

## 50 Million African Women Speak platform (50MAWSP) National Launches Planned in 14 Member States



File Photo: Women at the Zambia Launch

**L**usaka, Monday, 17 August 2020: COMESA will this week start conducting national launches of a digital platform known as the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) Project specifically designed to address the information needs of women in business in the region.

The trade bloc will roll out the Platform in 14 Member States between August and November 2020 largely through virtual means owing to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The launches are tentatively scheduled to kick off in Zimbabwe followed by Seychelles on 25 August.

The platform which is accessible at

[www.womenconnect.org](http://www.womenconnect.org) primarily seeks to economically empower women by providing a one-stop shop for a wide range of financial and non-financial services that women need to start and grow successful businesses.

It is jointly implemented by COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of

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**“The 50MAWSP digital platform therefore is giving women-owned businesses a lifeline as we embrace a new normal where businesses, whether big or small, are moving online,”**

West African States (ECOWAS) and is funded by the African Development Bank. Continentally unveiled during the Global Gender Summit in November 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda, the platform enables women in Member/partner States of COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS and other African countries to find information on how to run businesses, where to access financial services, how to create business opportunities online and where to access training resources.

Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe has described the initiative as “a very practical way of speaking to the general agenda of empowering women” with its business resources and custom-built social networking features already attracting thousands

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# Women in Burundi Empowered to Produce Good Quality Textile



Women working in the textile sector in Burundi will soon be able to produce high quality cloth after undergoing skills and entrepreneurial empowerment through an incubator project supported by the Federation of Women in Business for Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) in partnership with African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) Spanish Fund.

The training which is also facilitated through the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) project is expected to contribute to creating jobs for women in Burundi.

BIAWE Project Coordinator, Darlene Hakizimana stated that the women entrepreneurs have been equipped with business skills as well as being trained technically to use industrial sewing machines to manufacture creative and well-designed textile products. Once trained, the women are encouraged to form cooperatives so as to empower themselves financially and through coaching and mentorship programs for sustainability of their startup business.

Ms. Hakizimana said that the BIAWE project is creating strategic partnerships

for the entrepreneurs with different institutions in the country and beyond. These partnerships will enable them to link with off takers and market for their products. The activity is expected to create a great opportunity for designers and entrepreneurs who would want to craft their own brand with innovative fashion designs. Using local arts and traditions with attract local, regional and international customers with reasonable cost and be able to compete with imported textiles' market from other countries.

"Some of the items earmarked for production include uniforms, branded wear as well as other textile products including embroidery targeted for the local and foreign market," Ms Hakizimana added.

The Burundi Investment Promotion Authority (API) has commended the initiative saying it will greatly benefit the agriculture sector by promoting the growing of local cotton, which is a raw material for most garments and textiles.

This FEMCOM project in the textile sector aims to empower women in different sectors in COMESA Member States where association has its footprints.

## 50MAWSP) National Launches Planned ...

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of women and connecting them to do business with each other and share experiences in ways that were previously not possible.

According to the Director for Gender and Social Affairs, Ms Beatrice Hamusonde the platform, which is also available as an app, is timely and the perfect response for the region's women to turn to as they deal with the social and economic challenges which have resulted from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The 50MAWSP digital platform therefore is giving women-owned businesses a lifeline as we embrace a new normal where businesses, whether big or small, are moving online,"

she added, emphasizing that the platform will give women an opportunity to showcase their products and connect with a market of millions across Africa, in addition to leveraging opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and mentorship as part of a dynamic online community of entrepreneurs.

Following the two national launches scheduled this August in Zimbabwe and Seychelles, 12 more launches will be conducted in Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan and Tunisia. The first 50MAWSP national launch in the COMESA region was held in Zambia in February this year.



# Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project Extended to end of 2021



File Picture of Cross Border Trade at Kasumbalesa

The World Bank has agreed to a no cost extension for the Great Lakes Trade Facilitation Project (GLTFP) to December 2021. This was revealed during the 12th Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting held virtually on Friday 14 August 2020.

The five million US dollars project was launched in 2016 for a five-year period. COMESA's Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Ambassador Kipyego Cheluget said the Project has been crucial in facilitating trade for small scale cross border traders by promoting the Simplified Trade Regime and providing necessary information needed to conduct business across the three project countries of Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

He added that though most traders have been affected by COVID-19 and the restrictions that have been imposed by countries, the GLTFP has ensured that Trade Information Officers are available at border posts to attend to those who are trading.

The meeting was briefed on how COVID-19 has also halted most of the project's field-based activities such as regular visits to project countries and borders in order to hold consultations with relevant

stakeholders.

On a positive note, the PSC heard how the Project Team has adapted to using online communication platforms provided by COMESA Secretariat and have continued implementing the project. "The use of online meetings has had its positive effect in terms of saving resources which can be used during the no-cost extension of the project that now ends in December 2021," said Amb. Cheluget, who is also the PSC Chairperson.

"We need to ensure that the investment made by COMESA and its key development partner the World Bank is not in vain.... there is need to ensure that outputs realized by the project such as supporting and facilitating small scale cross border traders continue beyond the life of the project," he pointed out.

Another major activity that the project

is focusing on is the continued provision of technical support and coordination of activities aimed at rolling out effective implementation of the COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR). The STR seeks to help in bringing the informal sector into formal trade by simplifying trade and customs process for small-scale traders and allowing them to also benefit from the Free Trade regime of COMESA, among other objectives.

During the meeting, it was noted that the project model is already attracting beyond the COMESA region and being considered for enhancement of cross-border trade in some West African countries. Thus, under GLTFPs' sister programme, the Small Scale Cross-Border Trade Programme that is funded by the EU, the International Trade Center intends to set up Trade Information Desks at selected borders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to support and provide

## DIARY FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

NAME OF MEETING	DATES	ORGANISER
Validation Workshop: <i>Metrology Infrastructure in the COMESA Region</i>	19 August 2020	Division of Industry and Agriculture
Launch of the 50MAWSP Seychelles National Launch	25 August 2020	Division of Gender and Social Affairs

# HOW TO WEAR A MEDICAL MASK SAFELY

[who.int/epi-win](https://www.who.int/epi-win)

## Do's →



Wash your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for tears or holes



Find the top side, where the metal piece or stiff edge is



Ensure the colored-side faces outwards



Place the metal piece or stiff edge over your nose



Cover your mouth, nose, and chin



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Avoid touching the mask



Remove the mask from behind the ears or head



Keep the mask away from you and surfaces while removing it



Discard the mask immediately after use preferably into a closed bin



Wash your hands after discarding the mask

## Don'ts →



Do not Use a ripped or damp mask



Do not wear the mask only over mouth or nose



Do not wear a loose mask



Do not touch the front of the mask



Do not remove the mask to talk to someone or do other things that would require touching the mask



Do not leave your used mask within the reach of others



Do not re-use the mask

**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



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