



BizNet NEWSLETTER

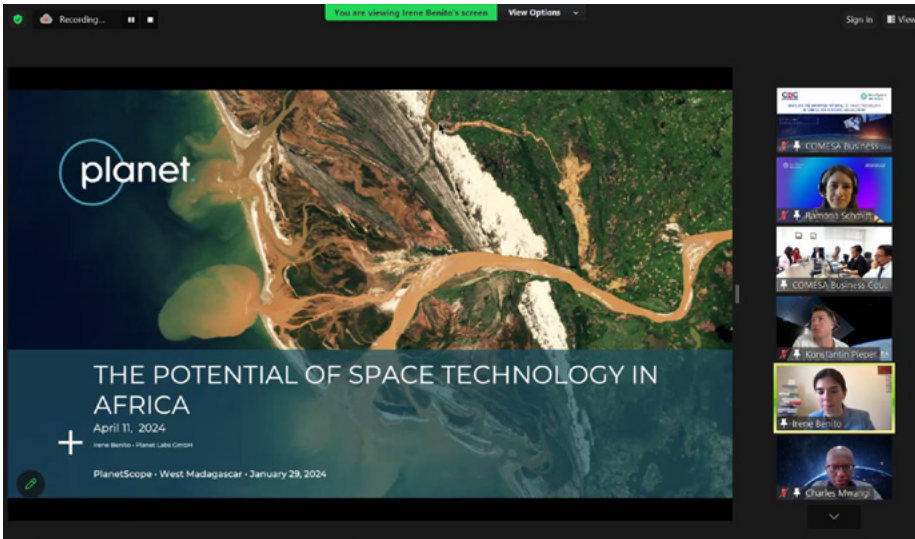
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The Year in Retrospect

MARCH

CBC and BDI Successfully Host NewSpace Webinar, Paving the Way for Africa's Space Technology Future



The COMESA Business Council (CBC), in partnership with the Federation of German Industries (BDI), successfully hosted a virtual NewSpace Webinar on March 21st. The event brought together key stakeholders from the private sector, space agencies, technology innovators, and industry leaders across the COMESA region and beyond, with over 70 participants in attendance.

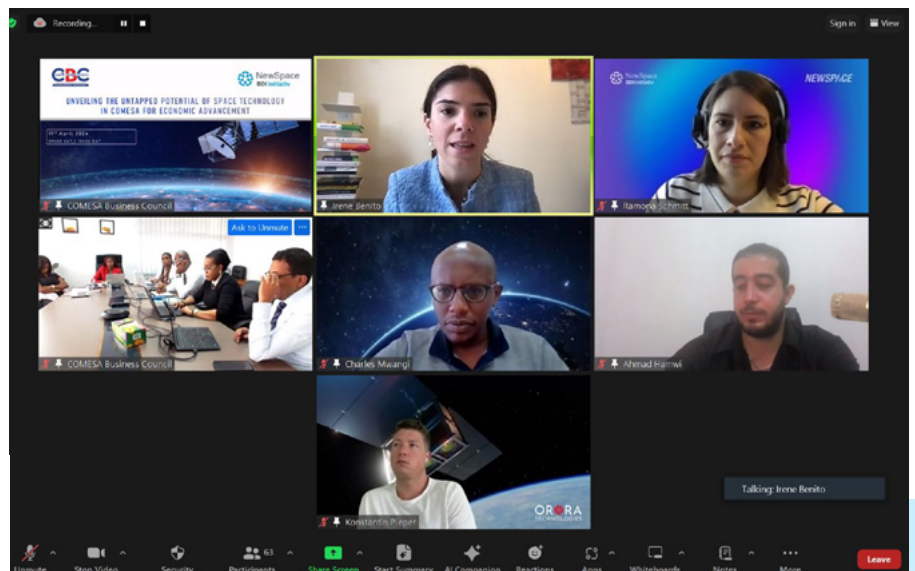
The webinar highlighted the transformative potential of space technology for Africa, showcasing its ability to address critical challenges such as food security, climate resilience, and sustainable economic growth. Discussions centered on the role of space innovations in providing solutions like real-time weather data, early warning systems, land management tools, and enhanced agricultural planning.

Key objectives of the webinar included:

- Promoting public-private partnerships to accelerate space initiatives.
- Facilitating knowledge sharing on space technology applications and best practices.

The interactive session featured insights from representatives of space agencies, startups from the region and business leaders, all emphasizing the need for collaboration to unlock Africa's space technology potential.

As a forward-looking initiative, the webinar successfully raised awareness about the value of space-driven solutions in enhancing productivity and sustainability across sectors. It also paved the way for future partnerships, investments, and knowledge-sharing platforms aimed at fostering a robust space industry in the region.



Looking Ahead >>>

CBC remains committed to creating platforms that drive innovation and regional development. Following the success of this webinar, CBC has established a New Technologies workgroup and will continue to engage stakeholders to ensure that space technologies become a key enabler of economic growth and sustainable development within the COMESA region.

APRIL Lusaka, Zambia

2024 to 2026 CBC Board of Directors Elected



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) announced the election of its new Board of Directors for the 2024–2026 term during the 11th Annual General Meeting held in Lusaka. Mr. James Chimwaza, from the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, was elected CBC Board President, succeeding Mr. Marday Venkatasamy, who will serve as immediate past president.

Other key appointments include;

- Mr. Mucai Kunyiha (1st Vice President),
- Dr. Sherif El Gabaly (2nd Vice President), and
- Mrs. Munkeni Kiekie Eliane (3rd Vice President),

Other members elected to the Board of Directors include Engineer Melaku Ezezew from the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Association, Mr. Issa Sekitto from the Private Sector Foundation Uganda, Dr. Tinashe Manzungu from the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce, and Mrs. Namita Jagarnath Hardowar from the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

The AGM also featured remarks from Her Excellency Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe, who stressed the CBC’s critical role in fostering regional integration and sustainable economic growth. She celebrated the

substantial increase in COMESA’s trade activities, with total exports doubling to \$205 billion between 2020 and 2022. Her address reaffirmed the importance of bolstering private sector involvement to unlock the region’s full potential in both regional and global markets.



Read More



APRIL Lusaka, Zambia

BDI Delegation Engages CBC Members to Strengthen Regional Partnerships

The BDI - Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V. had the pleasure of meeting with our esteemed CBC members, Trade Kings Group and the British American Tobacco (BAT) and have a tour at the two organisation’s factory plants.

At Trade Kings, the team toured the Bigtree Beverages plant factory, gaining invaluable insights into the operational excellence of Trade Kings Group. While at BAT, they also explored the production process at the factory.

The two visits included fruitful discussions on the continued collaborations and partnerships, way forward and expressed enthusiasm on the ongoing membership with CBC.

APRIL Lusaka, Zambia

CBC Successfully Hosts Virtual Regional Track and Trace System Validation Workshop

As part of its efforts to combat illicit trade and strengthen supply chain integrity in the COMESA region, the COMESA Business Council (CBC), in collaboration with EU Africa RISE, successfully hosted the Virtual Validation Workshop on the Regional Track and Trace System.

The event, held with over 70 participants online, marked a significant step toward addressing a critical challenge identified in the 2022 Anti-Illicit Trade Framework Study conducted by CBC with the support of EU Africa RISE. The study revealed a major gap: the absence of a comprehensive track and trace system, which has contributed to the proliferation of illicit trade across the COMESA region.

In follow-up to these findings, CBC, again supported by Africa RISE, conducted a further study to determine the specifications for an effective Regional Track and Trace System. The system is expected to:

- Monitor the supply chain of affected products.
- Protect revenue collection for member states.
- Address illicit trade across member state borders while meeting international obligations under established protocols.

The workshop served as a platform to present the Assessment Report outlining the system requirements. It was followed by a Plenary Discussion, where participants engaged in a Q&A session to provide feedback, ask questions, and gain clarity on the system's scope and implementation.

The Regional Track and Trace System is set to be a game-changer for COMESA, enhancing the capacity of governments to protect revenue, monitor goods, and curb illicit trade, which hampers economic growth and regional integration.

MAY Malawi; Kenya; Burundi.

Empowering Agro-Processors: COMESA Hosts Local Sourcing Workshops



CBC, in partnership with Business African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) under the EU initiative, conducted impactful Local Sourcing for Partnerships (LSP) Training and Capacity Building Workshops in Malawi, Kenya, and Burundi. Themed "Roots to Market: Enhancing Local Sourcing for Small and Medium Agro-Processors," the

workshops aimed to strengthen SMEs' participation in regional supply chains and foster economic growth.

The workshops brought together 50 SMEs in each country alongside corporate entities and stakeholders, equipping agro-processors with essential skills in food safety, quality compliance, and value addition. Participants were linked to corporate supply chains, promoting partnerships and ensuring their competitiveness in local and regional markets.

Since 2016, the LSP program has trained over 850 SMEs across COMESA member states, integrating more than 500 into corporate networks. This year's sessions in Malawi, Kenya, and Burundi continued this legacy, emphasising the importance of quality standards and local sourcing to drive intra-COMESA trade, which has grown from \$10 billion in 2020 to \$14 billion in 2022.

By fostering partnerships and empowering SMEs, the CBC is paving the way for stronger, more inclusive regional trade networks, ensuring businesses thrive and economies grow sustainably.





MAY Tunisia, Tunisia.

Enhancing AfCFTA Awareness in Francophone COMESA Countries

With a focus on enhancing the understanding of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) operational instruments among private sector stakeholders from Francophone COMESA countries, CBC with support from the EU-Technical Assistance Facility (EU-TAF), successfully hosted a two-day sensitisation workshop in Tunisia.

The workshop brought together participants from Burundi, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, and Tunisia, creating a platform for engagement and knowledge sharing on trade dynamics within the AfCFTA framework.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Lazhar Bannour, Director General of Trade and Economic Cooperation at Tunisia's Ministry of Trade, highlighted the transformative potential of the AfCFTA in fostering trade, economic growth, and regional integration across the African continent. He further reiterated Tunisia's commitment to supporting private sector participation as a driver of economic progress.

The project, focusing on COMESA French-speaking member states, aims to empower these countries with a deeper understanding of trade dynamics and the emerging opportunities under the AfCFTA. By equipping private sector stakeholders with critical knowledge and tools, CBC continues to strengthen regional integration and promote inclusive economic development across the COMESA region.



SEPTEMBER Netherlands

Horticulture Mission to the Netherlands: Expanding Market Opportunities



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) spearheaded a transformative Horticulture Engagement Mission to the Netherlands from September 15th to 22nd, 2024. Supported by the European Union under the RECAMP programme, this mission aimed to boost market access, foster partnerships, and enhance SME competitiveness in the horticulture sector.

Key Mission Objectives:

Networking and Business Matchmaking for COMESA producers.

Exploring European Union market access through the Netherlands.

Knowledge Exchange on best horticultural practices.

The mission kicked off with key presentations from agencies like the Fresh Produce Centre and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, highlighting the Netherlands' pivotal role:

- The country imports 28% of COMESA's horticultural exports.
- Dutch horticultural imports total €10.6 billion annually.

The delegation engaged with key players in fruit and vegetable cultivation, flower production, logistics, packaging, and more—providing SMEs with valuable exposure to global best practices.

This initiative is a significant step toward positioning COMESA horticulture on the global stage.



SEPTEMBER Harare, Zimbabwe

SMEs Embrace Digital Platforms at the Biznet Awareness Training Workshop

From September 9–11, 2024, the Monomotapa Hotel in Harare hosted the Biznet Awareness Training Workshop in collaboration with the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC).

Supported by the European Union under the COMESA RECAMP program, the workshop brought together 90 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from diverse sectors, equipping them to enhance their participation in regional supply chains through the use of digital tools.

At the core of the workshop was the Biznet portal, an innovative platform designed to connect distributors and suppliers across the COMESA region, promoting intra-regional trade and economic integration.

The three-day workshop provided participants with practical skills and insights, focusing on digital literacy,



e-commerce, marketing strategies, and the importance of regional market standards.

The workshop achieved significant milestones:

- **Onboarding SMEs to Biznet:** Over 85 SMEs from Zimbabwe joined the Biznet portal, opening opportunities to engage in regional trade and establish business linkages.
- **Improved Product Standards:** Practical evaluations helped participants understand the importance of quality, packaging, and market alignment, enhancing their competitiveness.
- **Increased Awareness:** Participants gained valuable knowledge of COMESA's SME initiatives, sparking interest in further development programs and resources.

The Biznet Awareness Training Workshop successfully empowered SMEs to embrace digital tools, fostering a stronger, more interconnected business environment within the COMESA region. By equipping SMEs with the knowledge and resources to navigate digital platforms, the workshop contributes to building a more competitive and integrated regional market.

With new skills, networks, and opportunities, participating SMEs are better positioned to expand their businesses and contribute to the growth of intra-regional trade. The CBC and its partners remain committed to supporting SMEs, ensuring continued progress toward economic integration and sustainable development in the COMESA region.

OCTOBER Bujumbura, Burundi

17th COMESA Business Forum: Connecting Regional Businesses



In partnership with the COMESA Secretariat and the Government of Burundi, the 17th COMESA Business Forum was successfully held in Bujumbura, Burundi, in October. This flagship event brought together and connected business leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders from the COMESA region and beyond, fostering regional integration and collaboration.

The forum attracted over 1,000 delegates, offering a vital platform for networking, knowledge-sharing, and business growth. A notable highlight was the three-day SME exhibition that ran alongside the forum, where about 100 small and medium enterprises showcased their innovations, products, and services. This provided a unique opportunity for SMEs to connect with potential partners and expand their market reach.

The event was graced by COMESA Secretary General, Her Excellency Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, and Burundi's Prime Minister, His Excellency Gervais Ndirakobuca, whose remarks underscored the importance of strengthening regional value chains and empowering the private sector to drive sustainable economic growth.

The forum was supported by the European Union's 11th European Development Fund through the COMESA Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP). Other partners included; Federation of German Industries (BDI), Burundi Development Agency, African Trade and Investment Development Insurance (ATIDI), Tunisia-Africa Business Council (TABC), and Afreximbank.

The success of this forum reaffirms COMESA's commitment to building a resilient and competitive business environment across the region, with SMEs playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of trade and development.

OCTOBER

Kampala, Uganda

CBC Strengthens Membership Engagement During Uganda Membership Drive



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) successfully concluded its Uganda Membership Drive, aimed at strengthening relations with existing members,

engaging new potential members, and raising awareness about CBC's services. The mission featured high-impact engagements with key stakeholders, including our national focal point, the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), Mukwano Industries, Roofings Company, Gudie Leisure Farm, and Kawumu Leather Industry.

Key highlights included:

- **Strategic Engagements:** CBC held meetings to understand member challenges, including issues around trade barriers, tariffs, and logistics, with the PSFU and companies such as Mukwano and Kawumu Leather highlighting the importance of advocacy and improved trade routes to facilitate smoother regional trade.

- **Promoting Digital Solutions:** CBC introduced its e-academy platform aimed at empowering SMEs and businesses with knowledge and skills on topics such as trade, market intelligence, business marketing, among others.
- **Building Partnerships:** Gudie Leisure Farm showcased a proposal to build capacity for youth in agribusiness, aligning with CBC's objectives of enhancing market access and socio-economic development within the COMESA region.

Exploring Value Addition: Kawumu Leather Industry presented its efforts in value addition for Uganda's leather sector, emphasising opportunities for boosting exports and reducing reliance on imports.

OCTOBER

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Trade Without Borders: Key Takeaways for COMESA's Private Sector from the Fourth NTBs Forum

From the 1st to the 4th of October, the city of Addis Ababa hosted the 4th COMESA NTBs Forum, which brought together participants from all 21 member states and underscored the indispensable role of the private sector in addressing one of the most pressing obstacles to trade: Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs).

NTBs, which include cumbersome customs procedures, additional taxes, and inconsistent standards, are silent yet formidable barriers that have long hindered the full realisation of COMESA's true trade potential. But as this year's forum demonstrated, the private sector holds the key to unlocking solutions.

The NTB Challenge: Why the Private Sector Must Act

For businesses across COMESA, NTBs are more than technical hurdles—they are lost opportunities, higher operational costs, and restricted market access. Data presented at the forum reveals that unresolved NTBs have lingered for as long as 14 years, eroding trade credibility and discouraging private sector participation in cross-border commerce.

Amid these challenges, tools such as the Tripartite SMS and online mechanisms for reporting NTBs are empowering businesses to actively identify and address barriers. Still, the adoption of these tools by the private sector remains low. Reported NTBs have declined drastically, with only two of the 16 outstanding NTBs being reported between January and September 2024.

Lessons from the Forum: Harnessing Private Sector Power

The forum spotlighted several actionable strategies for businesses to strengthen their role in NTB elimination:

- **Active participation of the private sector in National Monitoring Committees (NMCs):** Businesses must ensure their voices are heard in identifying and resolving trade barriers by actively engaging with NMCs.
- **Leveraging Reporting Tools:** Tools like the SMS and Online Mechanisms enable real-time reporting, which can lead to faster resolutions and smoother trade processes.
- **Continuous awareness campaigns and training sessions on these tools**
- **Collaboration with Regional Bodies:** The COMESA Business Council (CBC), the private sector organisation and NTB focal point for the region, was urged to deepen partnerships with businesses to foster collective action against NTBs.

Success Stories and Opportunities

Countries like Zambia are leading by example, with funding for NTB tools, producing awareness materials, and procuring equipment to facilitate smoother trade processes. Malawi's collaboration with its private sector has resulted in widespread sensitisation campaigns at border posts. These initiatives demonstrate the power of private sector-driven solutions.

A Call to Action

The 4th NTBs Forum delivered a clear message: the private sector is not just a stakeholder but a changemaker in the fight against NTBs. With the right tools, partnerships, and determination, businesses across COMESA can lead transformative change and unlock the region's vast trade potential.



DECEMBER Nairobi, Kenya



During the signing ceremony, BDI was represented by Mr. Matthias Wachter and CBC by the CEO, Mr. Teddy Soobramanien.

CBC-BDI Sign Phase II Project to Drive Regional Private Sector Growth

The CBC-BDI Phase II Project officially started marking a pivotal step in advancing private sector development across the COMESA region. This partnership, in collaboration with the Federation of German Industries (BDI), focuses on building stronger platforms for advocacy, enhancing technological innovation, and improving public relations capacity for the CBC.

Building on the success of Phase One, Phase Two will concentrate on three key results:

1. Strengthening Sector Working Groups (SWGs):
 CBC will focus on making SWGs dynamic platforms that translate member interests into effective policy demands. The project includes capacity building for SWGs, the development of position papers, and engaging members more actively in discussions to drive impactful policy recommendations.

2. Promoting Innovative Technologies:
 CBC aims to raise awareness of innovative and inclusive technologies that enhance productivity, digitalisation, and environmental sustainability. Through information campaigns, webinars, and partnerships with technology providers, the focus will be on solutions like smart farming, renewable energy, and climate monitoring.

3. Enhancing Public Relations and Advocacy:
 CBC will strengthen its public relations capacity to ensure sustained, professional outreach and advocacy.

DECEMBER Seychelles

AfCFTA Rules of Origin Training Workshop in Seychelles Targeting COMESA Francophone Countries



The COMESA Business Council (CBC), in collaboration with the Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and with support from the European Union Technical Assistance Facility (EU-TAF), successfully hosted a two-day training workshop on the Rules of Origin under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Held on 17-18 December 2024 in Mahé, Seychelles, the workshop brought together technical experts and private sector representatives from the nine French-speaking COMESA Member States: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, DRC, Mauritius, Madagascar, Rwanda, Seychelles, and Tunisia.

The workshop was a continuation of discussions initiated during the Tunis sensitization session in July this year, with a deeper focus on the practical application of Rules of Origin and strategies for private sector stakeholders to leverage AfCFTA opportunities.



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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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