

50 Million African Women Speak platform unveiled in Seychelles



President Danny Faure (centre in blue shirt) participated in the launch

The 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform was on Tuesday 25 August unveiled in Seychelles with the country's President His Excellency Danny Faure urging women to seize the opportunities it will present them to do business. The launch was the first in a COMESA Member State since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and was held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants gathered physically and were joined virtually by several invited guests.

COMESA's high-profile participants at the event were led by Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe, Assistant Secretaries General Amb. Dr. Kipyego Cheluget and Dr. Dev Haman as well as other officials from the Secretariat and Member States. During the event, speaker after speaker emphasized the need for women to embrace digital approaches as one of the ways to ensure their businesses survive

during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While making his official launch address, President Faure lauded the strong bond Seychelles enjoys with COMESA, noting that the launch of the 50MAWSP platform was "yet another example of the results of our strong relationship."

He made a case for closer collaboration at Member State level as well as among businesspeople in the region and reaffirmed the importance of digital platforms such as

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50MAWSP in making this possible.

"The 50 Million African Women Speak platform comes at a time when the world needs to come together more now than ever before, following the economic and social disruption caused by COVID-19," President Faure said.

"Seychelles is grateful to COMESA and the African Development Bank for this investment. I am convinced that this will benefit many families and enable them to overcome the challenges they face. I encourage all women to sign in to www.womenconnect.org to do your part to support our families, our economy and come together for Seychelles". He added

On her part, Secretary General Kapwepwe commended the Government of Seychelles for its support which ensured the successful implementation of the 50 Million African



COMESA Enhancing the Leather Value Chain in Eswatini

Over 150 artisans have been trained in various areas of the Leather Value chain in the Kingdom of Eswatini with support from the European Development Fund through the Regional Integration Support Mechanism (RISM).

Specifically, the project has trained artisans in footwear design and making, leather goods design and making, vegetable tanning and on the establishment of a vegetable tanning cluster. The project has also funded the development and validation of a feasibility study on the possibility of establishing a leather tannery in the Kingdom.

Eswatini joined forces with COMESA and signed a Grant Agreement in December 2018 for an overall amount of more than Euros 1.185 million from the European Development Fund (EDF) through RISM. To forge the way forward, various Ministries came together to ensure the achievement of results of this project to become a success and a marvel for all to see in the country and beyond.

The Leather Value Chain Strategy of 2016 to 2025 states that the Kingdom of Eswatini is highly dependent on the importation of footwear and other leather

products and annual footwear imports averaged at US\$17.8 million in the period 2011 to 2017 which is reflective of a sufficient local market.

Trade Experts at the COMESA Secretariat have stated that whilst this may have read positively, the performance of the artisans who are involved in the production of footwear and other leather products are constrained due to several factors which include lack of skills in business management, collaboration (clustering) and having limited access to suitable equipment/machinery and technical production skills.

The funds made available through RISM have contributed to the enhancement of performance of the leather value chain in trying to mitigate some of these challenges faced by the sector players.

"This project has contributed to addressing the constraints that had been identified to further the achievements by procuring leather production equipment including cutting, stitching, making and lasting machinery and tools amounting close to \$36, 000," reads the Latest Progress Report on Eswatini.

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Women Speak Project, and observed that the digital platform would give women in Seychelles an opportunity for a fresh start despite the devastation by the pandemic.

"The thousands of women who have already signed up to the platform have quickly found value in the various knowledge groups that connect women entrepreneurs based on their specific interests, which range from the pursuit of digital marketing skills to fashion and photography.

"A tour around the platform is indeed an instant reminder that COVID-19 is not the end of the road for women entrepreneurs in Seychelles, it is only the beginning of life on the 50 Million African Women Speak platform," she said.

She also thanked the funding partner, African Development Bank for the financial support which has made the 50 Million African Women Speak Project possible in 36 countries across the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs.

The 50MAWS platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries.

Following the launch in Seychelles, launch events in 13 COMESA Member States are planned and the next launch is scheduled for 3 September 2020 in Zimbabwe.



COMESA, AU, SADC Engage Youth on Silencing the Guns

COMESA, the African Union and SADC have agreed that young people in Africa should no longer be seen as perpetrators of conflicts or targets of violence but rather be recognized as actors and partners in promoting peace and security. The three bodies have acknowledged that youth are partners who have continued to play an important role in preventing and maintaining peace on the continent.

This affirmation was made during the Southern Africa Regional Consultations on the Roles of Youth in Silencing the Guns in Africa. The virtual meeting held on Friday 28 August was organized by COMESA working with the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It attracted youth participation from most parts of COMESA and SADC.

High level representatives from the two Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the AU discussed how youth can play a bigger role in silencing the guns on the continent. The event offered an opportunity to the young peacebuilders to interact with the RECs and build relationships with their intergovernmental institutions.

The consultations were also meant to provide youth with a platform to update the RECs on their activities as peacebuilders and support the implementation of Silencing the Guns programme which aims to free the African continent of wars, civil conflicts, humanitarian crises, human rights violations, gender-based violence and genocide. COVID-19 pandemic was also mentioned as a threat to youth development because they are among the most affected.

Speaking on behalf of COMESA Secretariat, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget highlighted the need for the youth to be more involved in implementing programmes that affect the continent such



Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget

as Silencing the Guns.

He called for the need to build a bridge between the current generation and the next who are youth by passing on the baton. "...we should resolve to move from rhetoric to action which will require that we change our mindsets and start to view the youth, not as leaders of tomorrow but leaders of today,"

COMESA through the Programme on Peace and Security supports the 2013 AU Declaration on Silencing the Guns and end all wars in Africa by 2020. This is done through conflict prevention, conflict management, post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes.

I must give credence to youth and their networks in the way that they are seizing the opportunities afforded to them – including through the Youth for Peace Africa program to continually innovate and overcome myriad complexities that challenge their contributions to peace and security in Africa," Amb. Ngoga added.

As a way forward, Amb. Cheluget called for youth to be empowered through capacity building efforts to ensure that they are well equipped to take on the leadership role. The COMESA Early Warning System (COMWARN) shows that youth make up 34% of the COMESA population with a steady upward trend and one in four young people are affected by violence or armed conflicts in the southern African region alone.

AUC Head of Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Amb. Fred Ngoga pointed out that regional consultations will yield positive results that can enable the continent get closer to its aspirations of an integrated and peaceful society necessary to drive and maintain development.

"I must give credence to youth and their networks in the way that they are seizing the opportunities afforded to them – including through the Youth for Peace Africa program to continually innovate and overcome myriad complexities that challenge their contributions to peace and security in Africa," Amb. Ngoga added.

SADC Head of Regional Early Warning Centre Mr Habib Kambanga commended the youth for playing their part in Silencing the Guns in the region. "The Southern African region is recording positive strides in assisting the continent achieve its target of silencing the guns and ending all wars this year,"

AU Youth4Peace Ambassador for Southern Africa Ms Karabo Mokgonyana called for the involvement of young people in the designing of programmes such as the Silencing the Guns so they can be part of the solution from the beginning.

COMWARN has become instrumental in the identification of structural drivers for peace and prosperity and is an invaluable tool to assist Member States to build resilience.

Consumer Alert on Pyramid Schemes

The COMESA Competition Commission (CCC) has advised consumers in the region to be on the lookout for pyramid schemes whereby people are encouraged to join and recruit others at a fee to make money. Members of a pyramid scheme make money through the recruitment of others.

A statement from CCC Headquarters in Malawi states that the Commission's attention has been drawn to the activities of a scheme known as Crowd1, which markets itself as a digital multi-level company and whose operations are being investigated in some jurisdictions. Specifically, the Commission has noted that authorities in the Philippines and Namibia found that Crowd1 members make money by recruiting others and the organization has since been banned in Namibia. In Philippines, authorities are said to have issued a cease and desist order to Crowd1 for operating without a license.

Further, authorities in Mauritius and New Zealand have issued investor alerts, advising the public to exercise caution in their dealings with Crowd1.

The Commission has observed that some pyramid schemes pose as multi-level marketers that pretend to be selling products. However, at close glance there are no sustainable earnings from the sale of the products and members are often advised to recruit others to make money. "Consumers are therefore advised to exercise caution when dealing with Crowd1 and also conduct research about companies they wish to invest in to avoid losing their hard-earned money," the CCC statement reads in part.

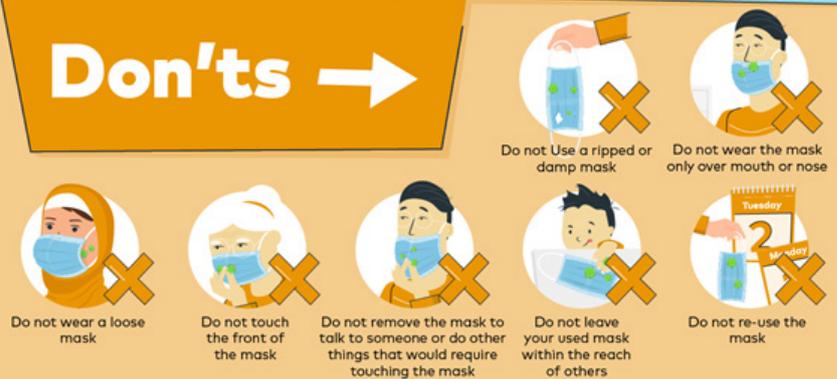
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Remember that masks alone cannot protect you from COVID-19. Maintain at least 1 metre distance from others and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, even while wearing a mask.

EPI-WIN World Health Organization

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