



16TH COMESA BUSINESS FORUM

“Economic Integration for A Thriving COMESA Anchored on Green Investment, Value Addition and Tourism”

REPORT

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AfBC	African Business Council
ACTESA	Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution for Africa
ARSO	African Organization for Standardization
ATI	African Trade Insurance Agency
ATO	African Trade Observatory
CBC	COMESA Business Council
CCC	COMESA Competition Commission
CEHA	COMESA EAC Horticulture Accelerator
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa States
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
PMPA	Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa
PPP	Public Private Partnership
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RECAMP	Regional Enterprise Competitiveness & Access to Markets Program
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
TDB	Trade and Development Bank for Eastern and Southern Africa
TFTA	COMESA-EAC-SDAC Tripartite Free Trade Area
ZAM	Zambia Association of Manufacturers
ZDA	Zambia Development Agency

Acknowledging Official Sponsors of COMESA Business Forum

The Board of Directors of COMESA Business Council (CBC) and management wishes to express their sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the sponsors for their financial and technical support towards 16th COMESA Business Forum.

CBC wishes to acknowledge specifically the following sponsors for their invaluable support:

COMESA Secretariat, Government of Zambia, Zambia Development Agency, Competition Commission, Africa Leather and Leather Products Institute, African Trade Insurance Agency, European Union, World Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, Kenya Airways, ZEP-RE (PTA Reinsurance Company), Copper Belt Energy, Coco Cola Ltd, Trade Kings Groups od Company, Proctor and Gamble Ltd and Federation of German Industries.

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the discussions which took place at the 16th COMESA Business Forum which was held on 7th June 2023 at Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, Zambia. The Forum was organized by CBC in collaboration with the COMESA Secretariat and Government of the Republic of Zambia under the theme “*Economic Integration for a Thriving COMESA Anchored on Green Investment, Value Addition and Tourism*”. The objective of the Forum was to provide a platform for the public and private sector players to discuss the challenges and opportunities on trade and regional integration in the COMESA region, and to agree on proposed measures to address them and opportunities to exploit, and thereafter, to present them to the 22nd COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit.

1.2 The Forum’s discussions were held under the three (3) thematic areas, namely accelerating the recovery of COMESA Member States from COVID-19 through green investment, value addition and tourism, promoting of regional food trade in COMESA, promoting of regional value chains and building capacity of producers/industries.

1.3 The Forum was attended by participants drawn from public and private sector including COMESA Member States, multi-national companies in the COMESA region, UN agencies, COMESA Institutions/ Specialized Agencies, regional and national business associations, CBC national focal points/corporate members, trade support institutions, traders, businesses from the COMESA region, financial institutions, corporate companies, regional media houses, investment promotion agencies in COMESA, export promotion bodies in COMESA and the COMESA/CBC Secretariat.

1.4 The Forum was officially opened and addressed by Hon Chipoka Mulenga, the Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry of the Republic Zambia. The following dignitaries addressed the participants during the opening session of the Forum : Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Industry in Republic of Zambia, H.E Mr. Wamkele Mene, Secretary-General, AfCFTA Secretariat; H.E Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary-General of COMESA and ; Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, President CBC.

1.5 The discussions of the Forum were categorized into the following three sessions:

- (a) **Session 1:** focused on the barriers faced by the private sector, measures to be put in place to exploit the potential of regional markets, compliance to regional and international quality product standards, enhancing value addition of raw materials, enhancing competitiveness of the private sector, and technical and financial support to value chain development.
- (b) **Session 2:** focused on the success story of Panuka Farm (One of Zambia’s biggest privately owned farm), challenges facing multinational companies that trade across the region, support of AfBC to SMEs on regional value chains, promoting regional food trade, gaps in the implementation of SPS/TBT Agreement and impact of utilizing ARSO standards, and support to agriculture.
- (c) **Session 3:** covered the Presidential Round Table which explored ways of accelerating the recovery of COMESA Member States from COVID-19 through green investment, value addition and tourism. The panel discussion was attended by four Hon. Ministers from Burundi,

Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the COMESA Secretary General, the President of CBC, the Chairperson of Trademark Africa, the Secretary General of African Civil Aviation and the General Manager of Trade Kings groups of companies.

1.6 The Forum deliberated and agreed on the following key recommendations:

1.6.1 The COMESA Secretariat and the COMESA Business Council Secretariat should collaborate in drafting a regional private sector development strategy for the COMESA region;

1.6.2 Member States were urged to;

- (a) Support the ongoing efforts on the implementation of a regional digital retail payment platform for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in the COMESA region,
- (b) Develop a framework to guide the implementation of product standards within the COMESA region and to develop a mutual recognition framework to reduce the barriers to trade that result from multiplicity of compliance requirements with respect to standards,
- (c) Fast-track the ratification process of the COMESA-EAC-SDAC Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA) and also to fast-track the development of a regional implementation strategy for AfCFTA with full participation of private sector players,
- (d) Set up a regional coordination and cooperation mechanism in the enforcement of legislation on illicit trade and to develop a regional track and trace system for products in the COMESA region affected by illicit trade,
- (e) Fast track the domestication of the COMESA Industrialisation Policy and Strategy and promote diversification of export products of strategic sectors to enhance value addition and strengthen value chains at both national and regional levels as a way of transforming the economies of Member States and creating employment opportunities,
- (f) Build capacity and develop skills among SMEs to enhance competitiveness of their products for entry into the regional market as well as continental and international markets,
- (g) Implement fully existing trade facilitation instruments and embrace new trade facilitation instruments such as COMESA Digital Free Trade Area by adopting e-certificate of origin, e-commerce etc,
- (h) Adopt harmonised seed regulations and standards to promote cross border movement of quality seeds in the COMESA region and to promote the use of digital national and regional Food Balance Sheet to facilitate food trade in the COMESA region,
- (i) Consider putting in place measures that promote domestic tourism and also urged to promote regional flight connectivity and put measures in place to facilitate reduction of travel costs within the region to drive tourism as a recovery measure,
- (j) Consider having a regional green economy strategy and action plan to promote sustainable development in the region,
- (k) Enhance the full implementation of the COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visas to facilitate the movement of businesspersons in relation to both trade in goods and services as a Trade Facilitation Measure as well as enhance integrated border management.

1.6.3 Establish the COMESA Medicine Agency to improve access to quality healthcare services and affordable, safe, and quality medicines and vaccines.

2.0 Background

COMESA and the Government of the Republic of Zambia, in collaboration with the COMESA Business Council, convened the 16th COMESA Business Forum on 7th June 2023 at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, Zambia. The Forum preceded the 22nd Summit of COMESA Heads of State and Government which took place at the same venue on 8th June 2023. The Business Forum, a high-level dialogue, was hosted under the theme, *“Economic Integration for A Thriving COMESA Anchored on Green Investment, Value Addition and Tourism”*, and it focused on engaging public and private stakeholders on solutions that are expected to propel and transform COMESA Member States into competitive and sustainable growing economies for regional and global trade and investment expansion post COVID-19.

The objective of the Forum was to provide a platform for the public and private sector to discuss the challenges and opportunities in the COMESA region, and to agree on the measures to address them and opportunities to exploit, and thereafter, present them to the 22nd COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit. The discussions were held under three (3) thematic areas, namely accelerating the recovery of COMESA Member States from COVID-19 through green investment, value addition and tourism, promoting of regional food trade in COMESA, and promoting of regional value chains and building capacity of producers/industries.

The participants were drawn from the public and private sector including national governments, multi-national companies in the COMESA region, SMEs in the COMESA region, UN agencies, COMESA institutions and agencies, regional associations, private sector associations, business representatives from the region, experts in specific areas of the Business Forum and the COMESA Secretariat, chambers of commerce in COMESA, companies and SMEs from the region and internationally, trade support institutions, importers, exporters, traders, businesses from the COMESA region, financial institutions, corporate companies, international investors, regional media houses, investment promotion agencies in COMESA, export promotion bodies in COMESA, telecommunication companies, regional financial banks and institutions and centers of excellence.

Ms. Paxina Hankanga, and Mr. Paddy Mukando, as Directors of Ceremony for the Forum.

3.0 Official Opening Session

3.1 The President, COMESA Business Council (CBC)

Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, the President of COMESA Business Council (CBC) started his remarks by informing the forum that the Business Forum was aimed at providing a platform to engage public and private stakeholders on innovative solutions that will propel and transform COMESA into a competitive and sustainable Regional Economic Community (REC).

Mr. Venkatasamy noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted on the economies of COMESA Member States. He further noted that despite the dwindling of regional trading

activities as a result of the pandemic, the COMESA Region has remained resilient and presents an enormous growth potential. He stated that in 2021, COMESA exported goods worth of US\$156 billion, imported goods worth of US\$227 billion and intra-COMESA trade stood at US\$12.7 billion dollars. Notably, he expressed concern at the low levels of intra-COMESA trade.

Mr. Venkatasamy called upon Member States to deepen trade with their existing trading partners within COMESA and to expand trade with other Member States in COMESA through regional value addition chains so as to increase intra-COMESA trade.

Regarding the regions' adaptation to the digital agenda in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Venkatasamy indicated that CBC has embarked on the implementation and operationalization of the Regional Digital Retail Payments Scheme for MSMEs by offering affordable, instant, reliable services on payments, savings, credit, and insurance services, among other services.

Mr. Venkatasamy also noted that there is need for a wholesome capacity building approach towards financial inclusion through digital literacy skills, developing knowledge and understanding of savings and credit products, as well as no-frills remittance facilities, all towards improving the financial resilience of disadvantaged communities at the bottom of the financial pyramid.

To this effect, he informed the forum that CBC is running an E-Academy, an initiative to strengthen MSMEs' capacity in the region. He also stated that COMESA has made substantial progress towards the formulation of model laws, frameworks, and protocols in the areas of trade liberalization and facilitation, transport, energy, ICT, industry and investments, gender, and social affairs amongst others.

Mr. Venkatasamy indicated that the Business Forum was expected to address some of the challenges faced by the business community in the region, specifically relating to the following measures:

- (a) To accelerate the recovery of COMESA Member States from COVID-19 through green investment, value addition and tourism;
- (b) To promote Regional Food Trade in COMESA: Addressing the Market Access Gaps;
- (c) To promote Regional Value Chains and Building Capacity of Producers/Industries.

Mr. Venkatasamy pointed out that the recommendations from the Forum would form part of the COMESA Business Declaration that would be presented at during the COMESA Heads of State and Government Summit that was set for 8th June 2023. In wrapping up, Mr. Venkatasamy urged all delegates to actively participate in the Forum.

3.2 HE. Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General, COMESA

H.E Chileshe Kapwepwe, the Secretary-General of COMESA, acknowledged that the Business Forum was a good public-private sector platform through which delegates would discuss the challenges and opportunities in the COMESA region and agree on the measures to address them.

Additionally, she mentioned that she was optimistic about the region's recovery from the negative impacts of COVID-19. This, she noted, was demonstrated by the COMESA region recording an

increase in trade, globally and within, with exports to the world significantly increasing by 56% from US\$ 100 billion in 2020 to US\$ 156 billion in 2021. In the same vein, she observed that exports of food from the region also recorded a year-on-year increase of 15% from US\$ 19.6 billion in 2020 to US\$ 22.5 billion in 2021.

Furthermore, she mentioned that the value of intra-COMESA total exports increased by 28% from US\$ 10 billion in 2020 to US\$ 13 billion in 2021. This, she noted, was a positive sign for the COMESA region, especially in view of the policy of promoting regional value chains further and underpinned one of the reasons for organizing the Business Forum.

To increase intra-COMESA trade, H.E Ms. Kapwepwe mentioned that there was a need for public-private sector partnership. She also revealed that the COMESA Secretariat and CBC are closely working together on several initiatives in promoting private sector development in the COMESA region such as the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Program (RECAMP) and the African Trade Observatory (ATO) Portal, among others. In addition, she said that the COMESA Secretariat is set to commence implementing the AUs Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa (PMPA) and the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization (AMRH) in the context of the COMESA region, this year.

H.E Ms. Kapwepwe further stated that regional Food Trade was greatly influenced by the ability to comply with Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). Non-compliance with these non-tariff measures due to capacity constraints hinders access to regional and global markets and is increasingly becoming a significant barrier to trade, particularly in agricultural commodities.

Regarding the development of value chains in the region, she observed the need for such efforts to be accompanied by good productive capacity among the producers /manufacturers in the region in order to fully exploit the benefits of these opportunities.

H.E Ms. Kapwepwe also revealed that during the 21st Summit of COMESA Heads of State and Government held in 2021, the Heads of State unanimously offered their support towards the implementation of CBC's flagship program on Digital Financial Inclusion, whose overall goal was to support the development of a Regional Digital Retail Payments Platform that serves MSMEs in the COMESA region thereby improving cross border trade.

3.3 HE Wamkele Mene, Secretary General, AfCFTA Secretariat

H.E Mr. Wamkele Mene, the Secretary-General, African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) Secretariat, commended COMESA for its commitment towards the AfCFTA as evidenced by the fact that only two COMESA Member States have not ratified the AfCFTA. He noted that this commitment towards the AfCFTA positions COMESA as the strongest pillar of AfCFTA. He further applauded COMESA for ensuring that its trade agreement presents benefits to the business community, noting that the region was a great example of how a trade agreement can benefit the business community in Africa. He mentioned some of the successes scored by COMESA over time such as the COMESA transit scheme, the COMESA yellow card insurance scheme and the digitization of trade and inclusion of women and youth, among others.

H.E Mr. Mene asked a critical question on what Africa can do in the wake of transitioning from reliance on global supply chains. He indicated that two previous global occurrences demonstrate Africa's resilience and can be drawn upon for the future, namely COVID-19 and the current Russia-Ukraine war. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic created global imbalances where developed countries made sure of their access to essential drugs and implements while Africa was at the back of the queue. In addition, the Russia-Ukraine war has caused food insecurity in Africa.

H.E Mr. Mene therefore recommended that Africa must accelerate establishment of regional value chains to ensure resilience in future crises. This, he noted, requires all RECs under the AfCFTA to ensure greater trade flows and investment in value chains that will safeguard sustainability of Africa. He further mentioned that while the African continent was rebounding from the effects of COVID-19 the external environment remained precarious. He noted that the global outlook remains unstable and unfavorable for Africa. He suggested that Africa should thus leverage on trade agreements across the continent to ensure that the AfCFTA is established as this can be an anchor for Africa's success. He also said that RECS such as COMESA are the building blocks for the AfCFTA and without their success, the AfCFTA cannot succeed. He stated that lessons from successes of COMESA mentioned are key and can be used as a model for the AfCFTA.

In putting up a case for the need to establish regional value chains on the continent, H.E Mr. Mene revealed that the AfCFTA Secretariat estimates that in the autos(auto mobile?) sector, when a continental value chain was established, there was potential to increase volumes of vehicles manufactured on the continent to 5 million vehicle units per year by 2035 from the current 900, 000 units. He also reported that the benefits of such a value chain must not be for a few countries currently engaged in the autos sector. The benefits of such a value chain must extend to the manufacturing of components for the sector.

He revealed that in the agriculture sector, AfCFTA estimates indicate that acceleration of the elimination of tariffs on agriculture products could result in a 574 percent increase in the production of foods that would ordinarily have been imported. He mentioned that this development can significantly release Africa from the burden of food insecurity. This can further establish an alternative set of supply chains that can power Africa considering that the continent imports about US\$ 52 billion dollars' worth of food items annually. He concluded by thanking the COMESA Secretary General, the President of CBC and the Government of Zambia for organizing the forum.

3.4 Hon. Chipoka Mulenga, MP, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Republic of Zambia

Hon Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce Trade and Industry of the Republic of Zambia, the Guest of Honour, noted that the theme for the Business Forum was well aligned with Agenda 2063 and the Paris agreement on climate change among other important international agreements. He stated that the Business Forum created a platform for delegates to explore ways in which the region could regain momentum from the effects of COVID-19. In addition, he

mentioned that beyond COVID-19, the African continent was plagued with so many challenges. Among these challenges, he mentioned conflict across the region as one of the impediments to trade and integration. He posited that for Africa to be able to engage in business amongst itself, Africa must be peaceful. Therefore, he said that tension in any country should be the concern of any nation in COMESA as “conflict in any country is conflict everywhere.” In that regard, he implored all COMESA Member States to work towards restoring peace in its entirety across the region.

With regard to business within the region, Hon. Mulenga stated that there was a need for renewed impetus to eliminate the barriers that hinder investment. He mentioned that the African continent was endowed with immense natural resources and must exploit its potential. Further, he emphasized that Member States must not compete with each other but complement each other for the greater good of the people of the region. To illustrate this, Hon. Mulenga informed the forum that Zambia, in collaboration with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was taking advantage of the green revolution and that the two countries had signed an MoU aimed at facilitating their entry into the battery manufacturing value chain as the two countries hold more than 70 percent of cobalt in the world. He also revealed that Zambia and Zimbabwe are establishing a common agro industrial park, a move that will leverage on the two countries’ comparative advantage in agriculture and enhance export of food products.

Hon. Mulenga noted that the Forum had taken place at an opportune time as Africa seeks to change its narrative. He also said that he was confident that the forum would serve as a platform to exchange business information and partnerships. He therefore implored delegates, especially the business community, to take advantage of the forum and the summit to form viable partnerships.

With regards to the AfCFTA, Hon. Mulenga emphasized the need for African countries to harmonize their policies and strategies and work towards operationalizing the AfCFTA which he argued can lead to continent wide benefits. He noted the importance of a conducive business environment and strong policy framework in actualizing the benefits of the AfCFTA.

In conclusion, Hon. Mulenga extended an open invitation to all businesspersons to explore business opportunities in Zambia and within the COMESA region in the various sectors with vast business opportunities. He further wished all delegates a fruitful engagement at the Forum.

Box 1: Presentation from the European Union as Cooperating Partner (Switch to Circular Economy)

Switch to circular economy in East and Southern Africa - Mr. Matthias Reusing, Counsellor for the European Green Deal, Rural Development and Trade at the Delegation of the European Union to Zambia and COMESA

The presentation highlighted the importance of the circular economy approach to sustainability because natural resources worth US\$ 90 billion are extracted every year and only 9 percent of these resources find their way back into the system for reuse. Overtime, the use of resources was expected to double, and this could have detrimental impacts on sustainability. Mr. Reusing also stated that the world was grappling with challenges such as COVID-19, climate change, biodiversity collapse and recessions. In Africa, he

mentioned that the circular economy approach should be a priority because population projections show that Africa's population growth of up to 2100 will consistently trend upwards without a plateau and this could have a detrimental impact on resource use. Further, municipal solid waste generation in Africa was projected to continue increasing.

In addition, he mentioned that most economies are natural resource based and this necessitates a move from a linear to a circular economy. He said that the principle of a circular economy hinges on regeneration of natural systems, design waste and pollution. Within the COMESA region and Africa in general, he revealed that the five key opportunities for a circular economy approach are food systems, packaging, built environment, electronics and fashion and textiles. He mentioned that in line with this circular economy approach, the EU has priority focus areas that could have an impact on its relations with COMESA and these relate to the European Green Deal, the sustainable trade agenda, single use plastic regulations and deforestation free regulations. Other measures include the European Critical Raw Materials Act through which the EU's demand for critical raw materials could enhance relations with resource endowed countries in the COMESA region.

Mr. Reusing mentioned that the EU was using international partnerships to foster its agenda for sustainability, and this was being done through consultations with RECs, governments, private sector, and EU Member States, among others.

Mr. Reusing stated that the EU's circular economy program in the COMESA region has three components, namely business enabling environment, human and skills development and matching grants. Other schemes include South-South twinning and peer to peer learning. He also mentioned that ultimately, the program aims to foster sustainable growth and job creation. With regards to implementation, he mentioned that the project was worth an estimated 40 million euros and was set for commencement of implementation in 2024.

4.0 Highlights of CBC Regional Business Advocacy Agenda 2023

Dr. Sherif El-Gabaly, CBC Board Director and Chairperson of CBC Trade and Industry Committee, outlined the CBC Regional Business Advocacy Agenda 2023 as follows:

- (a) Ensuring that strategic advocacy platforms for the private sector handle at least 70 percent of the priority sectors within the COMESA region;
- (b) Ensuring effective representation of private sector interests in COMESA decision making processes;
- (c) Providing timely and strategic business services to regional stakeholders on the business environment in the region;
- (d) Ensuring 90% of private sector inclusiveness in the regional integration agenda;
- (e) CBC to continue being a fully membership-led and driven institution.

Dr. El-Gabaly also shared key policy recommendations, which were agreed upon by the Workgroups and are to be pursued by CBC in 2023 by urging Member States to consider:

- (a) Developing a framework to guide the implementation of product standards within the COMESA region;

- (b) Setting up coordination and cooperation mechanisms in the enforcement of legislation on illicit trade;
- (c) Developing a regional track and trace system for products in the COMESA region affected by illicit trade;
- (d) Fast tracking the ratification process of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (EAC, SADC and COMESA).
- (e) Fast tracking the development of a regional implementation strategy for AfCFTA with full participation of private sector players.
- (f) Technical implementation of the regional digital retail payment platform for MSMEs in the COMESA region;
- (g) The development and domestication of relevant Digital Financial Inclusion policy framework for payment scheme in the COMESA region;
- (h) Promotion of value addition and regional value chains in COMESA for strategic sectors.

He also reported that the Workgroups urged the CBC Secretariat to work on the following:

- (i) Drafting a regional private sector development strategy for the COMESA region;
- (j) Developing a pharmaceutical industry in COMESA based on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.0 Session 1: Promoting Regional Value Chains and Building Capacity of Producers/Industries

5.1 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA): Session 1 Moderator

Dr. Medhat EL-HELEPI from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) was the moderator for session 1. He started the session by explaining the importance of promoting regional value chain and the need to build capacity for producers/industries in COMESA region. Thereafter, he introduced his first panelist, Mr. James Chimwaza, Board Director of CBC, to the Forum and requested him to explain the barriers faced by the private sector and the measures to be put in place to address the concerns.

5.2 Mr. James Chimwaza , Director, COMESA Business Council Board of Directors: What are the barriers faced by the private sector and what measures should be put in place to exploit the potential of regional markets?

Mr. James Chimwaza, Director, COMESA Business Council highlighted challenges such as overlapping membership to various RECs which increases the cost of doing business due to the different rules in these regions. He also mentioned challenges such as heterogeneity of countries in terms of economic status, lack of diversified products, lack of harmonized product standards, language barriers in understanding regulations, exorbitant costs of transporting goods, complicated payment systems and declining knowledge and falling standards of education, resulting in low value addition.

To address these challenges, Mr. Chimwaza recommended the following measures:

- (a) Need to review regulations;
- (b) Removal of stringent regulations on transportation of goods;

- (c) Development of a framework for the harmonization of standards;
- (d) Promoting cooperatives and improving capital across the region;
- (e) Development of cashless platforms that allow for trade of goods to accelerate business in the region;
- (f) Prioritization of investment in education through revision of curriculum on skills development and value addition.

5.3 Ms. Diana Apio-Kasyate, Director Public Affairs, Communication and Sustainability East and Central Africa Franchise, Coca Cola: What can be done to attain compliance with regional and international quality standards?

In her response, Ms. Apio-Kasyate stated that more investment in information sharing relating to standards was essential especially among enforcement agencies as well as the private sector. She also cited the need for an enabling regulatory environment that places importance on local sourcing or focuses on collaboration across the continent. In addition, she highlighted the need for policy harmonization across Member States with respect to product standards.

5.4 Ms. Providence Mavubi, Director Industry and Agriculture, COMESA Secretariat: What measures has COMESA put in place to facilitate the transition from raw material to finished products in the region.

In her response, Ms. Mavubi stated that COMESA has in place a regional industrial policy that guides the development of industries through focus on 9 value chains. In addition, she mentioned that COMESA has an MSME policy aimed at creating a vibrant MSME sector in the region. Further, she revealed that there are programmes that address market access, productivity development, and access to finance among others. She stated that COMESA also has a policy to manage and develop Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Parks to promote investment in the zones. The COMESA Secretariat also provides capacity building for infrastructure support. She mentioned that the COMESA local content policy framework was also in place to support production and sourcing of goods from within the region. Regarding standards and technical barriers to trade, she said that COMESA was working with partners such as the EU in the development of regional technical regulations and mutual recognition agreements. Other initiatives that she highlighted include the Global Food Safety Initiative, capacity building of regional bodies, technical capacity building of Member States' private sector, and a reporting mechanism for NTBs. Other measures that she highlighted include the coordinated border management system, the simplified trade regime and investment promotion such as the common investment area agreement.

5.5 Ms. Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director, International Trade Centre: What is needed to enhance the competitiveness of the private sector (Specifically MSMEs which are the majority)?

Ms. Tembo stated that there is a need for clear recognition of complementarities across the region through which MSMEs can then be included in regional value chains. She also said that the private sector must be part and parcel of the decision-making process in the region. Ms. Tembo equally heightened the need for a regional and continental vision that is aligned, clear and implementable with the needs of MSMEs. She went further to highlight some of the support that ITC has provided to the region as part of its value chain development programmes such as identification of high potential value chains, equipping relevant actors with market analysis skills

through collaboration with CBC, supporting countries towards implementation of market access, supporting intra-Africa investment, and creation of strategic partnerships. She highlighted the need for coordination by cooperating partners to avoid duplication of efforts.

5.6 Mr. Gainmore Zangwe, Acting Director, Intra-African Trade Initiative, African Export-Import Bank. What measures has the Afreximbank put in place to support value chain development in Africa?

Mr. Zangwe stated that Afreximbank has in place an Export Trading Companies initiative where support is provided to firms that aggregate products produced by smallholder farmers. The Bank has also partnered with the AfCFTA Secretariat and WFP to source food from the continent for the WFP's routine food relief program. In addition, the bank has an MSME development program aimed at supporting MSMEs to participate in value chains and the program provides innovative instruments such as invoice discounting for MSMEs. He mentioned that for industrialization to take off in Africa, there was a need for the establishment of SEZs and industrial parks as well as integrating MSMEs in them. He mentioned that Afreximbank was leading the battery initiative in DRC and Zambia. The Bank was also mapping regional value chains in the automotive industry which has about 30 000 parts which gives scope for collaboration across countries. He said that Afreximbank was also putting emphasis on Africa Direct Investment to channel funding into value chains.

5.7 Ms. Manisha Dookhony, Economics and Market Reform Officer, EU Rise: What are the funding mechanisms offered to the private Sector (MSMEs) in COMESA to operate at regional and global level?

Ms. Dookhony revealed that EU Rise identifies projects for funding based on their economic feasibility. She highlighted that EU rise mainly works with intermediaries that can be a conduit for financing instruments. Some of their key areas of focus include critical raw materials and circular economy. EU rise also facilitates matchmaking and supports firms to be export ready.

Box 2: Presentation from Partners (ACTESA & ZDA)

2.1 Regional launch of the COMESA EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA) – Dr. John Mukuka, CEO, Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA)

During the Business Forum, a horticulture accelerator program was launched by ACTESA. The vision of the project is to have climate smart horticulture and value chains by 2031. During the launch, it was indicated that the program will focus on crops such as avocado and onion. These products were selected based on the strategic focus of countries and market access considerations. The program will also facilitate access to finance for small scale producers. Among the expected outcomes of the project include market growth, improved processing capacity, efficiency, consumption, policy and standards harmonization, value creation and value distribution.

It was also mentioned that the program will be piloted in 5 countries namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. So far, Governance structures have been put in place, the CEHA board has been formed and some funding is also available to support the Secretariat.

2.2 Zambia Trade and Investment Opportunities, Mr. Albert Halwampa, Director General, Zambia Development Agency (ZDA)

A presentation was made on Trade and Investment opportunities in Zambia by Mr. Halwampa who highlighted key facts about Zambia such as area, population, currency and tribes.

Regarding macroeconomic trends in the country, he mentioned that variables such as the exchange rate and inflation have stabilized in recent years and growth was back on track. He also mentioned that Zambia boasts of a peaceful environment with 7 Presidents all having been ushered into power democratically through peaceful transitions. He highlighted political stability, macroeconomic stability, coherent policy environment, central location with wide market access, and pro-business reforms by the Government as some of the factors that make Zambia a prime destination for investment. Other factors he mentioned include wide market access in COMESA with 8 neighbors and in SADC, COMESA, TFTA and AfCFTA with huge population and GDP.

He also noted the low levels of intra-COMESA investment as evidenced by the low level of investment in Zambia by COMESA Member States. Mr. Halwampa equally highlighted the existing opportunities for investment in sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, tourism and energy. He revealed that Zambia has in place a number of incentives for investors and also mentioned the need for joint ventures.

6.0 Session 2: Promoting Regional Food Trade in COMESA-Market Access

6.1 COMESA SPS/TBT Coordinator (Session Moderator)

Dr Mukayi Musarurwa, as a Moderator, started the dialogue discussion by highlighting the market access issues and the key areas of concern. He indicated that it was well known that the agricultural products were significantly facing higher tariff barriers in the COMESA region compared to other products and that this issue was the case around many parts of the African continent. He further indicated that SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures) issues consisted of over 70% non-tariff barriers and the situation had continued to worsen within the region.

He further revealed that a share of the non-tariff barriers faced by the African exporters and importers which were imposed by countries within the same region were much higher than in countries outside Africa. He further indicated that most of the people attending the summit were aware of the issue of maize being re-exported from the COMESA region to the countries of export. He further revealed that just 10 days prior to the day of the conference, there was an issue of maize being confiscated which came from Uganda in South Sudan and these were just a few examples of the issues that were pertinent in the COMESA region.

He further revealed that apart from the challenges faced within the COMESA region, there were also challenges faced by the African exporters in countries that were in the European Union and U.S markets. He further revealed that there were further major issues with the statistics in importing and exporting in the region considering that an average of \$200 billion in imports was recorded compared to \$120 billion in exports within the COMESA region on an annual basis. With regards to food, the COMESA region was importing up to an average of \$50 billion annually.

He further stated that COMESA has done a lot of work in the area of non-tariff barriers specifically looking at issues that were mainly happening at the borders of the countries within the COMESA region. He further revealed that the work that COMESA has so far done reveals that SPS/TBT

issues are a major concern and that they form the major barriers that most of the Member States are facing.

In addition, Dr. Musarurwa revealed that the horticulture sector for example was facing challenges of;

- pests,
- harmful organisms,
- and contaminants of different kinds

He further revealed that in the agro processing sector for example, the food safety hazards such as the mycotoxins had become paramount and that they were a major problem. He indicated that the problems were covering a wide variety of products especially during the exporting period. According to Dr. Mukayi Musarurwa, fruits and vegetables, atretic fruits, food supplements, fortified foods, cereals and bakery products, alcoholic beverages, food additives etc. produced from the COMESA region were difficult to export to other countries outside the COMESA region.

He further revealed that COMESA was implementing various interventions to address some of the challenges the region was facing. He indicated that among the programs implemented were projects on the harmonization of food regulatory limits that were currently being undertaken as a pilot in 5 countries looking at the major 5 exports and the standards used and what the standards were based on in the exporting and importing of these commodities. The standards were ascertained to determine if it was the size or interventional standards that were a limiting factor.

Another project outlined by Dr. Mukayi was on food import control best practices which was also a pilot project being carried out in about 8 countries and was focusing on the aspect of the best food control measures to try and address the export issues with SPS and TBT issues and to further try and get results based on the expectations of the Member States. Another project that was being carried out was the mutual recognition framework looking at facilitating trade.

Examples of trade facilitating tools included:

- (i) Seed commodities in six countries identified by the countries themselves and
- (ii) four food staples that are traded across the region.

With the mutual recognition framework, the project was focused on ascertaining the standard operating procedures the countries were using as barriers and how the project could harmonize the existing barriers and assess the control assessment issues. He further revealed that there was progress seen in the implemented projects despite the controlling assessment being the major issue faced by the Member States.

6.2 Mr Bruno Mweemba Director and founder of Panuka Farms: What are the key building blocks that played major roles in the success story of Panuka farm

Mr Bruno Mweemba, Director and founder of Panuka Farms stated that one of the initial challenges his farm faced was rejection of the farm products when the farm was attempting to enter into the formal business houses. He stated that the farm faced challenges especially during the first 6 months when the products were being returned after every delivery for ,non-conformity and quality issues and as a result, some of the products were publicly denounced on platforms such as social media. He stated that in view of overcoming such challenges, one of the first steps the farm took was to eliminate emotions and pay attention to the numerous issues that were coming through.

Mr Mweemba indicated that particular attention should be paid to three main issues namely;

- (i) Quality, which in his view was one of the most important areas the company needed to pay particular attention to.
- (ii) The second issue he emphasized was to pay particular attention to the size in terms of the volumes and
- (iii) To maintain consistency.

To overcome the challenges and breakthrough into the market, Panuka farms paid close attention to these three aspects. Mr Mweemba further revealed that it was necessary for the farm to also pay particular attention to issues such as the impact of climate change, and biodiversity flows on an enterprise such as Panuka Farms. He thanked the world bank for providing assistance in establishing mechanisms to help Panuka farms achieve its r goals which enabled them to remain in operation throughout the year. Mr Mweemba further stated that Panuka farms struggled to penetrate beyond the borders of Zambia and that there was a need to have more people on the ground providing hand holding services to an enterprise such as Panuka which was trying to get into the export market.

Mr. Mweemba further stated that there was a huge gap between the policies that were being made and the actual situation on the ground. Another issue raised was the challenges in finances which he described as a big issue and also described the current scenario as street targeted financing practiced by most institutions which was not fit for the purpose despite the farm having a number of corporation partners. According to Mr Mweemba, the project financing aspect was supposed to be what he termed as the structured financing which had the capability of understanding the nature of an enterprise to a point where the borrower was supposed to pay back the lender at a given point in time. He indicated that most of the financing businesses were the destroyers of the majority of the enterprises because they did not know how to structure the finances and would expect the enterprise to start paying back the loan before the yield was ready.

6.3 Mr James Ojiambo, Manager, Regulatory Affairs, East And Southern Africa, Nestle Food Ltd :- What are some of the challenges Nestle has been facing while operating across the different brackets and what mechanisms has the company been putting in place to facilitate smooth trading across the borders?

Mr James Ojiambo started by stating that Nestle Food Ltd as a company was a global multi-national in many parts of Africa. He stated that Nestle Food Ltd was facing a number of challenges

and experiences and one of the major challenges was the regulatory environment which was one of the critical components in the regulatory environment. There was also an issue in the harmonization of standards of the products across the region. The company would still encounter different institutions that had different requirements for its products in different countries and this was bringing a lot of complex issues especially during the manufacturing period and at supply chain level.

He stated that because of the difference in the requirements by different institutions in different countries, the company had to produce specific products for different markets. He indicated that the harmonization of the product was identified as a key area to address. He stated that the company had structures in place to help with the harmonization process and the administration issues whilst utilizing the ISO standards. He stated that he was looking forward to acquiring recommendations from the forum so as to actualize the ISO standards.

Mr James Ojiambo stated that aside from the issue of standards was the issue of pre-market approval which is a process where a manufacturer needs to get certification or approval before supplying the goods to the market. He stated that the pre-market approval varied in different countries and in some countries, it was easy because all that the suppliers needed was to meet the standards and production requirements. He indicated that in some countries however, the approval system was very complex such that it would take up to two years just to approve a particular product to the market.

In some cases, the testing requirements were very expensive in some countries, and this posed a real challenge for the company. As such, Mr James Ojiambo was hopeful that these issues would be taken into consideration and addressed through a process called the mutual permission framework. He is of the view that if a particular product was to be accepted by one Member State after an evaluation to taste for faults, there was no need to go through the same evaluation process in the other state which was a major trade barrier. He stated that another challenge was the import and export documentation, which was one reason why the company was not able to access certain markets. He also indicated that there was a lack of available facilities to taste products in some countries. He stated that most of the countries in the region were lacking labs that had the capacity to taste the products and that there was need to invest heavily in that area to enable a more effective analytical analysis.

6.4 Dr Amany Asfour CBC Director, President of African Business Council:- How does the ABC ensure the efficiency of Agri business to a number of regional business establishments and how do the countries upscale the participation of SME small scale farmers within regional value chains?

Dr Amany Asfour, CBC Director and President of African Business Council started by stating that food security in Africa was the most important key area that needed attention. She stated that it was not in order for COMESA Member States to be importing food worth \$50 billion whilst the region had 60% of arable land ready for agriculture production. She called on all the stakeholders such as women SMEs, private sector, and the youths to join hands in order to increase capacity in agriculture. The second pillar she advocated for was policy advocacy by working on the

legislation to create an enabling environment in agriculture and agri-business. She stated that there was a need to seize all the opportunities in the agricultural sector citing the example of Panuka farms. The third pillar she revealed was about product development, a process that included branding, standardization and having products that were unique but with good quality.

She gave an example of the existing technology catalogue in Dubai managed by the youths. She called for the need to build the agriculture capacity in Africa by building SMEs and by empowering more women considering that the majority of the agriculture sector (80%) was managed by women. There was also emphasis by Dr Asfour on the need to promote the youths to engage themselves in the agriculture sector considering that 60% of the population of Africans are youths. According to Dr Asfour, there is need to facilitate the capacity of African agriculture and agri-businesses.

Dr. Asfour further stated that there was a need to increase agriculture yields by empowering the private sector to enable them to have agro-investment farms and by having regional integration by ascertaining measures that would allow them to industrialize food production across the region. She further revealed that there was also need to add value to the commodities instead of just sending the products as raw commodities. She stated that the COMESA Business Council was on the African Business Council board and the AfBC had 20 clusters.

Among the clusters was agriculture and agribusiness whilst the other cluster was about animal wealth and food security and another cluster was about the green and blue economy. The African business forum was signing road maps and signing MOUs about how agriculture resources could be utilized within the private sector to link the industrialization agenda of the food security of the African continent. According to Dr Asfour, there is need to promote the new technologies among the Member States such as the use of drones to monitor the fields, pollinating, spraying and other technological inventions. She called on governments in Africa to work on the policy and legislative environment to provide incentives to the private sector to industrialize the agricultural sector. She also called for the need to have integrated farms in the continent.

6.5 B H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn Board Chair, Alliance for Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA) and former Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. what does the region and the continent look forward to in terms of AGRAs framework from a transition from a food dependent region to a food self-sufficient to an exporting region and what were the required building blocks for the transition?

H.E. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Board Chair, Alliance for Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA) started his remarks by acknowledging that there are capacity limitations that AGRA was facing such as the capacity of the public sector and civil society groups including the private sector. He called for the need to build capacity by the different stakeholders. He raised concerns on the delay to build capacity and to implement existing matters raised from the presentations. He indicated that Africa had experienced a crisis due to COVID-19 and the Ukraine Russian war and these were the issues that exposed the weaknesses calling for the need to have a strategic plan to utilize the 60% arable land.

He further stated that there was a need for COMESA Member States to draw examples from the countries in Asia that had made significant progress rapidly. He was of the view that stakeholders needed to fully understand the land available by ascertaining where the land was, the quality of the land and what could be grown on the piece of land. He called for the need to build capacity among stakeholders so as to ensure that the private sector as the engine of economic growth could happen in a retained manner. He further stated that blueprints were not enough and that there was a need to address numerous challenges being faced by the private sector in the agriculture sector and that was what AGRA was working towards. He also indicated that AGRA is working with COMESA in the following four areas:

- (a) the initiative to bring about the establishment of mutual recognition SPS measure and technical capacity which was one of the major complications during COVID-19. In this regard AGRA was working with COMESA to bring about understanding and awareness.
- (b) Addressing the lack of existing knowledge on the food balance sheet especially that it was not known which country was specifically producing which food as a result, AGRA was working on a digital food balance sheet to understand the level of food availability for the private and public sectors in the COMESA region so that food security measures could be taken care of.
- (c) the implementation of the harmonized seed trade regulation which emphasizes the need to promote quality seed and making sure that countries have sufficient seed especially among small and medium enterprises.
- (d) The need to advocate for access to essential inputs among COMESA Member States. He noted that it had taken AGRA close to 9 months consulting experts and stakeholders on how to develop a medium and long-term plan for Africa to be self-sufficient. He also highlighted the need to invest in agriculture in countries like Zambia which had resourceful water bodies as compared to the other countries. He ended his remarks by indicating that AGRA is working towards selecting six corridors in Africa and was partnering with the U.S government which initiated the leaders' summit and the food security agenda basing the corridors on the existing water bodies in the region.

6.6 Mr Reuben Gisore, Technical Director, African Organization for Standardization (ARSO): How does ARSO plan to address the gap as the stakeholders are continuing to implement the SPS/SBT agreement and what was the impact of utilization ARSO harmonized standards in terms of trade facilitation on the continent?

Mr Reuben Gisore, Technical Director, African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) appreciated the idea that most of the delegates were talking about standards and he indicated that ARSO was an organization in charge of harmonizing standards in Africa which was established in 1977. He stated that the aspect of harmonizing standards was part of the mandate of the organization. He stated that a number of committees were established under ARSO in this regard and that ARSO was the technical arm which gave COMESA the ability to ask about standards. He further stated that the number was actually 12000 and not 4000 products that needed to be included in the current agreed tariff lines. However, ARSO has only managed to harmonize 1600 products against 12000 suggesting that there is more that is supposed to be done.

Mr. Gisore noted that the process of harmonizing standards is not easy and is expensive as it requires experts who are drawn from the member countries to travel thousands of kilometers to go and add their inputs. Mr Reuben Gisore called for the need to work with the private sector so that the private sector can make submissions regarding the kind of standards they are recommending, mostly those that they needed. He further stated that a number of studies were being carried out to supplement the areas that needed more attention, with the latest being with the ITC and the COMESA Secretariat.

He further stated that despite the Member States harmonizing the standards, the majority of countries did not meet the required standards by establishing the right laboratories. He stated that ARSO was establishing the African conformity assessment program to assist members to ensure that mutual recognition was established at continental level. He further indicated that certification was expensive and that it cost close to about \$15,000 to \$20,000. In this regard, the conformity assessment was expected to reduce the cost down to \$5,000 among the Member States. There was a need to build capacity and ARSO was already consulting from 15 member countries and 8 countries had already responded to the cause.

6.7 Mr. Michael Awori, Chief Executive Officer, Trade and Development Bank (TDB): The Role of the Bank on development of Agriculture in the region?

Mr. Michael Awori, Chief Executive Officer, Trade and Development Bank (TDB) stated that TDBs primary intervention and interactions were at the sovereign level and at the corporate or mass institutions level. He further stated that TDB served several reps which had grown to 25 states with 6 physical offices and that it was very active in the agricultural sector. The activities of TDB were focused on three main key areas and the first was emerging from the agriculture sector targeting corporate entities.

Mr. Awori noted that TDB was providing funding to the corporate entities to enable them procure supplies and agriculture inputs. Through TDB support, they were enabling provisions of utilizing modern techniques around nutrition to ensure that the farmers were able to increase the yield on their land. TDB was providing intermediate links between the local banks, the local entities and the outside world. TDB was bridging the gap between the local market and the international market and further provided access to the market for the SMEs. The third area of areas of priority was the investments on the infrastructure such as power projects, rail lines, road networks and power grids in the rural areas.

Box 3: Presentation from Partners (Standard Chartered Bank, Copperbelt & EU)

3.1 Mr Sonny Zulu – Managing Director, Standard Chartered Bank Zambia

Mr Zulu stated that the SC Bank was committed to supporting a number of programmes with its projected investment of up to \$75 million. From this fund, \$10 million was meant to support different stakeholders through COMESA in order to increase capacity. He further stated that globally, over 600 million people had no access to electricity and among these 6% were in the sub-Saharan region. He further stated that the World Bank was already working closely with the private sector and that signified progress. He however

stated that there were still many framework and regulatory issues despite the recorded progress. He indicated that the licensing process was very bureaucratic with numerous financing gaps. Among other challenges he stated were the existing financing gaps, high interest rates, and lack of access to credit facilities.

3.2 Mr Owen Silavwe, Copperbelt energy

Mr Owen Silavwe from Copperbelt Energy, through a speech read on his behalf by the Corporate Affairs Manager, stated that there was need for integration by leveraging what was available to the fullest capacity. He further indicated that there was a need to create value chains and that the trading blocks were the starting points. He also stated that there was a need for more cross-border trade investment to be widely made in the COMESA region.

3.3 Mr Claudio Bacigalupi – Head of corporation at the delegation of the European union to Zambia and COMESA; What are some of the E.U. regulations on critical materials among the COMESA Member States?

Mr Claudio Bacigalupi revealed that due to the growing demand for raw materials in Europe, there was a need for the countries in the third world to fill up the demand considering that Europe was heavily dependent on raw materials in Africa and in the rest of the world. He further stated that there was great demand for minerals such as lithium, which is a highly demanded raw material in the automotive sector. He also indicated that demand was anticipated to increase significantly in the years to come. He stated that the E.U was doing everything through the Critical Raw Material Act to ensure the European Union access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials. He stated that there were four main aspects linked to this;

- (i) The strengthening of stages of the European Critical Raw Material value chain, for instance, reducing administrative burdens and having access to financial tools.
- (ii) Improve European Union capacity to monitor and mitigate risks of disruption to critical raw material supply,
- (iii) Diversify European Union critical raw material imports to reduce strategic dependencies and
- (iv) Improve critical raw material through circularity and sustainability

He indicated that the E.U. is working towards ensuring that there is an efficient supply of different critical raw materials (CRMs) to be mainly distributed in Europe. He stated that the European Union was a common market and thus it did not have barriers. He stated that in the Critical Raw Material Act, there were some benchmarks for which the extraction capacity at European level covered at least 10% of the consumption. In terms of processing, there was at least 40% of the European Union's strategic raw material consumption.

In terms of recycling, it was also extremely important, and the capacity cover was 15%. He stated that there was a huge interest in the diversification of the supply. He revealed that not more than 65% of the European consumption of each strategic raw material was supposed to come from a single country. He indicated that the European Union was committed to developing mutually beneficial strategic international partnerships with a very big emphasis on support, value chains and support investments to secure diversified and sustainable supply.

He stated that the E.U. and African countries had a bilateral memorandum of understanding reaffirming both sides' interests and a roadmap dictated the concrete actions. He stated that the European Union had

partnerships around the globe in critical raw materials supplies. He further indicated that the countries were already signed to a memorandum of understanding among them Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Namibia.

He revealed that the transformations were based on mutual benefits, whilst having a holistic approach, covering the entire raw material value chain from the exploration, extraction, processing, refining, and recycling. He also stated that there is need for the integration of the raw material value chain to discuss and facilitate networking among the relevant actors, government industries, and funding organizations. He stated that the E.U was preparing for the first quarter of the 2024 forum on critical raw materials from this transformative point of view regarding value addition on copper production in terms of the copper wire industry.

The E.U. was working towards creating business opportunities for the private sector and the second pillar was cooperation on research and innovation, which was basic for the development of the partnerships. He stated that the alignment on ESG, environmental, social, and governance criteria, and international standards was focused on the deployment of infrastructure for project development. He stated that the mining operations and extraction were not multidimensional sectors that needed transport infrastructure and energy infrastructures.

He indicated that there is need for capacity building, training, and skills along the raw material value chain which needed to be included in the memorandum of understanding and in this roadmap. He stated that 150 billion euros was to be made available through grant money and money coming from financial institutions that was dedicated to investments, not only in the mining sector, but also in the transport sector, in the energy sector and in the digital sector.

7.0 Session 3: Presidential Round Table

Presidential Round Table, Government - Accelerating the Recovery of COMESA Member States from Covid-19 focusing on Green Investment, Value Addition and Tourism

7.1 Burundi

Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry, and Tourism: What the Republic of Burundi is doing, with regards to accelerating from the COVID-19 pandemic and focus on green investment?

Hon. Marie Chantal Nijimbere, Minister of Commerce, Transport, Industry, and Tourism started by stating that Burundi is utilizing technological innovation in order to accelerate recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. She further stated that Burundi is reviving its economy through a sustainable recovery plan in relation to all the effects of the covid pandemic. She indicated that there is a need to have solutions which require good policies and stronger strategies. She further indicated that in order to accelerate the recovery from the pandemic, there is need for solutions that are in the direction of the development of production and supporting infrastructure that correspond with technological innovations. She indicated that for example, infrastructure is supposed to correspond to the telecommunications infrastructures in order to support and connect the entire population in Africa.

She indicated that there is also a need to have transport infrastructure, energy infrastructure, standardization, and quality infrastructure to be able to respond to production and be resilient to the effects linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second solution she recommended is to facilitate access to finance because during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an observation that women and young people were at a disadvantage in terms of having access to to finance. She further indicated that among the challenges that young people and women were facing in the small and medium-sized enterprises, the lack of credit facilities are paramount..

She further indicated that there is a need to ease trade restrictions in the border areas after the COVID-19 pandemic because the limitations in trading around the borders was a major barrier. She indicated that there is a need to have smart borders to connect and allow countries to exchange information in order to facilitate the exchange of goods and services and facilitate the movement of people. She indicated that Burundi had made a lot of effort to to make agriculture a priority sector through the mechanization of agricultural services, the integration of small and medium-sized enterprises and the integration of the youth and women.

She indicated to the forum that there were several challenges observed during the post-COVID recovery stage which included but are not limited to the lack of infrastructure and low competitiveness of the region's products. She indicated that in order to respond to all the challenges, there were programs that were being developed which included the youth economic empowerment and employment program, which was a national youth program. She indicated that Burundi was setting up an impulse, guarantee and support plan for young people knowing that agriculture was a priority. She stated that Burundi was putting in place mechanisms and specific banking institutions for young people and women. She revealed that there was an investment development bank and an agricultural community bank in Burundi which were specific for small and medium-sized and informed enterprises in the agricultural sector.

She indicated that the highlighted measures were meant to overcome the challenges of connectivity considering that Burundi was a land locked d country thus developing multimodal infrastructure projects, especially the development of the railway project which is expected to connect to Tanzania through the Democratic Republic of Congo. She indicated that Burundi is also in the process of developing other infrastructure to improve logistics, including the development and modernization of other production support infrastructure. She further indicated that Burundi is committed to developing value chains which have comparable advantages especially the value chains of tea, coffee, fruits and vegetables, cosmetics, and essences but also by diversifying the economy through the development of the tourism sector.

7.2 Zimbabwe.

Hon. Dr. Sekai Nzenza, The Minister Of Industry And Commerce; How is Zimbabwe accelerating recovery from COVID-19 through value addition? And what steps have been undertaken for regional integration through COMESA or the ACFTA?

Dr. Sekai Nzenza stated that Zimbabwe was experiencing a unique scenario post COVID-19 in that the government realized that the pandemic had presented the country with numerous opportunities. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Zimbabwe was importing a lot of food including manufactured goods. She stated that when COVID-19 emerged, a National Development Strategy, whose focus was on value addition, was launched.

She further stated that Zimbabwe started looking inwards by implementing the import substitution strategy and therefore, developed a sectorial strategic approach within the mineral beneficiation sector by recognizing the natural resources that Zimbabwe already had, particularly in the areas of lithium. She further stated that under the agriculture and Agro-processing sector, Zimbabwe recognized the need for producing locally as well as producing for export. She further stated that within its borders, an MOU covering a strategic economic integration program was signed with Zambia. She also indicated that Zimbabwe was on a strong agro-industrial path which was being supported by COMESA and was looking forward to implementing the aspirations that had come out quite strongly through COMESA and through the AFCFTA.

Dr. Nzenza further revealed that Zimbabwe was looking at mineral beneficiation by creating a policy framework that enabled the country to reduce the export of raw materials. She stated that Zimbabwe had recorded a bumper harvest in wheat for the very first time amid the Russia and Ukraine war. She further revealed that the government was focused on utilizing the natural resources that Zimbabwe had and she gave an example of the leather value chain which required that the value is added to the raw material before export.

7.3 Malawi

Mrs. Vera Kamtukule, Minister of Tourism: What is Malawi's position on tourism recovery vis-a-vis COVID-19?

Mrs. Vera Kamtukule, Minister of Tourism, started by indicating that Malawi was negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic considering that the country recorded a negative growth rate of about 95%. She further indicated that the tourism sector lost about 35,000 direct jobs and that the country's job market was highly informal. She indicated that Malawi had about 89% of jobs in the informal sector and 11% the formal ones and thus a sector losing about 35,000 direct jobs was a huge setback.

She further stated that the country's international arrivals were reduced by 79% from 2019 and Malawi was trying to recover from all that post COVID-19.

She also indicated that by 2021, the new arrivals had increased by at least 117% after which a very devastating cyclone happened where over 1,000 people perished and about 500 were unaccounted for. She also stated that the infrastructure in tourism was highly affected when the southern part of the country had mudslides from mountains. Infrastructure was destroyed and access to roads to the tourist destination was destroyed. She however indicated that Malawi has launched a 20-year recovery plan that has 103 specific projects 10 of which had already passed through feasibility study stages.

7.4 Zambia

Hon. Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Zambia: What is Zambia doing to promote the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hon. Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Zambia stated that COVID - 19 taught Zambia a lesson on the need to work objectively. Zambia is considering home grown solutions by fostering key measures through science and technology. The minister stated that digitizing was a key measure and Zambia is working to ensure that trade is digitized. The minister further stated that Zambia is working towards prevention of corruption and was accelerating the implementation of numerous projects. He further revealed that one of the projects that has been initiated is the launching of a star link satellite and internet provision project which is expected to benefit the entire Zambian population especially people in rural areas. He further indicated that Zambia is working towards enhancing her economy by building resilience and investing heavily in the education sector by providing free education from primary to university. He also indicated that Zambia is working towards establishing policies that will improve the lives of the people in both the short and long run.

7.5 COMESA

H.E. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General, COMESA: How has the mandate of COMESA evolved to address the challenges posed by COVID-19?

H.E. Chileshe Kapwepwe, Secretary General, stated that COMESA is working towards harmonization of policies and legislation among the Member States and was playing a key role in bringing the chambers of commerce together. She further revealed that due to the disruption of the supply chain, COMESA was working towards strengthening systems such as the pharmaceuticals sector and further designing development projects among the Member States. She further stated that there is need to have real solutions to the problems by implementing facilities that support stakeholders in the COMESA region. She informed the forum that among the challenges that are being faced by public-private partnerships is the lack of resources to help meet the existing gaps. She revealed that 2.7 trillion dollars was needed for Africa to meet the SDGs. She revealed that there were steps that were being considered to create an enabling environment and to create a strong legal framework. Among the projects that were recommended was to establish the yellow card which was to be used by truckers for example within the region. She further recommended the need to promote green investment among the SMEs to facilitate trade among the Member States

7.6 Trademark Africa

Amb. Erastus Mwencha Chairman Trademark Africa and Former Secretary General of COMESA: What are some of the challenges that are being faced by the PPP in the COMESA region?

Amb. Erastus Mwencha, Chairman Trademark Africa and Former Secretary General of COMESA, stated that with the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need to finance the critical infrastructure in key PPP areas considering that the financing gap in Africa. He also indicated that there is need to work towards closing the gap in the energy deficit in the African continent. He further said that there is an existing gap of \$2.7 trillion in the infrastructure development in Africa despite the promises of receiving \$100 billion annually.

The Chairman stated that one of the prevailing issues in his home country is low forest cover, which is a challenge to the country.

7.7 COMESA Business Council

Mr Marday Venkatasamy, President, COMESA Business Council (CBC): What green investment strategies can COMESA pursue to promote sustainable development?

Mr Marday Venkatasamy, President, COMESA Business Council (CBC) stated that COMESA is prioritizing green investment strategies by promoting sustainable infrastructure such as roads, railway lines and promoting the implementation of critical infrastructure that promotes production of sustainable energy. He also indicated that COMESA is promoting the export of food and promoting access to green energy and mineral generation, to close the existing gaps. He indicated there were local funds that are available and need to be utilized under the PPP to promote infrastructure and renewable energy infrastructure in order to close the existing gaps considering that over 400 million people have no access to electricity in the region. He cited an example of a project in Uganda where value addition was being added to crude oil. He further cited challenges such as the lack of investment and lack of policy framework among other issues. He recommended the need to push for the agenda in line with the green strategy, need for sustainable management of the water and to prioritize programs that work towards mitigating climate change.

7.8 African Civil Aviation

Ms. Adefunke Adeyemi, Secretary General, African Civil Aviation: To what extent has African Civil Aviation contributed to accelerating liberalization of air transport in promoting tourism in the region noting its significance in regional integration facilitation?

Ms. Adefunke Adeyemi, Secretary General, African Civil Aviation, stated that COVID- 19 presented lessons for Africa and was a wake-up call for Africa to look within itself for solutions. She stated that the African Civil Aviation had to look at the best possible measures on how to overcome the challenges presented by COVID-19 and as a result, African Civil Aviation is considering further investments in improved infrastructure development. She revealed that this measure is important considering that before COVID-19, the aviation industry alone contributed \$62 billion and 7.7 million jobs to the African continent. She further recommended the need to invest in aviation considering that aviation is one of the key components of the economy in Africa. She also recommended the need to invest more in women and the youth.

Further to the above , Ms. Adefunke Adeyemi stated that the countries in the COMESA region were able to deliver strong business performance and they had a significant portion of GDP driven by the SMEs of about 50%. She however, stated that in Africa, most of the SMEs were only producing less than 30% of GDP and that was the determinant of where Africa was as a continent and as a region.

She further stated that there was a need to drive SME growth and make sure that they were able to then deliver to their markets. She stated that there were five areas that were identified that needed to be addressed. The first one was access to supply chains and logistics, considering that a lot of the SMEs were not able to access the right supply chains to be able to deliver the right margins to sustain them. In addition to access to logistics, she further stated that logistics were driving the business and also resolving the business model in the country.

She revealed that the African Civil Aviation had put a series of measures to identify the measures to be implemented indicating that the African Civil Aviation was going to be the first to be able to access information. She stated that access to information was a key aspect of the business and a key to the process of finance. She also revealed that there were a lot of people that were struggling with access to finance and that was the pressure that was realized from financial services providers.

7.10 Trade Kings group of companies, Zambia

Mr Luxminaryanan Subramaniam, General Manager, Trade Kings group of companies: How do you build the competitiveness capacity of the businesses to effectively participate in regional and global chains?

Mr Luxminaryanan Subramaniam responded to the above question by giving an example of how Trade Kings Group, which was the largest in Zambia had grown organically in the last 25 years. He indicated that the company had contributed, was still contributing and would continue to contribute to the Zambian economy. He shared five main points that had prompted Trade Kings to build competitive capacity to effectively participate in the economy. He stated that when a company decided to invest in a greenfield project, it was important that the company consider setting up short- and long-term goals.

Secondly, he stated that the company was expected to produce quality products consistently, besides the quality, and that the products were supposed to be available, affordable, and accessible.

He further stated that innovation was supposed to be a continuous journey and not a destination. He further indicated that there is need for training among the local Zambians or people in their respective countries. He also revealed that there was a need to improve infrastructure in different sectors such as power, transport, mode of transport etc.

7.12 Chief Executive Officer: ZANACO

Mrs. Mukwandi Chibesakunda, Chief Executive Officer of ZANACO recommended the need to prioritize the aviation industry by investing more resources in the industry. She further revealed that the aviation industry was very key in the acceleration of growth in the COMESA region.

8.0 Key Recommendations of COMESA Business Forum

The Forum adopted the following key recommendations of COMESA Business Forum as read by the CBC President:

8.1 Private Sector Development in the Region

- a) Call upon COMESA Secretariat and COMESA Business Council Secretariat to collaborate in drafting a regional private sector development strategy for COMESA region.
- b) Urge more Member States to implement of COMESA Simplified Trade Regime (STR) to promote cross border trade for small-scale cross border traders including women and youth to formalize the informal cross-border trade, improve performance of cross border traders and enable them to benefit from the regional preferential treatment when importing or exporting goods within the region.
- c) Urge COMESA Member States to build the capacity of their private sector to participate in the development of agricultural sector.

8.2 Digital Financial Inclusion in the COMESA region

- a) Urge Member States to support the ongoing efforts on the implementation of regional digital retail payment platform for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in COMESA region.
- b) Urge Member States to domesticate the relevant policy frameworks for the operationalisation of the COMESA Digital Retail Payment Scheme.

8.3 Facilitation of Implementation of Product Standards in COMESA Region

- a) Urge Member States to develop framework to guide the implementation of product standard within COMESA region.
- b) Urge Member States to develop mutual recognition framework to reduce the barriers to trade that result from multiplicity of compliance requirements with respect to standards.

- c) Urge Member States to explore the use of African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO) products standards to facilitate cross border trade in COMESA region and at the continental level.
- d) Urge Member States to build the capacity of conformity assessment bodies in the COMESA region to facilitate development of quality infrastructure.

8.4 Enhancement of Regional and Continental Integration

- a) Urge Member States to fast-track the ratification process of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (EAC, SADC and COMESA).
- b) Urge Member States to fast-track the development of regional implementation strategy for AfCFTA with full participation of private sector players.

8.5 Anti illicit Trade in the COMESA region

- a) Urge Member States to set up of a regional coordination and cooperation mechanism in the enforcement of legislation on illicit trade.
- b) Urge Member States to develop a regional track and trace system for products in COMESA region affected by illicit trade.
- c) Urge Member States to develop a regional approach to the issues of illicit trade at international platform.

8.6 Industrialisation and Value Addition in the COMESA region

- a) Urge Member States to fast track the domestication of COMESA Industrialisation Policy and Strategy and promote diversification of export products of strategic sectors to enhance value addition and strengthen value chains at both national and regional levels as a way of transforming the economies of member states and creating employment opportunities.
- b) Urge Member States to promote value addition and regional value chains in COMESA for strategic sectors.
- c) Urge COMESA Member States to identify means of driving high value chain markets through strategic partnership in the region, with a focus on sectors such as the automotive sector, and related components manufacturing sector, and the agroindustry value chains with value addition as a key component.

8.7 Skills development in COMESA region

- (a) Call upon COMESA Member States to invest more in skills development by revamping the education systems to embrace technology i.e., digitalization.
- (b) Urge COMESA Member States to build capacity and develop skills among Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to enhance competitiveness of their products for entry into regional market as well as continental and international markets.

8.8 Trade Facilitation in COMESA region: Call upon COMESA Members States to implement fully existing trade facilitation instruments and embrace new trade facilitation instruments such as COMESA Digital Free Trade Area by adopting e-certificate of origin, e-commerce etc.

8.9 Attracting Investment from the Continent:

- (a) Urge Member States to embrace the concept of African Direct Investment in different sectors including agriculture.
- (b) Urge financial institutions to consider structuring their financing to the agricultural sector in conformity with the industry's practices i.e., to follow the industry cycle.

8.10 Food Trade in COMESA region

- (a) Urge COMESA Member States to adopt harmonised seed regulations and standards to promote cross border movement of quality seeds in COMESA region.
- (b) Urge COMESA Member States to promote the use of digital national and regional Food Balance Sheet to facilitate food trade in COMESA region.

8.11 Development of Pharmaceutical Industry in COMESA Region

Reiterate to the COMESA Member States our earlier call to:

- (a) Establish COMESA Medicine Agency to improve access to quality healthcare services and affordable, safe, and quality medicines and vaccines.
- (b) Harmonize regulatory requirements including procedures for registration and inspection of drugs in the COMESA region.
- (c) Develop a regional strategy to facilitate development of pharmaceutical sector.

8.12 Promoting the recovery from COVID-19 pandemic through tourism

- a) Tourism sector is a major source of revenue for many Member States and is an important contributor to the region's GDP. The sector supports millions of direct and indirect jobs all over the world, particularly for women and young people. Evidence from other countries shows that domestic tourism recovered faster from COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, Member States are urged to consider putting in place measures that promote domestic tourism.
- b) Member States are also urged to promote regional flight connectivity and put measures in place to facilitate reduction of travel costs within the region to drive tourism as a recovery measure.
- c) Urge Member States to invest in aviation to accelerate the efficiency of movement of goods and people through liberalisation of the skies.
- d) Urge Member States to consider the need to diversify economic activities in the economy.

- e) Urge Member States to consider developing inward strategies at national and regional levels.
- f) Urge Member States to consider home grown solutions to the challenges facing their respective countries.
- g) Noting the devastating impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the economies especially the SME sector, we urge Member States to work with private sector financial institutions to provide business financing to SMEs.

8.13 Cooperation in the Management of Natural Resources and Environment

- a) Urge Member States to develop national policy frameworks for green economy that supports low carbon development, with strategies that build resilience, promote sustainable infrastructure, promote resource efficiency, promote green investment, and enhance social inclusion and sustainable livelihood.
- b) Urge Member States to consider having a regional green economy strategy and action plan to promote sustainable development in the region.
- c) Urge Member States to put in place regulatory frameworks to promote investment in Green Economy.

8.14 Movement of Businesspersons in COMESA Region

- a) Urge Member States to enhance the full implementation of the COMESA Protocol on the Gradual Relaxation and Eventual Elimination of Visas (Visa Protocol) to facilitate the movement of businesspersons in relation to both trade in goods and services as a Trade Facilitation Measure as well as enhance integrated border management.
- b) Call Upon Member States to embrace public private partnership in trade facilitation such as the development of infrastructure to enhance connectivity and border management.

Box 4: Partner presentations (ZEP-RE, ATI,CCC & ZAM)

4.1 Mrs. Hope Murera – Managing Director, ZEP-RE.

Mrs Murera advocated for the need to support small holder farmers to enable banks to support the sector. She further raised the idea that ministers of trade should ensure that the issue of insurance is prioritized. She further indicated that her organization was building digital platforms across the region to enable companies have an ecosystem approach towards the raised challenges. She further revealed that there was need to bring the markets, producers, everyone else together. She also called for the need to protect the members of the region from exploitation citing examples of young men in Kenya who were involved in value addition ventures who lacked insurance to protect their businesses. She further indicated that there was need to raise awareness ensuring that there was credit facilitation and access to credit facilities.

4.2 Mr Pizarro Lukhanda – Senior Underwriter - African Trade Insurance Agency (ATI).

A representative from the African Trade Insurance Agency (ATI) started by stating that indeed insurance was very significant, and that insurance was defined in many categories though there was need to specify that the kind of insurance that was supposed to be looked into was trade and investment. He was of the view that apart from recommending the need to attract investment especially investment in the private sector into all these areas, there need to work around the policies and the regulatory framework that needed to be put in place. He was of the view that some of the investors had concerns about government policies and position changing. There was an urgent need to have third-party bonus broker sitting between the private sector and the government as a way of having protection and a backup plan. In 2022 ATI managed to secure and facilitate trade and investments worth \$8 billion and the organization managed to attract this kind of investment in the COMESA region. He also stated that there was need to deal with SMEs in terms unifying them with the supporting firms.

4.3 Mr. Willard Mwemba, Chief Executive Officer, COMESA Competition Commission (CCC)

During their presentation, the COMESA Competition Commission represented by Mr. Willard Mwemba, Chief Executive Officer gave a brief outlined of CCC and its work. He mentioned that the Commission should be regarded as partner of the business Community and not an adversary. He also indicated that the Commission plays a facilitative role for business in the region and is essential in the functioning of a market system. He also highlighted that the Commission has developed an approach of engaging in dialogue with the private sector on various anti-competitive practices before penalties can be implemented. As such he called for close collaboration between the private sector and the commission to ensure that there is clarity on the Commissions' role as well as the expectations on the part of the private sector.

4.4 Mr. Ashwin Kumar Ashu Sagar, President, Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM)

During the meeting, the Zambia Association of Manufacturers made a short presentation where they highlighted the need for COMESA member states to leverage on what countries don't have in common especially for trade. The need for skills complementarity around regional value chains was also mentioned. In addition, the presentation highlighted how comparative advantages across the

9.0 Closing Session

9.1 Vote of Thanks by Ms. Vivian Dewa Ramjee, Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Madagascar.

In her vote of thanks, Ms. Vivian Dewa Ramjee stated that the 16th COMESA Business Forum was a remarkable and special event with a unique theme which is anchored in accelerating the recovery of COMESA Member States from COVID-19 in the area of green investment, value addition and tourism. She appreciated the effort and commitment by COMESA Business Council, COMESA Secretariat and Government of Zambia for ensuring the success of the event.

Ms. Vivian thanked the Partners and Sponsors for their financial support and for their support in kind. They Partners and Sponsors included, the European Union, Republic of Zambia, Federation of Germany Industries, African Trade Insurance Agency, COMESA Competition Commission, the African Leather and Leather Products Institute, Zambia Association of Manufacturers, Copperbelt Energy Corporation, Regional Infrastructure Financing Facility, Standard Chartered Bank, ZANACO, Coca-Cola, Proctor and Gamble, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, Trade Kings.

She further thanked the invited speakers and panellists for gracing the event with insights and perspectives on how COMESA Member States leveraged green investment, value addition, and tourism towards inclusive sustainable trade and investment. She appreciated the continued effort of the private sector community and captains of industries in promoting private sector development. She stated that their presence at the event demonstrated their commitment towards regional integration.

Finally, she thanked all participants, the media for being part of the event and the people of Zambia for being hospitable.

9.2 Closing remarks by Dr Dev Haman, Assistant Secretary General, Administration and Finance.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Dev Haman thanked participants for their active participation and valuable contribution to the Forum. He stressed the need for different institutions in the region to work for purpose of achieving a common goal. He thanked all the delegates for attending the Forum and wished them safe journey back to their respective countries.

16th COMESA Business Forum

07 June 2023, Lusaka, Zambia

Economic Integration for
a Thriving COMESA Anchored
on Green Investment, Value
Addition and Tourism

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