

Member States Hold the Key to the Operation of the COMESA Information Sharing Portal



Seven countries: Burundi, Rwanda, Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mauritius and Madagascar have nominated officers that will serve as the focal persons in operationalizing the newly developed COMESA Information Sharing Portal. The portal is a resource page for real time exchange of information on regional supply and demand of essential goods manufactured in the region.

Manufacturers and suppliers will have privileges to update products and product information under the approved categories, as well as contact points and respond to enquiries...

Developed to support Member States during COVID-19 and after, the portal will connect producers, sellers and buyers of essential goods and help small-scale cross-border traders and Small and Medium Enterprises have access to market information.

At the demonstration of the prototype portal to the Ministries that coordinate COMESA activities at the national level, two months ago, COMESA Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe urged Member States to nominate focal persons that will manage content and registration of suppliers and products.

So far seven countries have responded, and accounts created for the focal persons

to upload country specific content on the system. Their role also includes creating and approving users (manufactures and supplies) at the national level and responding to queries. Country regulations and guidelines on Covid-19 and related Information will also be available on the portal.

COMESA Secretariat has provided for country specific dashboards for each Member State to upload their respective content including list of approved manufacturers or suppliers, database of products, information requests among others.

Manufacturers and suppliers will have privileges to update products and product information under the approved categories, as well as contact points and respond to enquiries. Buyers will be able to view the public information in the portal.

To support Member States to complete the nomination process and creation of accounts, the Secretariat has now appointed liaison officers to engage directly with the appointed officials to facilitate populating and utilization of the portal. The Secretariat is also organizing a second round of training of the appointed officials.

The decision to develop the portal was made by the COMESA Council of Ministers in May this year, to support regional trade, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tripartite Transport Corridor Trip Monitoring System Set for Piloting



File photo/ Chirundu border

Preparatory work for launch of a Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) pilot project are at an advanced stage. The CTMS is an initiative of the tripartite regional blocs; the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) on trade and transport facilitation.

Piloting of this project is planned for sections of the North-South (NS) and Walvis Bay-Ndola-Lubumbashi (WBNL) Corridors, (which transit Zambia to the Kasumbalesa Border with DR Congo). Initial focus is on Zambia, a well land-linked State with eight neighbouring countries.

To prepare the country for the project, a CTMS virtual workshop was conducted for stakeholders, incorporating public and private transport operators and their associations, in August this year. The meeting came up with procedures for operators, drivers/crew members and officials performing compliance validation at border posts and other roadside check points.

Since then, Zambia has now provided coordinates for waypoints, among them, COVID-19 test and isolation for transport crews in various provinces in the pilot corridor: Central, Copperbelt, Lusaka, Southern and Western and North-Western provinces. Operators along these routes are expected to register trips on the CTMS which

A New Statistics Strategy for COMESA is in the Works

COMESA is developing a regional Statistics Strategy covering the period 2021-2025. Its main focus will be to strengthen the collection and dissemination of statistical information in the region with the overall objective of supporting regional integration. The current Statistics Strategy covered the period 2017-2020.

COMESA stakeholders from Member States, Partner organizations and the Secretariat held a virtual meeting last week to review the draft COMESA Statistics Strategic Framework which sets the roadmap for the regional strategy for the next five years.

Speaking during the virtual meeting, Chief Statistician Mr. Themba Munalula said the strategy will support regional integration by building on aspirations of the national statistics strategies in Member States.

"There is critical need to harmonize statistical capacity building programs supported by COMESA, other RECs and pan African Organizations to foster efficiency in the delivery of these programs," Mr Munalula said.

He added that the Statistics Strategy needs to be promoted within the COMESA Member States and institutions as it serves the purpose of meeting the needs of the COMESA MTSP 2021 – 2025. He also emphasized the need for the alignment of national, regional and the continental statistics development strategies as a way of ensuring that priorities are linked and consistent.

has been mapped to enable operators to follow. Two companies in Zambia have started the process of registering their fleet and drivers in preparation for the launch.

Zambia has also commenced the procurement procurement of the hand-held devices to be deployed at the roadside for the CTMS Pilot. The devices will be available from 9 October to allow for software installation and training of officials prior to the launch of the Pilot. In addition, Zambia has designated Covid-19 testing centres where transport operators and their drivers can access these services country-wide before the commencement of their cross-border trips.

To publicize the initiative, COMESA Secretariat in collaboration with the Cities and Infrastructure for Growth in Zambia (CIGZ) funded by UKAid has developed publicity kit to raise awareness especially on the Tripartite Trade and Transport Facilitation Guidelines aimed at fast-tracking clearance of essential goods and services.

The initial focus will be on the Chirundu One Stop Border Post (OSBP) and later roll it out to other borders using a multimedia approach encompassing the community radio, television and social media. So far, a live television programme on the Guidelines and CTMS whereby transport experts from the COMESA Secretariat were featured on the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation.

An Inter-Agency Technical Coordination Committee (IATCC) is being set up for the Chirundu OSBP to come up with recommendations on how to address operational challenges at the border during the COVID-19 pandemic and after.



File Photo/ Themba Munalula, Chief Statistician

Consultations will continue in the period prior to the 11th COMESA Committee on Statistical matters to be conducted later this month.

National Monitoring and Evaluation Missions Mounted as RISM Project Winds-Up

The Regional Integration Capacity Building Project (RICB II) under the COMESA Adjustment Facility (CAF) is conducting project monitoring missions in Zambia to assess the progress attained and capture key results achieved at national level as the project closes in November this year.

Zambia is among the countries that is benefiting from CAF /Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM) resources through implementation of a Euro 2.1 million project supported by the European Union. The project targeted to increase Zambia's competitiveness and penetration of regional markets. This was by developing and enhancing the capacity of mostly, the Micro and Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to take advantage of the existing and potential regional markets and enhancing value addition and promotion of high value exports to the regional markets.

Some of the key interventions supported over the years included SME development in the

leather and textiles clusters as well as institutional support to key beneficiaries responsible for implementing regional commitments such as Zambia Metrology Agency, Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), Zambia Association of Manufacturers and Zambia Bureau of Standards.

The mission is meant to engage the different beneficiaries implementing various regional programmes in the public and private sector actors.

Last week, the Project Management team led by CAF/RISM Coordinator, Hope Situmbeko carried out three missions in Lusaka covering textile manufacturing plant at the Zambia Association of Manufacturer's, the Zambia Metrology Agency and the Zambia Bureau of Standards which are some of the beneficiaries of the project.

The manager of the textile production plant Mrs Maureen Sumbwe said they target to create over 100,000 job among the youths and women in Zambia. Currently the textile cluster has an

order from UNICEF to make nurse's aprons amounting to over 500,000 Kwachas (\$25,000.)

At the Zambia Metrology Agency, the RISM project funded the procurement of equipment including a Mobile Prover, an automated system that provides on-site calibration to ensure flow meters in service for fiscal and custody transfer applications maintain sustainable measurement performance as well as remain in compliance with industry standards. Director of legal Metrology at the Agency Humphrey Nkobeni said since the procurement of the prover by COMESA, the country has recorded improved fuel management resulting in increased revenue for the economy.

"We are able to do a lot of damage control even before people realize there could have been a problem with fuel. It's really doing wonders for us and the Agency and the fuel traders," Mr. Nkobeni said.

At the Zambia Bureau of Standards, over 110 SMEs were trained in the application of national regional and international standards.

Border Efficiency Tops Agenda for DR Congo and Zambia

The COMESA Secretariat has committed to support the improvement of key transboundary initiatives to improve efficiency at the Kasumbalesa border point between D R Congo and Zambia. Over the years, this border point has experienced efficiency challenges related to movement of cargo and now the two governments are actively engaged to finding a lasting solution under a Joint Permanent Commission (JPC) framework.

Recently, a Congolese delegation led by the Vice-President of the Congo Business Federation (FEC) Mr. Dieudonne Kasembo, and officials from the Congo Revenue Authority, conducted a visit to Lusaka for a bilateral intergovernmental meeting with Zambia that focused on trade facilitation issues at the Kasumbalesa border.

On the sidelines of this meeting, the DR Congo team met with COMESA officials led



Trading at Kasumbalesa border post between Zambia and Congo D.R

by the Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Administration and Finance, Dr Dev Haman who assured them of COMESA support to further dialogue towards sustainable solutions and seamless trade between the two countries, and the rest of the region.

Mr. Kasembo highlighted the negative impact that the challenges at the border presented to business sustainability, fair competition and the effective functioning of the two countries' markets. He affirmed his country's commitment to work with the Government of Zambia through COMESA to address the trade facilitation challenges at the Kasumbalesa border post.

The other challenges discussed related to the offloading of transit cargo at the border, transshipment of goods and other customs management issues, the status of implementation of the electronic cargo tracking systems at the national and regional level, and the upcoming support from COMESA, towards the One Stop Border Post operations at the Kasumbalesa border.

On the sidelines of intergovernmental meetings, the private sector came together to prepare their advocacy position report on

the above business costs and recommend industry-based solutions. The COMESA Business Council (CBC) chaired the Private Dialogue between the business and logistics associations of DRC and Zambia, to identify specific border business costs and recommend improvement on border relations on trade facilitation between the two countries.

During the meeting, CBC Chief Executive officer, Ms. Sandra Uwera expressed the need for involvement of the private sector in the implementation of electronic cargo

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tracking systems and other digital trade facilitation tools at the national level, as they are the end users and beneficiaries of such systems.

Some of the key industry recommendations submitted to the bilateral meetings was strengthening border patrol and enforcement to ensure adherence to legal frameworks regarding the transshipment of goods and to curb customs fraud and the illegal breaking of transit goods at the border.

The meeting also recommended that there be amplified Customs interface to enable sharing of information and uniform processing across the region as well as strengthening the One Stop Border Post at Kasumbalesa border.

It was also recommended that there be effective management of border markets through defining lists of products for small scale trade excluding commercial goods and that a mechanism be developed to strengthen the protection of drivers and transporters within the DRC.

Further, a regional approach should be applied in the implementation of electronic tracking systems to ensure cross border synergies in traceability, to safeguard against transit fraud and unlawful breaking of transit goods.

The COMESA Diary

**6-8
Oct 2020**

Fifth Meeting of the Trade and Trade Facilitation Sub-Committee
Organised by: Trade & Customs **Venue:** Virtual

**6-9
Oct 2020**

Nineteenth Meeting of the Legal Drafting Sub Committee
Organised by: FEMCOM **Venue:** Virtual

**12
Oct 2020**

Sixth Meeting of Sub-Committee of Heads of Customs (Experts Meeting)
Organised by: Trade & Customs **Venue:** Virtual

**13-15
Oct 2020**

Twentieth Meeting Legal Drafting Sub Committee
Organised by: Legal/Finance/ Audit **Venue:** Virtual

**14
Oct 2020**

Sixth Meeting of Sub-Committee of Heads of Customs
Organised by: Trade & Customs **Venue:** Virtual

**14-15
Oct 2020**

Technical/Meeting of Experts on the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR)
Organised by: Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project **Venue:** Virtual

**19-21
Oct 2020**

Seventh Annual Research Forum
Organised by: Trade & Customs **Venue:** Virtual

**20-22
Oct 2020**

Audit and Budget Subcommittee
Organised by: Admin & HR Budget and Finance, Internal Audit **Venue:** Virtual



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051. Lusaka, Zambia

+260 211 229 725

www.comesa.int

info@comesa.int

facebook.com/COMESA/

[@twitter.com/comesa_lusaka](https://twitter.com/comesa_lusaka)