

17TH COMESA BUSINESS FORUM; A RENDEZVOUS CONNECTING THE REGIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

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Ivhu Logistics Real Estate Joins COMESA Business Council Membership

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ZMW 14 million Programme to Skill Youth with Disabilities.

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Driving Value Chains and Youth Empowerment in Uganda's Agribusiness Sector

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MCCI and UNDP Launch "Xport Accelerator": Propelling Mauritian SMEs into African Markets



In a bold move to capitalise on the burgeoning opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (MCCI) has partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to launch "Xport Accelerator." This initiative aims to empower Mauritian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to expand their horizons and tap into the vast potential of African markets.

Unveiled in September, Xport Accelerator is not just another business programme; it is a transformative journey designed to reshape how Mauritian SMEs approach continental expansion.

Dr. Drishtysingh Ramdenee, Secretary General of the MCCI, emphasises the

program's strategic importance: "SMEs are the lifeblood of our economy, contributing 40% to our GDP and 47% to employment. With the advent of the AfCFTA, we have a responsibility to turn this challenge into an opportunity. Xport Accelerator is not merely a programme; it's a growth catalyst, a bridge to a future where Mauritian SMEs are indispensable players in the African economic landscape."

The programme's scope is comprehensive, targeting SMEs across various sectors, from manufacturing and services to agriculture, IT, and crafts.

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17th COMESA Business Forum a Success



The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Secretary General, Her Excellency Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, has underscored COMESA's intra-regional trade, which has held steady at 14 billion United States dollars over the past two years, despite broader economic fluctuations.

In her address, during the 17th High-Level COMESA Business Forum held in Bujumbura, Burundi, under the theme "Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate-Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism," she highlighted that while intra-COMESA trade currently stands at 6%, there is ample opportunity to increase this figure by reducing trade barriers and enhancing regional cooperation.

"By consolidating our efforts, we can build more robust economies equipped to capitalise on regional and global market opportunities," she stated.

"COMESA Secretariat is working closely with CBC to promote the free movement of businesspersons in the COMESA region through gradual relaxation and eventual elimination of visa requirements within the COMESA region," she noted.

Complementary to these integration efforts, Prime Minister of the Republic of Burundi, His Excellency Gervais Ndirakobuca, in addressing the Forum's climate resilience goals, emphasised the need for sustainable practices, citing climate change as a threat to regional economies and livelihoods.

The Prime Minister noted that the Business Forum provided an excellent platform to explore how to collectively develop COMESA's regional value chains in agriculture, mining, and tourism.

In alignment, COMESA Business Council's Board President, Mr. James Chimwanza, stated that, as an engine for economic growth in COMESA, the private sector undisputedly has a pivotal role to play in driving the sustainable development agenda in the region.

The 17th COMESA Business Forum brought together leaders from government, industry, and business associations across the region and internationally to discuss strategies for a competitive business environment that benefits all COMESA Member States.

COMESA's Secretary General Highlights \$14 Billion Intra-Regional Trade Stability Amid Global Fluctuations, Advocates for Boost in Value Chain at 17th Business Forum.



Exhibitors Share Insights from the 17th High-Level COMESA Business Forum

The 17th High-Level COMESA Business Forum, held in Bujumbura, Burundi, on October 28, 2024, under the theme “Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate-Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism,” brought together a diverse array of exhibitors from 21 Member States across the region.

With a focus on enhancing regional business growth, this forum provided a valuable platform for exhibitors to showcase their innovations, establish new connections, and expand their market reach. Running alongside the forum was a three-day exhibition at the Parliament grounds from 28th to 30th October, allowing businesses to interact with government officials, private sector leaders, and potential partners. Here, exhibitors shared their experiences and the significant impact of the forum on their businesses.

The exhibitors expressed their enthusiasm for the opportunity to connect with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, paving the way for future collaborations and growth.



◀ The President of Burundi, His Excellency, Evariste Ndayishimiye, took a tour to appreciate the businesses, and excitement filled the atmosphere as over 100 exhibitors showcased their products and services as he toured the stands.



▲ “We would like more platforms like this exhibition that allow local businesses from different countries to showcase our products regionally. This exposure is invaluable, and we look forward to increased support and investments that target SMEs.”



◀ An NGO based in Uganda, St. Jude Family Projects, showcased its coffee and dried fruits produced in partnership with over 7,000 farmers from the Nassaka area. “This exhibition in Burundi has been incredible for making sales and building networks that will facilitate our expansion beyond Uganda,” shared Lynette Nachida. “We anticipate new orders from clients across the region who have shown interest in our products.”



◀ “I manufacture shoes and bags using sustainable and eco-friendly materials,” explained Anne Sikuleba from Malawi. “Showcasing my products has connected us with government representatives and private sector leaders from across the COMESA region, empowering us with valuable industry links and partnerships for our business.”

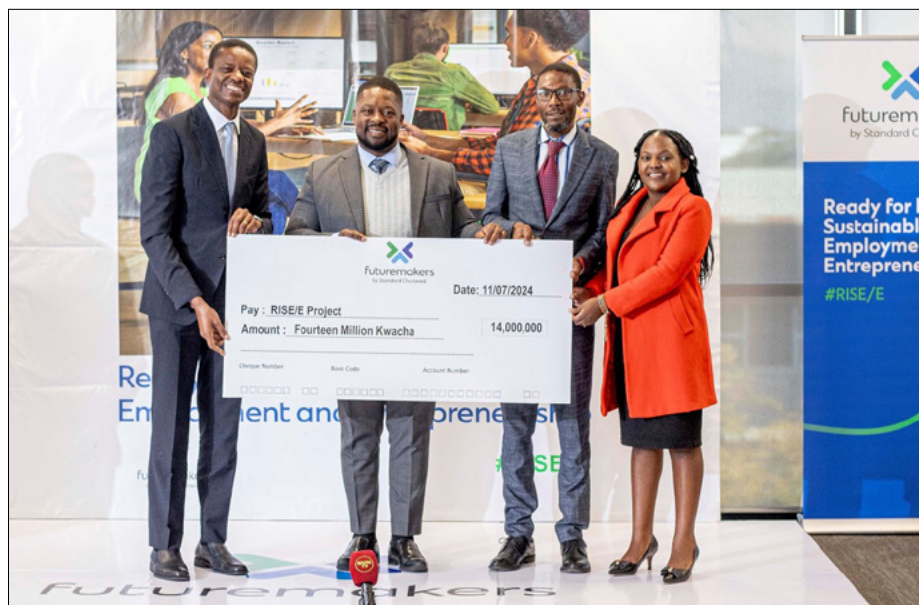
Standard Chartered Zambia, Sightsavers and Challenges Worldwide launch ZMW 14 million programme to skill youth with disabilities.

Standard Chartered Bank in partnership with Sightsavers and Challenges Zambia recently announced the launch of a groundbreaking ZMW 14 million Futuremakers initiative dubbed Ready for Inclusive Sustainable Employment and Entrepreneurship (RISE-E) Project designed to improve employment prospects for young people with disabilities and support youth-led businesses.

you are aware that unemployment rate in Zambia was 6.13%, but youth unemployment rate was 11.03%. This has been attributed to the huge skill gaps between labour demanded and labour supply within the labour market. As a government we are aware that achieving such a goal requires the joint efforts of all stakeholders, as the task that lies ahead of us is mammoth, and the government cannot single handedly transform the labour market system. However, we can provide policy guidance, the enabling environment, leadership and open to collaboration to provide equal opportunities to all Zambian regardless of diversities. For this reason, I am happy today that we are launching the Futuremakers RISE/E today."

The CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Zambia, Mr. Sonny Zulu in his remarks stated: "We are thrilled to collaborate with Sightsavers & Challenges Zambia on this innovative and pioneering project which that will have a positive impact on the lives of young people with (and without) disabilities. Through Futuremakers, we will continue to develop a talent pool of skilled, employment-ready young people. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Arts for their presence here today.

He added: "Young people face challenges such as access to market information, poorly designed technical assistance, and lack of support. Young entrepreneurs with disabilities and women face additional hurdles that further impede their entrepreneurial aspirations and the potential for impact and upwards mobility. A project like RISE/E seeks to greatly benefit young people and address some of the challenges that young people face."



Standard Chartered CEO, Mr Sonny Zulu (left); Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts (second left), during the launch

The colourful launch was hosted at Standard Chartered Head Office in Lusaka and was graced by Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth Sport & Arts Mr Chileshe Kangwa.

With an investment of ZMW 14 million for a duration of 3 years, the program aims to reach 270 young people, providing them with the tools and resources necessary to thrive in the job market and contribute to the country's economic landscape. 90 young entrepreneurs with and without disabilities will also participate in the programme, and youth-led microbusinesses will be given expert business development advice, creating job opportunities in the process.

Speaking at the launch event, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Arts Mr Chileshe Kangwa stated: "I am proud to have this opportunity to grace this very important occasion that speaks directly to sustainable development goals number eight (8) and twelve (12) which seek to promote economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, as well as reduced inequalities among citizens. I am confident that majority of



Ms Glenda Mulenga, Country Director at Sightsavers said “We are excited to launch this new project which we hope will make a real difference to the employability of young. The project will target at least 270 young people with disabilities to help them gain employment in Zambia fifty per cent of them will be women. At least 90 young entrepreneurs will also take part and youth-led microbusinesses will be given expert business development advice.

The programme is also being implemented in partnership with Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD) in Zambia. Federal Director, Mr Justine Bbakali at ZAFOD said “We are excited about this innovative and pioneering project which will make a real difference for young people with disabilities as well as strengthen small businesses.”

Ms. Kasonde Kashulwe, Programme Manager for RISE/E at Challenges Worldwide, which partners the initiative, said “We are very excited to renew our partnership with Sightsavers and to utilise our 25 years of experience as an organisation to help empower the next generation of entrepreneurs to build thriving, resilient, microbusinesses ready to grow, succeed and create job opportunities within their communities.”

This programme is funded by the Standard Chartered Foundation as part of Futuremakers by Standard Chartered, a global youth economic empowerment initiative to support disadvantaged young people, especially women and people with disabilities, to learn, earn, and grow. It will have an employability track and an entrepreneurship track, both of which seek to open opportunities for people with and without disabilities.

MCCI and UNDP Launch “Xport Accelerator”: Propelling Mauritian SMEs into African Markets

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Particularly noteworthy is its focus on women-led businesses and young entrepreneurs, aligning with broader goals of inclusive economic growth.

As of November, following a rigorous selection process, 15 high-potential SMEs are embarking on an intensive journey of transformation. These chosen enterprises will benefit from a meticulously crafted support system, including personalised business coaching, skill-sharpening workshops, and strategic guidance tailored to the nuances of African markets.

“We are not just enhancing skills; we’re reimagining how our SMEs approach export,” Dr. Ramdenee states emphatically. “This is about a holistic guidance – from product strategy and financial management to cross-cultural marketing – all optimised for success in African markets.”

The timing of Xport Accelerator could not be more opportune. Africa’s economic growth, surpassing 3.8%, coupled with a projected population of 2.5 billion by 2050, presents a colossal market potential. This demographic and economic dynamism creates an environment ripe for the innovation and adaptability that Mauritian enterprises are known for.

Ms. Fatuma Musa, Officer in Charge of UNDP for Mauritius and Seychelles, highlights the transformative potential of the program: “Strategically, this collaboration underlines UNDP’s commitment to advancing gender equality and youth empowerment by

focusing on SMEs managed by women and youth, essential links for economic diversification and job creation. By integrating these companies within the AfCFTA, UNDP aims to open new market opportunities, improve the competitiveness of Mauritian companies, and contribute to the broader goal of inclusive and sustainable economic development across Africa.”

The MCCI-UNDP initiative goes beyond mere market entry. It is about fostering resilience, adaptability, and a global mindset among Mauritian SMEs. By equipping these enterprises with the tools to navigate complex international markets, the program aims to create a ripple effect of economic growth and job creation back home.

For Mauritian SMEs ready to embrace this challenge, the African horizon beckons with promise!

Gudie Leisure Farm: Driving Value Chains and Youth Empowerment in Uganda's Agribusiness Sector



Gudie Leisure Farm fishpond.

SUCCESS STORY

Deborah enrolled in the white meat value Chain program at GLF to gain essential skills in animal husbandry at Gudie Leisure Farm in Uganda in 2020. Today, Deborah operates a thriving piggery business with over 45 pigs, a poultry project raising more than 500 birds per batch, and has her sights set on even greater ambitions. Although she initially ventured into cuniculture, she decided to pause her rabbit project due to limited market access.

These earnings have allowed Deborah not only to reinvest in her projects but also support her household by paying herself a salary and covering operational costs, including feeds for the animals and wages for her workers. Her story is among the many successes that women and youths of Uganda have benefited through the farm's agribusiness projects.

Gudie Leisure Farm is a transformative force in Uganda's agribusiness sector, advancing value chain development and empowering youth across the country. Founded in 2009 as a social enterprise, GLF operates in over 1,000 parishes across 41 districts, including refugee settlements, and is committed to enhancing the capacity of young people in agribusiness to penetrate the COMESA market. The farm's vision includes empowering women and youth to play a key role in achieving sustainable growth in the agribusiness sector.

With a network of over 388,000 "Youth Agripreneur Champions," GLF provides training, resources, and business opportunities that enable youth to succeed in agriculture-based enterprises.

GLF's approach to agribusiness is value chain-oriented, ensuring that each stage from inputs to market delivery is optimized for quality, efficiency, and profitability. By building networks of youth-owned enterprises across

fish farming, poultry, piggery, and horticulture, GLF fosters a coordinated supply chain responsive to both local and international market demands.

"We offer incubation training programs for young people who, in turn, share their knowledge in other regions. Our focus is on white meat value chains, creating a value chain that is already tapping into Uganda's markets. Young people in these processes now face fewer challenges accessing capital to start businesses they required to pay back after selling the products."

Dr. Gudula Basaza
GLF's Managing Director and Founder



Celebrating 30 years of COMESA Impact

“With a GDP of less than 91 billion USD in 1994, we are now proud to be a region registering a GDP of USD 1.13 trillion, making up one third of the GDP of Africa. The COMESA Institutions are equally impacting positively on the economic and social agenda of COMESA, in support of the 2063 Agenda of the African Union”

**Her Excellency,
Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe**

COMESA Secretary General



**30 YEARS OF
COMESA IMPACT**



Gudie Leisure Farm: Driving Value Chains and Youth Empowerment in Uganda's Agribusiness Sector



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To support youth-led businesses, GLF has established core cottage industries including feed mills, nutraceutical production, and a bistro franchise. Additionally, GLF's Gudie Agribusiness Microfinance initiative provides affordable savings, credit, and advisory services, particularly targeting communities where traditional financial inclusion is limited. Partnerships with organizations like the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) ensure access to high-quality, region-specific agricultural technologies for young agripreneurs.

GLF's integrated support system also includes incubation programs, e-learning, and shared facilities,

giving youth agripreneurs the tools they need to establish sustainable enterprises. These efforts drive job creation and support local economies, with GLF's ecosystem encompassing animal husbandry, agri-tourism, and nutraceuticals.

Further, in alignment with its mission, GLF is set to partner with the COMESA Business Council (CBC) to help youth in agribusiness access broader regional markets. "Our plan is to work with CBC to enhance the capacity of youth in agribusiness, empowering them to successfully engage in the COMESA market," said Dr. Basaza. This partnership will focus on training facilitators, connecting young agripreneurs with strategic partners, and establishing value-added services within the agricultural sector.

Through these targeted initiatives, GLF is nurturing a generation of skilled, entrepreneurial youth who are well-prepared to meet the growing demands of the COMESA region. With a strong focus on capacity building, market access, and value chain development, GLF is empowering Uganda's youth to lead in the agribusiness sector, contributing to economic growth and regional integration. "As a lead enterprise, GLF offers a mix of integrated value chain services face-to-face incubation, e-learning, virtual support, shared facilities, market development, and ecosystem services like financial and multimedia support," Dr. Basaza highlighted.

Beyond agribusiness, GLF also encompasses Gudie Agri-Tourism and the Gudie Health Plan. The Agri-Tourism initiative educates tourists on Uganda's agricultural opportunities and cultural heritage, while the Health Plan offers essential medical and daycare services, enabling women and youth to fully engage in GLF's programs. The farm's multimedia center provides agribusiness information, training resources, and conference facilities, further supporting the growth of its ecosystem.

Gudie Leisure Farm also encompasses a television and radio studio, fishponds, and even tile production from eggshells, exemplifying the farm's commitment to sustainable and innovative practices. By integrating agribusiness with health, financial, and community services, Gudie Leisure Farm not only promotes economic growth but also fosters sustainable development and resilience among Uganda's youth.

According to COMESA Statistics, in 2023, Uganda's intra-COMESA exports totalled \$923 million, while imports stood at \$1.044 billion. With GLF's continued dedication to youth empowerment and value chain development, Uganda is positioned to play a more significant role in the COMESA market, driving socio-economic transformation at both the local and regional levels.

Ivhu Logistics Real Estate Joins COMESA Business Council Membership

...Targets

Expansion of Green Infrastructure

Development in the Region

Ivhu Logistics Real Estate ("Ivhu"), a Nairobi-based company specialising in financing and developing eco-friendly industrial real estate, has officially joined the COMESA Business Council (CBC) as a new member. This membership is a significant step in the company's mission to provide sustainable supply chain infrastructure across the region, supporting businesses in optimising their capital without heavy investments in property assets.

"We are excited to join the CBC and look forward to contributing to COMESA's vision of a more integrated, sustainable, and competitive regional market," said Ivhu Africa's Managing Director, Mr. Maruza Chikwanha.

With a focus on 'resilient green' industrial real estate, Ivhu designs and constructs sustainable facilities tailored for B2B clients across various sectors, including manufacturing, assembly, agriculture, processing, distribution, and export. By assuming construction risks and offering lease-based access to infrastructure, Ivhu enables clients to focus on their core operations rather than on managing non-core assets like buildings and warehouses.

The platform has been created to serve over 10 customer segments across 10 COMESA Member States. Ivhu Africa provides scalable, eco-friendly facilities that support businesses seeking to enhance efficiency and meet growing environmental standards. This bespoke commercial leasing approach is particularly beneficial for companies looking to reduce their capital expenditure on real estate while promoting environmentally sustainable practices.

As a member of CBC, Ivhu plans to deepen its involvement in the region's economic landscape, contributing to the development of regional value chains, sustainable industrialisation, and climate-resilient infrastructure. This membership aligns Ivhu with CBC's broader goals of supporting regional integration and providing private sector solutions that drive sustainable growth across COMESA member states.

The organisation also plans to develop industrial assets in other countries, which include Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, and Mozambique, as required by those markets under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Since becoming a member, Ivhu has participated in the 17th COMESA Business Forum recently held in Bujumbura, Burundi, where CBC facilitated introductions to the CBC network, which are now being actively pursued through networking and relationships.

"We were able to secure follow-on meetings with three businesses seeking their solutions and are scheduled to return to Burundi in Q1, 2025, as well as pursuing two opportunities proposed for the trade corridor between Zambia and the DRC." The managing director noted.

Ivhu's membership marks a forward-looking step in advancing environmentally responsible business practices across COMESA, contributing to the region's sustainable development and economic resilience.



About

Mr Maruza Chikwanha

Maruza is a multilingual, dual citizen of Zimbabwe and Australia, resident in Nairobi, Kenya, with a proven 25-year track record of delivering real estate assets in both developed and emerging markets.

He holds a Bachelor of Applied Science Degree (Construction Management) from RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, and is the Founder and Managing Director of Ivhu Logistics Real Estate, a multi-national industrial real estate developer with a pan-African vision for the continent to trade out of poverty and into middle income status whilst contributing to solving climate change, not only the most existential challenge of our time but also the most significant economic opportunity of the 21st century.

Maruza's award-winning journey across Australia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe is defined by a relentless pursuit of built environment excellence and a commitment to driving impactful development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa.

He delivered the first industrial real estate development in Africa to be designed, built, audited, and certified "EDGE Advanced" for Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies by the IFC and World Bank Group in 2018 and, in 2022, was responsible for ensuring that a Kenyan company became the "first African signatory" of the World Green Building Council "Net-Zero Carbon Buildings Commitment" to reduce embodied and operational carbon emissions by 2030.



▲ CBC Touring Kawumu Leather Industry in Uganda during a Membership Drive.

◀ CBC CEO (Centre) during a Hamburg Sustainability Conference.

◀ Workshop held in Tunisia on AfCFTA targeting the COMESA Francophone countries.



▲ CBC-in partnership with ZNCC during the hosting of the BizNet Workshop in Zimbabwe



▲ COMESA SG and CBC President (centre) welcoming Burundi's Prime Minister during the 17th COMESA Business Forum.



BizNet
NEWSLETTER

For further information or to contribute to the series, please email info@comesabusinesscouncil.org

CBC is a business member organization bringing together a diverse group of businesses and associations in the region from 34 sectors in 21 countries of COMESA. CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector in the region. CBC as the key advocacy driver for business, provides a link between the private sector and organs of the Common market. We seek to improve the competitiveness and deepen the participation of the private sector in regional and global trade, through advocacy, business facilitation and enterprise development. This includes prioritizing and taking specific advocacy strategies to address key business impediments and measures that affect our industries and have a direct bearing on the participation of our businesses in trading in the COMESA region.



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