Systems Project, with its climate-resilient SFCC component, represents a promising collaboration poised to address critical fisheries sector challenges while fostering sustainable development and climate adaptability across Africa.



Eswatini Prime Minister, Hon Russel Dlamini (R) receives COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe at the Cabinet Office in Mbabane. The SG was in the country for the launch of the electronic certificate of origin and meetings of the COMESA Committee of Governors of Central Banks

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The validation meeting brought together Directors of Fisheries from 18 COMESA member states, including Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Eswatini, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles.

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framework with the continental strategy and encouraged member states to do the same. The meeting, facilitated by technical teams from the COMESA Secretariat and the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), successfully concluded with the validation of the PFRS.

This validated PFRS serves as a comprehensive blueprint designed to transform the fisheries and aquaculture sectors across the COMESA region. It aims to address existing challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and promote sustainable practices to ensure the long-term viability and prosperity of these sectors. Fisheries and aquaculture are vital to the region's socioeconomic and environmental well-being, contributing to food security, livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation.

Additionally, the framework provides sector leaders with necessary policy direction, reforms, and strategies that can be tailored at the national level to enhance sector management and development.

The meeting received support from AU-IBAR under the EU-funded FishGov 2 project, with partners pledging ongoing assistance to the COMESA region to ensure the successful implementation of the PFRS.



COMESA DAIRY

Date	Activity	Venue
11-12 Nov	The 46th Administration & Budgetary Committee	Lusaka
11 – 14 Nov	Gender Statistics Workshop	Kampala
12 – 14 Nov	The 3rd Inter-Generational Dialogue - Eastern Africa Region	Kampala
20 – 22 Nov	2nd COMESA & International Relations Society of Kenya Annual Conference	Nairobi
25 – 26 Nov	The 46th Inter -Governmental Committee Meeting	Lusaka
27 Nov	COMESA @30 Anniversary Gala	Lusaka
28 Nov	The 45th COMESA Council of Ministers Meeting	Lusaka