

On behalf of the board of directors of the COMESA Business Council, I am pleased to present the annual report of the institution for the year ended 31 December 2019. The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization, and the recognized regional apex body of the private sector and business community in the COMESA region. CBC is the private sector policy organ of COMESA. CBC is at the driver's seat in ensuring private sector's active contribution in the policy making processes; creating a platform of engagement with the policy makers of the region; and promoting business partnerships in regional and global trade.

I am excited to highlight some of our policy agendas, where we have spearheaded policy reform and the need to address the impediments faced by businesses in trade.

### **Pioneering advocacy and public-private sector engagement**

We partnered Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), and the Government of the Republic of Kenya together with COMESA convened the Source 21 COMESA International Trade Fair and High-Level Business Summit in July 2019. This formed the pinnacle of our advocacy as we presented and engaged 4 Heads of States, several ministers and high-level policy makers on increasing local sourcing, manufacturing competitiveness, strengthening mechanism to curb illicit trade, development of e-commerce platforms for linkages and promoting regional and continental integration. Furthermore, in view of inclusive participation of the private sector in regional trade: five policy positions were presented and subsequently adopted in COMESA technical committee and policy organs meetings. It is imperative, that we continue providing a consultative platform and private sector position to ensure an improved business environment in COMESA.

I wish to highlight, one of our key flagships the CBC Digital Financial Inclusion Project for MSMEs, whose goal is the development of a regional common payment scheme supported by a model policy guideline that is low costs, integrated and interoperable; and caters for the SMEs. The project has begun with a Business case study and training of SMEs on digital marketing tools in 9 COMESA countries.

### **Informing policy through evidence-based research**

In the year 2019, CBC completed 3 regional studies namely: 'Promoting Agro-Industry Supply Chains along the Transport Corridors of Eastern and Southern Africa'; 'Tobacco Sustainability in Africa: A Business Outlook on the Social, Economic and Environmental Impact of Tobacco Farming in the Eastern and Southern African Region'; 'Business Trader Observer (BTO): An annual survey of business impediments along trade and transport corridors in COMESA'.

### **Strengthened enterprise competitiveness for increased partnerships**

Measures to promote local sourcing have been part of our agenda the past five years, in line with our Local Sourcing for Partnerships Project which seeks to build the technical and productive capacity of small and medium enterprises and link them to sustainable national and regional markets. As we continue this journey, training and business linkages platform were held in Uganda and Zimbabwe, with more than 150 SMEs trained.

In terms of promoting linkages and partnerships: two national buyer seller linkages and a regional platform was held through the Source 21 International Trade Fair that brought together exhibitors from 13 COMESA countries with buyers from all over Africa to network and increase local partnerships and trade.

We continue producing market briefs, newsletters and insider bulletins to inform the businesses on product information, country trade performance, market intelligence and regulatory requirements for trading in the region. In 2019, ten market and product briefs have been developed and disseminated.

### **Institutional Collaborations and stakeholder relationship**

Our most important obligation lies in a strengthened membership; where we have focussed on strengthening collaboration between CBC and the business community at national level to effectively provide services to the business community, either through technical capacity building of enterprises or Associations. In this instance, a training workshop was held in partnership with the International Trade Centre for national Associations to strengthen their services and client management.

The effectiveness of any institution can only be measured considering its partnerships. At COMESA level, in 2019, CBC partnered with ZEP-RE -PTA Reinsurance Company, African Trade Insurance Agency, Trade Development Bank, COMESA Competition Commission and COMESA Court of Justice through the Source 21 Business Summit and International Trade Fair. Furthermore, with Federation of National Associations of Women in Business in Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) in undertaking training of 38 women led SMEs in Zambia and Malawi.

Additionally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to our technical partners who continuous support our initiatives through financial and technical support: African Development Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Centre for International Private Enterprise, International Trade Centre, the United States Agency for International Department, and private sector partners.

### **Growth and sustainability**

At the end of 2018, I reiterated that we are on a journey of growth, where we have been working towards building a sustainable, effective institution and becoming the leading private sector organization in Africa, that promotes competitive and interconnected industries to actively participate in regional and global markets through advocacy, business facilitation and enterprise development.

We have seen monumental growth in our services: business policy and advocacy, business facilitation and membership development as highlighted above. In terms of institutional growth, we developed and are now implementing the Performance Improvement Roadmap, focusing on strengthening the institutional and service delivery capacity of the CBC in terms of strategy and results, effective client management and strengthening institutional sustainability. This has led to the development of our Digital Strategy and implementation of digital tools within the next year to strengthen intern governance.

CBC's financial position remains strong: during the period January to October 2019, CBC earned a total income of US\$1,460,960.00 from the private sector and projects. The total consolidated expenditure during the period was US\$957,805.00. This resulted into a surplus of income over expenditure of US\$503,155.00. However, we are not complacent of the future, sustainability and efficiency remain integral as we grow.

Finally, I wish to thank all our members, partners, stakeholders, my fellow Board directors, management and employees of the CBC of their concerted efforts towards the growth of the CBC. I remain confident that the CBC will continue to deliver another strong performance and great year in 2020.