

Number of Countries Participating in the COMESA FTA set to Rise ..as Tunisia prepares to join before end of the year



Tunisia Prime Minister H.E. Yousef Chahed (middle) and Minister of Trade Mr. Omar Behi (R) meet COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe.

The number of countries participating in the COMESA Free Trade Area is set to rise as Tunisia prepares to join the trading regime by the end of this year. Trade Minister Omar Behi told a visiting COMESA delegation that the government has established a thirty-member national technical committee on the implementation of the COMESA FTA composed of experts from the public and the private sector.

Currently, 16 out of 21 Members are participating in the COMESA FTA with others in various stages of joining the trade regime. Tunisia joined COMESA in July last year, together with Somalia, bringing the number of members States to the

regional body to 21. Since then, the country has embarked on a series of activities aimed at deepening its integration into COMESA programmes.

Early this week, Tunisia hosted a two-day National Workshop on the Implementation of the Regional Economic Integration Agenda. Consequently, a team of senior officials from the COMESA Secretariat, institutions and specialized agencies led by Secretary General Ms Chileshe Kapwepwe traveled to Tunis to support this initiative.

The workshop brought together a cross section of officials from the public and private sectors. Its objective was to provide technical

information to stakeholders in the country on the implementation of the COMESA Regional Economic Integration agenda with a focus on programme implementation and procedures for joining COMESA institutions.

Discussions centered on the implementation of the Free Trade Area, COMESA Trade Facilitation Instruments, Market Access, the COMESA Competition Regime, the Regional Payment and Settlement System (REPSS) and the COMESA Standards and Quality Assurance (SQMT) programme. The COMESA Regional Investment Agency (RIA) the COMESA Competition Commission (CCC), COMESA Clearing House and the Federation

From page 1

of National Association of Women in Business in Business were part of the mission.

Addressing delegates at the workshop hosted at the Tunisian Export Promotion Agency (CEPEX), Minister Behi said his country is at an advanced stage of preparations for the implementation of the COMESA Free Trade Area following the deposition of the Ratification Instrument of joining the regional in June this year.

“The national workshop will assist our country finalize its preparations and be ready for implementation of the COMESA FTA before the end of 2019,” he said.

Secretary General Kapwepwe commended the government for completing the admission process and expressed COMESA’s commitment to provide technical expertise to Tunisia when needed.

She added: “COMESA regional economic integration agenda has been tried and tested and the 21 Member States are already reaping its benefits as evidenced by increased volumes of intra-COMESA Trade in both goods and services.”

During the mission, which was her first in the country, Ms. Kapwepwe held bilateral meetings with the Prime Minister H.E. Yousef Chahed, Ministers Mr. Omar Behi (Trade), Mr. Mohamed Ridha Chalghoum

(Finance) Mr. Zied Laadhari (Investment) and the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs Mr Sabri Bach Tobji.

COMESA FTA provides participating countries with access to the larger regional market including the East African Community and the Southern African development Community (SADC) through the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite arrangement.

Transformed in 1994 from PTA to COMESA, the regional bloc has supported Member States participate in the FTA through reduction of tariffs and removing non trade barriers. Trade facilitation tools such as the COMESA Simplified Trade regime have been developed to ensure that small scale and medium traders benefit from the free trade regime.

RECs Steps in to Support Member States Benefit from Mineral Resources



Delegates to the regional dialogue

Multinational firms from other parts of the world still dominate the mining sector in many COMESA Member States with minimal roles for African firms. From these minerals, foreign manufacturing firms produce consumer and industrial goods for sale in global markets at much higher prices than what is paid for as a raw

material from the sources. This has resulted in many policymakers and economists in the region calling for increased local participation in the mining industry.

According to the African Economic Outlook, one of the critical deficiency in the management of the mineral resource in the

COMESA region, and Africa in general is the poor mining contracts that governments sign with the mining companies.

However, the narrative is slowly changing as African governments begin to consider adding value to their natural resources to drive economic development. This



seemingly obvious reasoning is the basis of a growing policy focus on mineral beneficiation which involves improving the economic value of a mineral by turning it into a final or intermediate product.

As part of the efforts to support this endeavor, COMESA and the African Union Development Agency (NEPAD) organized a regional dialogue on contract negotiation and fiscal policies in the extractive industries in Lusaka on 18th September 2019.

The objective of the dialogue was to share ideas on best practices around issues that African countries face when negotiating contracts, designing and administering an extractive fiscal policy. Zambian Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development Mr. Barnaby Mulenga, who opened the forum, noted that African countries are now revising their mining laws and fiscal policies to align them with emerging challenges.

“Financial leakages, transfer pricing and other vices have continued to characterize our extractive sectors leaving us the owners of the resources in poverty,” Mr Mulenga said in a speech delivered by Director of Planning Bernadette Mwakacheya. “Key is to understand what we are giving out in these contracts.” It was observed at the forum that most COMESA Member States continued to enter into poor contracts with multinationals, resulting in raw deals from its mineral resources, thus perpetuating poverty of the citizenry especially those residing in mining areas.

Addressing delegates, Assistant Secretary General (Administration and Finance) of COMESA, Dr Dev Haman said despite many challenges that the sector faces, COMESA is supporting Member States to implement the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) which endeavors to deepen the developmental role of the sector.

Dr Haman indicated that approximately, half of the world’s

vanadium, platinum and diamonds originate from the COMESA region, along with 36% of gold and 20% of cobalt. These minerals he said, contribute greatly to several COMESA Member States’ gross national product and employment, and many of them depend on mining exports for their foreign exchange earnings.

Mrs. Estherine Lisinge-Fotabong, Director of Programme Innovation and Planning at the AUDA-NEPAD stated that negotiating mining contracts was an extremely complex endeavour that requires a clear set of objectives articulated by leadership.

“To reach an agreement that is stable over time, the investor-state relationship must be perceived to be fair by the foreign investor and the host government, as well as local communities, broader civil society and the business community,” she said.

COMESA Forms Gender Technical Working Group



Members of the Gender Technical Working Group at the workshop

COMESA Secretariat has established a Gender Technical Working Group to strengthen gender mainstreaming across all sectors of regional integration programming.

To kick start this process, the officers drawn from all divisions, units and some COMESA institutions participated in a two-day workshop in Lusaka 24 - 25 September 2019.

Director of the Gender and Social Affairs Division Mrs. Beatrice Hamusonde said the technical working group was necessary as an accountability mechanism for gender.

“This move is important because of existing inequalities that impede inclusive and sustainable development. We are all aware that there are inequalities between men and women, girls and boys in many areas in our region,” Mrs Hamusonde said.

According to findings by COMESA, there are several root causes and consequences of gender inequality in the region. Key among them is the fact that women still own far less of productive resources. For example, in Kenya, only six percent of women hold title to land. In Malawi, only three percent of women are registered owners of commercial land while in Uganda, women own only 5% of the land.

Climate change is listed as having a greater impact on women as they are most reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods and have the least capacity to respond to natural hazards, such as droughts, landslides, floods and hurricanes. Other drivers of inequality include patriarchal norms that result in economic, legal, political and social discrimination against women and girls, reflected at individual, household, community and organizational levels and in the public areas.

Over the years, COMESA has made positive strides in the area of promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Mrs Hamusonde revealed that the region has seen an increased level of

political will and commitment to gender mainstreaming with the establishment of institutions such as the Gender Division, the Federation of National Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) and now the Gender technical Working Group.

The Secretariat has also introduced initiatives to improve capacity of staff through face to face and online training on gender. Member States have adopted reporting guidelines on gender and social development. In addition, the Secretariat has established a digital information and networking platform for women in business called the 50 Million African Women Speak.

Young Women Invited to Tap into the 50 Million Project



Kupes annual Conference

Young women and girls need to take advantage of the 50 Million African Women Speak Project meant to empower female entrepreneurs through providing access to financial and non-financial information relevant to develop and grow businesses.

The three-year project which is under implementation by COMESA, East Africa Community and Economic Commission for West African States will create a networking platform to connect women

entrepreneurs and encourage peer-to-peer learning, mentoring as well as information and knowledge sharing.

The Project aims at connecting, networking and empowering African women in 38 Member States across the three regional economic blocs.

On 21 September, in Lusaka, Zambia, more than 700 young women and girls participated in an annual women’s conference organized by KUPES, a

network for young women that aims at empowering, inspiring and motivating young women from all walks of life. The purposes of the organisation is to make the young ladies become agents for their own development. The theme of the one-day conference was Roar: ‘You were born for this’.

Addressing the women, Secretary General CHileshe Kapwepwe of COMESA invited them to tap into the 50 Million project as it provided opportunities for economic



empowerment.

The conference, now in its fourth year, was organized by KUPES, a Lusaka-based Network for young women and girls aged 17-24.

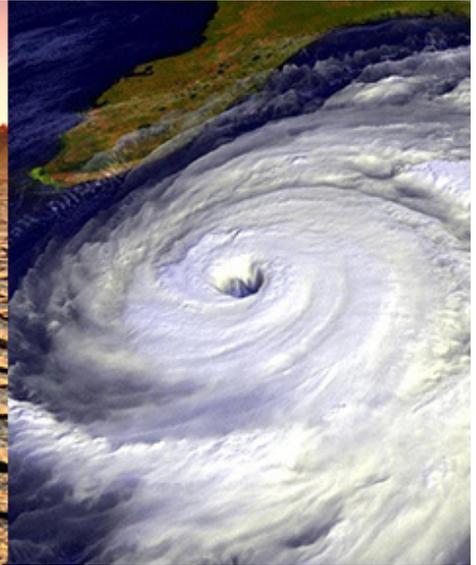
Speaking earlier, KUPES Founder Mrs.

Norena Chiteba said her Network believes that girls and young women possess huge untapped potential. When educated, healthy and equipped with the right skills and opportunities, they hold the key to unlocking many of the communities challenging problems such as reducing

poverty, catalyzing communities' social and economic development, and ending violence against women.

KUPES stands for Knowledge, Unique, Personal responsibility, Empathy and Support

€7.15m Provided for Climate Change Mitigation ...but More is Needed



The Effects of Climate Change

Eastern and Southern Africa region has not been spared the effects of climate change that have resulted in huge losses in the agriculture and energy sectors. This has prompted COMESA Secretariat to start implementing climate resilient programmes to mitigate its effects by adopting a proactive climate change programme that advocates for climate smart agriculture.

To date, a financing gap estimated at \$2.5 trillion USD per year is needed to help mitigate the effects of climate change globally. If this milestone is to be achieved, the international community needs to mobilize significant additional funding in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Under the COMESA Climate Change Programme about €7.15m has been provided by the European Union to support climate change projects in the Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Eswatini and Uganda.

The support is targeted at the Foundations for Farming in Zimbabwe, a group of different institutes involved in research, training and diffusion or conservation agriculture or no-till farming in Madagascar called the Groupement Semis Direct Madagascar (GSDM), NamBoard in Eswatini, and the Ministry of agriculture, animal industry and fisheries in Uganda.

In an interview conducted in Lusaka Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said more stakeholders should come on board to partner with the regional bloc by providing financial support to adequately implement the climate change programme.

She said the 21-member economic grouping has prioritized tackling effects of climate change to prevent abject poverty among its 600 million people, but more still needs to be done.

Countries in the region are implementing polices to combat effects of climate change key among them is measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Further, educating citizens on the importance of "going green" was another major policy consideration being pursued and advocated among Member States.

"COMESA is striving to be the best performing region in the world by having programmes that incorporate aspects of climate action particularly, the CO2 emissions in the region and Africa at large," she said.

Despite many African countries investing heavily in energy and transport infrastructure climate change posed danger to these investments far-reaching effects on human beings and the environment.

COMESA and Vatican Renew Relations



Ambassador Archbishop Gianfranco Gallone presenting his Letter of Credence to Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu

Kapwepwe at the Secretariat on Monday 23rd September 2019 following his appointment as the special

representative of the Vatican to COMESA. Ambassador Gallone will work as the link between the Secretariat in Lusaka and the Holy See.

COMESA DIARY

Meeting/Activity	Dates	Venue
Inaugural meeting of the project steering committee for EDF funded COMESA small scale cross border trade initiative and trade facilitation programme	30 September – 02 October 2019	Lusaka
COMESA Exhibits at the Uganda International Trade Fair	2nd – 10 October 2019	Lugogo Grounds Kampala
ESREM's Validation workshop on development of a Framework and Roadmap for the Establishment of a Regional Energy Regulatory Authority for SADC	3 – 4 October 2019.	Johannesburg
ESREM's National-level workshop on regulatory policy, autonomy and governance	8 – 10 October 2019.	Djibouti
Trade and Customs meetings	14 – 25 October 2019	Livingstone
Retreat for COMESA Institutions	24th November 2019	Lusaka
Intergovernmental Committee - Institutions	25th November 2019	Lusaka
Intergovernmental Committee-Secretariat	26th to 27th November 2019	Lusaka
Celebrating 25 years of COMESA	28th November 2019	Lusaka
COMESA Council of Ministers	29th November 2019	Lusaka

