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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization bringing together a diverse group of businesses and associations in the region and is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector and business community in the COMESA region. It has been established as a consultative committee of the business community to provide a link between the private sector and organs of the Common market.

CBC's advocacy and policy agendas focus on improving the competitiveness and deepening the participation of the private sector in regional and global trade. This includes prioritizing and taking specific advocacy strategies to address key business impediments and measures that affect our industries and have a direct bearing on the participation of our businesses in trading in the COMESA region.

This bulletin captures advocacy agendas under the following sectors:

- ✦ Transport and Logistics/Trade Facilitation Workgroup
- ✦ Manufacturers Workgroup;
- ✦ Digital Financial Services Workgroup;
- ✦ Agro Industry-Seed Workgroup;
- ✦ Agro Industry- Food and Beverages workgroup
- ✦ Agro Industry- Tobacco Growers Workgroup;
- ✦ Health Care Services and Pharmaceuticals Industry Workgroup.

## 2. POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

### 2.1 Agro Industry – Food and Beverages Association Workgroup

In June 2020, CBC developed and validated a position report focusing on Harmonisation of Food standards in COMESA, with key recommendations including: *acceleration of harmonisation of COMESA standards and net weight regulations; promotion of Mutual Recognition Agreements; improving laboratory capacities; and, addressing the cost of certification for SMEs.*

The position report and recommendations were presented to the 10<sup>th</sup> COMESA SPS Committee Meeting in July 2020. They were further presented and adopted by the 7<sup>th</sup> COMESA Joint Technical Committee on Agriculture at the end of July 2020.



On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, CBC convened a webinar under the theme, *“The Future of Industry Post COVID-19: Reset? Revolutionize? Maintain?”*, which brought together companies in the agro manufacturing sector.

The objective of the webinar was to consider the challenges faced by the manufacturing sector as impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. The discussion keenly reviewed what industry needs to look into in order to successfully prevail in the new normal dynamics of changed business trends. Key recommendations included: *enhanced investment in research and development to ensure local production of commercially viable intermediate inputs that are typically sourced from external markets; harmonisation of standards and quality systems within COMESA and the region; incentivisation of the manufacturing sector by governments through moratoriums in tax regimes; and, provision of affordable financing for industries to support upgrade of technologies, aligning with the 4th Industrial Revolution.*

**THE FUTURE OF INDUSTRY POST COVID-19: RESET? REVOLUTIONIZE? MAINTAIN?**  
Insights from leading manufacturing companies, SMEs and Associations in COMESA

**PANELISTS**

 <b>Dr. Sherif Al Gabaly</b> Chairman of Africa Cooperation Committee - Federation of Egyptian Industries	 <b>Phyllis Wakaiga</b> CEO, Kenya Association of Manufacturers	 <b>Monica Musonda</b> CEO and Founder, Java Foods Zambia	 <b>James Ojiambo</b> Manager, Regulatory Affairs, Nestle East & Southern Africa	 <b>Sandra Uwera</b> CEO, COMESA Business Council <b>FACILITATOR</b>
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Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020  
1430hrs - 1630hrs CAT  
Lusaka, Zambia

Register in advance via the following Zoom link:  
<https://bit.ly/2YdvXuf>

Email: [info@comesabusinesscouncil.org](mailto:info@comesabusinesscouncil.org)  
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### Adopted Recommendations

- ✦ Secretariat to develop action plan to urgently prioritize SPS issues to address low intra-COMESA trade;
- ✦ Secretariat to accelerate and actualize the implementation of MRA for priority commodities in COMESA Member States;
- ✦ COMESA is urged to strengthen private sector participation in the implementation of SPS measures. CBC is urged to establish a regional Beverages Association to strengthen regional industry coordination, supply chain partnerships and represent the industry's position in engagements with the public sector.

## 2.2 Agro Industry - Seed Workgroup



In June 2020, CBC carried out a survey termed, *“Issue Identification and Policy Actions for Improved Seed Trade in COMESA”* to the workgroup members. This was followed by a validation meeting held in July 2020. The objective of the meeting was to harmonize key positions for advocacy as part of the work group and validate positions and recommendations developed through the survey.

CBC also convened a webinar conference providing a platform of public-private sector engagement on key issues pertaining to the improvement of seed trade in COMESA, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2020. The webinar was held under the theme, *“Unlocking Agriculture Trade and Food Security Through Improved Seed Trade in COMESA”*.

Key recommendations from the webinar included: simplification of trade processes; strengthening market information systems; policy and regulatory harmonization; and addressing illicit/counterfeit seed trade.

These were further presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> COMESA Technical and Ministerial Committee meeting on Agriculture at the end of July 2020.

The following recommendations were adopted by the Technical and Ministerial Committee:

*i. On trade facilitation and simplification of procedures, particularly during COVID-19*

- ✦ Member States are urged to ensure the implementation of the COMESA Guidelines to facilitate the speedier movement of essential goods and food products during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Furthermore, to ensure greater alignment and clarity through listing seeds as part of essential goods lists at national level to ensure consistency in interpretation and application of the provisions.
- ✦ Member States are urged to implement single window systems to enable the central submission, digital submission of documents and processing of documents for importing and exporting seeds within COMESA.
- ✦ Member States are urged to ensure the publication of rules, regulations administrative procedures openly on the government website. Furthermore, the COMESA Secretariat to develop a repository of the above for all countries on the COMESA website, and constantly update it.

*ii. On addressing limited harmonisation and non-implementation of COMESA Seed Regulations*

- ✦ COMESA Secretariat is urged to work with the public and private sector to undertake visits to non-implementing countries to get buy in and encourage implementation of the COMESA Seed Harmonisation Regulations.
- ✦ Member States are urged to accelerate the implementation of COMESA Regulations, ensuring national systems are aligned to the above. This will also support alignment with with international regulations such as OECD and UPOV.

*iii. On inefficiencies and lack of capacity and harmonisation of seed certification systems*

- ✦ Member States are urged to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure for seed certification at national and regional level in implementing the regional and international standards, for example through licensing private seed laboratories and inspectors to increase the institutional capacity of Seed Certification Institutions.



- ✦ COMESA is urged to accelerate the development and implementation of regional seed standards/mutual recognition frameworks to enable acceptance of certificates issued by National Plant Protection Organisations of Member States.
- iv. *On addressing inaccurate or untimely seed trade information and statistics*
  - ✦ Urge COMESA Secretariat through the statistics department to work with the national statistics agencies and other relevant institutions like TASAI to put in place a framework for collection and recording of seed statistics to improve seed trade statistics within the region.
- v. *On addressing counterfeit trade in seed*
  - ✦ Member States are urged to strengthen national regulations and enforcement mechanism on curbing counterfeit seed trade. COMESA to develop a regional regulation on anti-illicit trade to provide a cross-border framework for engagement and collaborative efforts for tackling counterfeit trade in seed.
  - ✦ Member States are called upon to put in place an electronic verification mechanism (such as barcoding systems) for the traceability of seeds to distinguish between authentic and counterfeit seed.
- vi. *On Monitoring and encouraging the implementation of harmonised seed regulations*
  - ✦ COMESA Business Council should develop a COMESA Seed Trade Regulations and Harmonisation Index, borrowing from other seed indexes such as the TASAI Access to Seed Index, monitoring and showing progress on implementation of regulations by countries in COMESA.



## 2.3 Transport and Logistics/Trade Facilitation Workgroup

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, CBC convened a webinar themed, *“Taking Stock: Implementation of the COMESA Regional Guidelines for the Movement of Essential Goods and Supplies Across the Region During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”*

The webinar discussed the extent of implementation and the effectiveness of the released *COMESA Regional Guidelines for the Movement of Goods and Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, keenly reviewing current experiences by business and offering recommendations for enhanced trade facilitation measures.

### Taking Stock: Implementation of The COMESA Regional Guidelines For The Movement of Essential Goods and Supplies Across The Region during The COVID-19 Pandemic

Webinar: Tuesday, 14th July 2020

Voice of the Private Sector in the Region  
BUILDING REGIONAL GOING GLOBAL

**MODERATOR:**

**PANELLISTS:**

**Ms. Sandra Uwera**  
CEO, COMESA Business Council

**Mr. Mushuma Mulenga**  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Zambia

**Mr. William Ojonyo**  
Member: FEAFSA COVID-19 Taskforce, Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations (FEAFSA)

**Mrs. Temitope Iluyemi**  
Director, Global Government Relations for Africa, Procter & Gamble

**Dr. Christopher H. Onyango**  
Director, COMESA Trade and Customs

**Mr. Ian Hirschfeld**  
Head of Public Policy for Southern and Eastern Africa, Coca-Cola

**Mr. Mike Fitzmaurice**  
Executive Director, Federation of East and Southern African Road Transport Associations (FESARTA)

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The said recommendations focused mainly on enhancing trade facilitation; and strengthening the private sector’s engagement with the public sector during this pandemic period.

## Adopted Recommendations

- i. *On enhancing trade facilitation*
  - ✦ Member States are urged to strengthen and monitor the implementation of the COMESA Guidelines at national level and bilaterally with countries that share borders, through a public-private border management consultative committee that fosters dialogue, collaboration, awareness on new regulatory requirements and response mechanism, to ensure effective implementation.

- ✦ At national level, Member States are urged to strengthen platforms for public-private dialogue and ensure private sector participation, and finance of National Trade Facilitation Committees to increase coordination.
- ✦ Member States are urged to increase border coordination, strengthen border patrol and enforcement to ensure adherence to legal frameworks regarding the transshipment of goods to curb customs fraud and the offloading of transit goods at the border.
- ✦ Member States are urged to implement a regional approach for electronic cargo tracking systems to ensure cross border synergies, and regional tracking for increased traceability to safeguard against transit fraud, and also aid anti-illicit trade measures.

## ii. *On strengthening industry engagement during COVID-19*

- ✦ Member States are urged to implement principles of good business regulations: carrying out regulatory impact assessment, private sector consultation and implementing grace periods when imposing measures that have an impact on business or trade competitiveness.
- ✦ CBC is urged to establish sectoral regional Beverages Association to strengthen regional industry coordination, supply chain partnerships and represent the industry's position in engagements with the public sector.

## 2.4 Digital Financial Services Workgroup

**Live Webinar**

**Reshaping the Future of Industry & SMEs Through Digital Financial Inclusion**

**24th Nov 2020**  
13h30 CET | 14h30 CAT | 15h30 EAT

**Meet our Panellists:**

- Dr. Amany Asfour**  
Board Director, CBC | President, Egyptian Businesswomen Association, African Alliance for Women Empowerment
- Ms. Dilwonberish Aberra** | Program officer, Scale Africa Financial Services for the Poor, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Mr. Bosco Sebabi**  
Member of the TDB Panel on Central Banks & Payments/Clearing House Initiatives
- Mr. Bruno Mweemba**  
Managing Director - Panuka Enterprise Ltd
- Mr. James Chona**  
Director - Airtel Money, Zambia
- Mr. Fidelis Muli** Director, Technical Services - Kenya Bankers Association
- Ms. Sandra Uwera**  
CEO - COMESA Business Council  
**Moderator**

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The webinar brought together regulators, policymakers, telecommunication companies, commercial banks, microfinance institutions, manufacturers, agro-industry players, industry associations and Fintechs to deliberate on opportunities, risks and challenges within the digital cross-border payments ecosystem for SMEs in COMESA and proposed practical solutions to highlighted impediments.

The recommendations put forward were focused on the areas of **policy and regulatory frameworks**, **public-private engagement**, **public awareness and capacity building**, **political will**, **KYC policies**, **infrastructure development**, **design principles**.

## **Recommendations of the webinar**

### i. *On policy and regulatory frameworks*

Member States are urged to:

- ✦ Develop data protection and privacy laws which are harmonised across the region.
- ✦ Ensure that there is systems integration to facilitate payments across different payment platforms through implementing international Standards (ISO 20022) which promotes movement of funds across different platforms.
- ✦ Push for policies and regulations which support real-time payments; harmonisation of Mobile Network Operators' (MNOs') transaction limits of cross-border transactions; increased wallet sizes to enable MSMEs to transact more readily and efficiently; and address liquidity challenges experienced by agents in cashing out, particularly in remote areas.

## ii. *On public-private engagement*

- ✦ The private sector is urged to strengthen dialogue and partnerships with the public sector towards collaboration, raising awareness and advocating for regulations and policies aligned to developing the best platform which address consumer needs.

## iii. *On public awareness and capacity building*

- ✦ Develop mechanisms which facilitate dissemination of information, sensitizing and training MSMEs on available digital financial services.
- ✦ Develop programmes for capacity building of Women and MSMEs on how to use digital financial services i.e. the platforms to consider language which MSMEs will be comfortable with to build trust.
- ✦ Establish programmes and platforms which increase awareness on the effects of illicit trade on economies, society, consumer health, and environment of Member States across the region.
- ✦ Develop information sharing platforms among MSMEs, women and other various stakeholders.

## iv. *On political will*

- ✦ Proactive leadership; political will; and integration and coordination across national, inter-governmental and intra-governmental authorities are needed to address the range of issues relevant to harnessing digital financial technology.

## v. *On Know Your Customer considerations*

- ✦ National governments need to prioritize availability of robust and easily verifiable digital IDs, whether biometric or other types of data-based forms, which can be used to facilitate secure access to digital financial services.

## vi. *On infrastructure development*

Member States are called to develop good infrastructure that drive digital financial inclusion which includes cooperation between MNOs, Banks and other non-banks. Financial infrastructure improvements reduce the information asymmetry that constrains access to credit and raises the costs and risk of financial intermediation.

## vii. *On design principles*

- ✦ The digital integrated common payment scheme should have translation features for commonly used local languages. There is a need to consider use of the most common languages within each country and a possible translation feature so that MSMEs are incentivised to access digital financial services more.

## 2.5 Manufacturers Workgroup

On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020, CBC convened a sequel webinar for the workgroup, themed *“Concerted Approaches to Tackling Illicit Trade for Industry Competitiveness in COMESA.”* Its focus was on facilitating a public-private platform for engagement on key challenges faced by industry due to illicit trade, and to propose practical solutions to address the issue.

The poster is for a live webinar titled "CONCERTED APPROACHES TO TACKLING ILLICIT TRADE FOR INDUSTRY COMPETITIVENESS IN COMESA". It features the COMESA Business Council logo at the top right. The poster lists nine participants: three panelists (Mr. Ezekiel Sekele, Ms. Ksenija Barysiene, Dr. Elly Karuhanga) and six moderators (Ms. Faith Mazani, Ms. Providence Mavubi, Dr. John Akoten, and three others). The hashtag #CBCadvocacyillicittrade is prominently displayed. Social media handles for @COMESABusiness, @comesabusinesscouncil, and COMESA Business Council are also listed.

**Live Webinar**

**CONCERTED APPROACHES TO TACKLING ILLICIT TRADE FOR INDUSTRY COMPETITIVENESS IN COMESA**

**#CBCadvocacyillicittrade**

**PANELLISTS:**

- Mr. Ezekiel Sekele, **Zambian Breweries Plc**
- Ms. Ksenija Barysiene, **Japan Tobacco International**
- Dr. Elly Karuhanga, **Private Sector Foundation Uganda**
- Ms. Faith Mazani, **Zimbabwe Revenue Authority**
- Ms. Providence Mavubi, **COMESA**
- Dr. John Akoten, **Kenya Anti-Counterfeit Agency**

**MODERATOR:**

- Ms. Sandra Uwera, **CEO COMESA Business Council**

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This webinar's recommendations focused on the areas of: strengthening of the national and regional anti-illicit trade regulatory framework; collaboration and cooperation between the public and private sectors; public awareness, capacity



building and information sharing; and uptake of advanced digital technologies for automation of processes towards enhanced efficiencies.

Another key activity by this workgroup has been CBC's engagement of industry players to develop a business position for the harmonisation of regulations related to plastics waste control.

Insufficient information and knowledge on the matter poses several risks to plastic manufacturers, industries using plastics packaging, retailers distributing plastics. Providing insights on these issues and sensitising the business community on the need for regional harmonisation of plastic waste control in COMESA is therefore of grave importance to CBC's members and the broader business community across different markets, with differing regulations and requirements. To this end, CBC recently issued a policy brief themed, *"Promoting a Regional Approach to Plastics Waste Management in COMESA: Survey on Business/Industry Perspectives and Experiences."*

### Adopted Recommendations

#### i. On strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks to tackle illicit trade

- ⊕ Member States are urged to develop a regional policy on anti-illicit trade coupled with institutional mechanisms to support the enforcement and implementation. This should be complemented by capacity building of enforcement agencies, inter-agency information sharing and coordination platforms, and private sector engagement at national and regional levels.
- ⊕ Member States are urged to put in place stringent and punitive punishment measures that include seizure, destruction of illicit products and high fines that can act as a deterrent.

#### ii. On addressing illicit trade in alcohol and tobacco products.

- ⊕ Member States are urged to implement digital track and trace technologies such as digital marks or stamps to support consumer awareness and ensure traceability across countries from source, along transit, to destination.
- ⊕ Member States, as individual countries are encouraged to become parties to the WHO FCTC Protocol. This will give an opportunity to benefit from the global experience on fighting illicit tobacco, and COMESA as a region acquires an observer status taking a coordinating role.

#### iii. On enhancing industry competitiveness and strengthening local value chains

Member States are urged to put in place regional manufacturing hubs; incentivising manufacturing by zero rating capital investments and importation of intermediate goods; and developing financing mechanisms to support the upgrading of technologies in line with 4th Industrial Revolution.

#### iv. On promoting a harmonised regional framework on plastics waste management in COMESA

Member States are called upon to note that CBC is engaging industry on the cost of compliance with differing plastics control regulations across COMESA and will be presenting in forthcoming policy meetings, key recommendations towards harmonisation of the framework on plastic waste management.

## 2.6 Agro-Industry – Tobacco Growers Workgroup

In December 2020, CBC convened a Tobacco Workgroup meeting themed, *"Business Perspectives on Addressing illicit Trade in Tobacco Products for the COMESA Region"*. The objective of the meeting was to have a common understanding of the challenges affecting the industry across the value chain. The meeting also presented the Workgroup's 2021 workplan on various industry actions to address illicit trade and promote sustainable supply chains.



## Adopted Recommendations by the meeting

### i. On Addressing Illicit Trade

A harmonised regulatory framework for regional coordination, monitoring and enforcement towards curbing illicit trade should be developed. Such a regulatory framework shall include; inter alia: interagency coordination mechanism, information sharing platforms, punitive measures for offenders, stronger enforcement measures and regional cooperation.

### ii. On strengthening collaboration and enforcement mechanisms

Stiffer penalties should be implemented to deter illicit trade and strengthen the capacities of enforcement agencies to detect and destroy illicit products.

### iii. On track and trace technologies

Track and trace technologies should be implemented incorporating both markers and national recordkeeping structures to enable tracking the movement of tobacco products throughout the supply chain by transferring tracking data into a global information-sharing database.

### iv. On supply chain monitoring

Mechanisms such as registration of supply chain actors and collection of data on the tax liability of tobacco products within country borders or while transiting through individual countries should be implemented.

### v. On strengthening Public-Private engagement

Platforms for government and industry engagement to address and engage on issues of illicit trade and supporting enforcement mechanisms should be availed.

### vi. On increasing consumer and public awareness.

There should be enhanced dissemination of information about the risks to consumers' health and the economy, associated with illicit tobacco trade and incentivising the enforcement of.

## 2.7 Health Care Services and Pharmaceuticals Workgroup

In October 2020, CBC carried out a survey termed, “CBC Health and Pharmaceuticals Industry - Issue Identification and Policy Considerations,” which was followed by a validation meeting held in December 2020.

The objective of the meeting was to harmonize the industry's key positions for advocacy as part of the Workgroup and validate positions and recommendations developed through the survey.



## Adopted Recommendations

### i. On regulatory frameworks

- ✦ COMESA Member States are called to systematically apply policy regulations that level the playing field for finished products versus APIs. Moreso, member states need to ensure a stable regulatory environment, especially on regimens for protection of Intellectual Property (IP), pricing, clearances, trade, and export policies.
- ✦ Member States should harmonize regulatory requirements to address the disparate regulatory requirements: African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation (AMRH) Initiative.
- ✦ COMESA region should adopt a system of Mutual Recognition of their Certification systems amongst the Member States.



⊕ Member States are urged to develop and adopt harmonized registration of drugs, cost of registration, registration timelines, inspections, and requirements.

*ii. On policy harmonization*

COMESA Member States should harmonize regulatory requirements to address the disparate regulatory requirements: AMRH Initiative.

*iii. On trade facilitation*

Member States are called to facilitate the movement of health products to streamline clearance processes at border posts. This is particularly important within this period of COVID-19 which is marked by serious border delays.

*iv. On investments in the health sector*

Member States should work with international funding entities – such as the Investment Fund for Health in Africa, the International Finance Corporation's (IFC's) Health for Africa Fund, Afreximbank and the African Development Bank – to mobilize investments in the pharmaceuticals sector.

*v. On access to finance*

⊕ Member States should launch a scheme for giving financial assistance which may be provided for upgradation of selected pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities including biopharmaceuticals to the Highly Regulated markets.

⊕ There should financial assistance by National Governments in form of soft loan/interest subsidy – the financial assistance may be provided for upgradation to WHO-GMP EMA (PIC/S and EUDRA), US FDA and higher international standard requirements which are now increasingly required for making the SME's sustain in an increasingly competitive and demand driven manufacturing environment.

⊕ Member States should work with international funding entities – such as the Investment Fund for Health in Africa, the International Finance Corporation's (IFC's) Health for Africa Fund, Afreximbank and the African Development Bank – to mobilize investments in the pharmaceutical sector.

*vi. On research and development*

⊕ Strengthen the research and development capacities of the region through increased collaboration amongst national research centres that addresses evolving public health issues to harness the untapped power of collaboration among researchers by linking up with universities.

⊕ Member States should create a common platform to connect all dots pertaining to R&D and innovation.

⊕ COMESA should invest in the development of regional centres of excellence, focusing on the pharmaceutical industry, and encourage national Governments to do the same.



*vii. On technical capabilities*

Member States should set up skill universities in PPP mode in pharma clusters, create greater awareness for better implementation and adoption of the apprenticeship schemes and also devise schemes to bring back the highly skilled manpower which has migrated to other continents.

*viii. On government control*

Member States are called to simplify export procedures, remove duplication of clearances across various ministries, continue to offer incentives on exports to support the industry in accessing new markets and also benchmark incentives offered by other countries and accordingly frame incentives for industry.

*ix. On infrastructure development*

Member States should provide and establish required cold chain facilities. This will enhance export capability for high end drugs requiring exact cold chain standards till the time they are exported from the country in light of stringent developed market requirements, there is a need to establish cold chain facilities.

### 3. Adopted positions of the CBC, at the 41st Meeting of the Council of Ministers, 24-25 November 2020

#### *i. On Enhancing Trade Facilitation*

- a) Member States are urged to strengthen and monitor the implementation of the COMESA Guidelines at national level and bilaterally with countries that share borders, through a public-private border management consultative committee that fosters dialogue, collaboration, awareness on new regulatory requirements and response mechanism, to ensure effective implementation.
- b) At national level, Member States are urged to strengthen platforms for public-private dialogue and ensure private sector participation, and finance of National Trade Facilitation Committees to increase coordination.
- c) Member States are urged to increase border coordination, strengthen border patrol and enforcement to ensure adherence to legal frameworks regarding the transshipment of goods to curb customs fraud and the offloading of transit goods at the border.
- d) Member States are urged to implement a regional approach for electronic cargo tracking systems to ensure cross border synergies, and regional tracking for increased traceability to safeguard against transit fraud, and also aid anti-illicit trade measures.

#### *ii. On Strengthening Industry Engagement during COVID-19*

- a) Member States are urged to implement principles of good business regulations: carrying out regulatory impact assessment, private sector consultation and implementing grace periods when imposing measures that have an impact on business or trade competitiveness.
- b) CBC is urged to establish sectoral regional Beverages Association to strengthen regional industry coordination, supply chain partnerships and represent the industry's position in engagements with the public sector.

#### *iii. On the draft model COMESA Digital Integrated Common Payment Policy for SMEs*

Member States are note the CBC-Trade Development Bank High Level Public-Private Dialogue, will hold a high level January 2021, in Kigali, focusing on the harmonisation of policies and regulations on a regional digital integrated common payment policy that will support low value, cross border digital payments for MSMEs.

#### *iv. On Strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks to tackle illicit trade*

- a) Member States are urged to develop a regional policy on anti-illicit trade coupled with institutional mechanisms to support the enforcement and implementation. This should be complemented by capacity building of enforcement agencies, inter-agency information sharing and coordination platforms, and private sector engagement at national and regional levels.
- b) Member States are urged to put in place stringent and punitive punishment measures that include seizure, destruction of illicit products and high fines that can act as a deterrent.

#### *v. On addressing illicit trade in Seed*

Member States are called upon to put in place an electronic verification mechanism (such as barcoding systems) for the traceability of seeds to verify between authentic and counterfeit seed.

#### *vi. On Monitoring and encouraging the implementation of harmonised seed regulations*

COMESA Business Council should develop a COMESA Seed Trade Regulations and Harmonisation Index, borrowing from other seed indexes such as the TASAI Access to Seed Index, monitoring and showing progress on implementation of regulations by countries in COMESA.

#### *vii. On addressing illicit trade in alcohol and tobacco products*

- a) Member States are urged to implement digital track and trace technologies such as digital marks or stamps to support consumer awareness and ensure traceability across countries from source, along transit, to destination.
- b) Member States, as individual countries are encouraged to become parties to the WHO FCTC Protocol. This will give an opportunity to benefit from the global experience on fighting illicit tobacco, and COMESA as a region acquires an observer status taking a coordinating role.

**viii. *On enhancing industry competitiveness and strengthening local value chains***

Member States are urged to put in place regional manufacturing hubs; incentivising manufacturing by zero rating capital investments and importation of intermediate goods; and developing financing mechanisms to support the upgrading of technologies in line with 4th Industrial Revolution.

**ix. *On promoting agro industry competitiveness through harmonisation / equivalence frameworks***

Member States are urged to develop action plans to accelerate the development and adoption of harmonized COMESA food standards, and Mutual Recognition of Quality Assurance and Certification systems to enhance food trade.

**x. *On Promoting a harmonised regional framework on plastics waste management in COMESA***

Member States are called upon to note that CBC is engaging industry on the cost of compliance with differing plastics control regulations across COMESA and will be presenting in forthcoming policy meetings, key recommendations towards harmonisation of the framework on plastic waste management.

**xi. *On SMEs affordable financing***

Member States are urged to ensure a conducive or enabling environment for SMEs with respect to pricing structures for credit access and mobile payment solutions to ensure favourable lending terms.

## **4. FORWARD ACTIONS**

### **i. Focus on harmonization of plastic waste control**

CBC is engaging industry stakeholders to develop policy positions focusing on promoting a regional approach to plastics waste management in COMESA. The issue of plastic waste control is a key issue for various industries and CBC members who are operating in different markets, with differing regulations and requirements. Insufficient information and knowledge on the matter also poses several risks to plastic manufacturers, industries using plastics packaging, retailers distributing plastics, etc. Within this background, CBC will develop industry position on the above issue, for presentation at the 5<sup>th</sup> COMESA Industry Committee meeting, scheduled in the first quarter of 2021.

### **ii. Focus on Illicit Trade**

Illicit trade continually undermines the development of the local industry and competitiveness of local businesses. It also threatens fiscal revenue, public health and adversely impacts the functioning of competitive and free markets, adversely affecting global economies. In fact, this has been exacerbated within this COVID-19 pandemic period, with illegal players taking advantage of the border measures and supply chain disruptions, increasing actions for illicit trading. In view of the above, CBC will be undertaking various sectoral policy studies and briefs to highlight the impact of Illicit trade for business, with an initial focus on seed, tobacco sectors. This will inform various policy recommendations to be presented to the 5<sup>th</sup> COMESA Industry Committee Meeting, in the first quarter of 2021.

## About the COMESA Business Council



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization bringing together a diverse group of businesses and associations in the region from 34 sectors in 21 countries of COMESA. CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector in the region. CBC as the key advocacy driver for business, provides a link between the private sector and organs of the Common market.

We seek to improve the competitiveness and deepen the participation of the private sector in regional and global trade, through advocacy, business facilitation and enterprise development. This includes prioritizing and taking specific advocacy strategies to address key business impediments and measures that affect our industries and have a direct bearing on the participation of our businesses in trading in the COMESA region.

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