

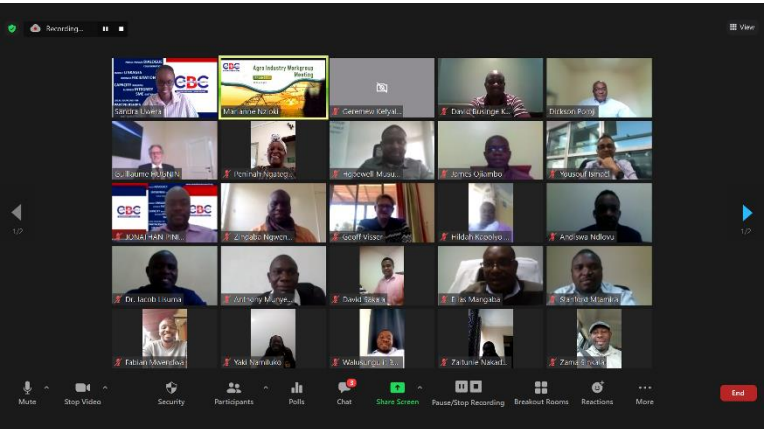
PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COMESA BUSINESS COUNCIL'S AGROINDUSTRY WORKGROUP REVIEWS IT'S 2020 ACTIVITIES AND AGREES ON THE WAY FORWARD FOR 2021



Ms. Sandra Uwera, CEO, CBC Mr. Guillaume Hugnin, Chairman of CBC's Agro-industry Workgroup



1st Meeting in 2021 of the CBC Agro-industry Workgroup

Lusaka Zambia, Thursday 16th July 2021: *“Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in COMESA. It provides livelihoods for about 80% of the region’s labour force, and accounts for about 65% of foreign exchange earnings in the region. In spite of this, agriculture accounts for a relatively modest 32% of COMESA’s GDP,”* said Ms. Sandra Uwera, Chief Executive Office of the [COMESA Business Council \(CBC\)](#), in her opening statement at the institution’s Agro-industry Workgroup Meeting.

CBC convened a meeting of the institution’s Agroindustry stakeholders on Wednesday, 14th July 2021, to discuss the progress made on recommendations put forward by the Workgroup in 2020, and to develop a roadmap for the activities of 2021, as per its mandate to advocate, promote linkages, growth and competitiveness of the sector within COMESA. The meeting was attended by various players in the agriculture sector, including dairy farmers, commercial grain farmers, tobacco leaf growers, and manufactures, from across the region.

In her opening statement, Ms. Uwera gave a brief background of the agriculture sector in COMESA and its pivotal role as a driver of economic growth in the region. She further highlighted the important role of women as a vital link within the chain of agriculture, industry and trade, noting that three quarters of the employed women in COMESA work within agriculture, and dominate as it pertains to high value products such as flowers, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Ms. Uwera recapped on the positions of industry put forward in 2020 for adoption by COMESA Member States, some of which included the development of an action plan to urgently prioritize SPS issues to address low intra-COMESA trade; acceleration and actualisation of the implementation of mutual recognition agreements for priority commodities in COMESA Member States; strengthening private sector’s participation in the implementation of SPS measures; and development of a regional regulation on anti-illicit trade to provide a cross-border framework for engagement and collaborative efforts for tackling counterfeit trade in seed.

Mr. Guillaume Hugnin, Managing Director at Panexport Co. Ltd.; Head of Group Exports at [Ecloxia](#); President of the [Mauritius Chamber of Commerce](#); and Chairman of the CBC Agro-industry Workgroup, in his opening statement

highlighted that the Workgroup had maintained strong pursuit of several key advocacy issues in support of the industry, particularly given adversities faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One issue of note progressed, was the development of a mutual recognition framework and local sourcing for partnership arrangement. “Continuous collaboration with public sector and also strengthening Public-Private Dialogue to address the emerging issues in the agriculture sector is crucial,” said Mr. Hugnin, as he called for consolidation of efforts in re-strategizing on how to further the Workgroup’s agenda.

CBC’s Business Policy Programs Manager, Mr. Dickson Poloji, who was the meeting’s moderator, gave a presentation on the progress made on CBC’s implementation of the Agroindustry Workgroup’s activities in 2020 and the first of 2021. He reiterated the need for collaboration stating, “as a way of facilitating trade in COMESA, we as the private sector need to work with Member States to develop a framework to facilitate implementation or enforcement of product standards which are being developed by ARSO.”

The meeting deliberated and agreed on the following issues:

- i. COMESA Secretariat to apply for observer status at the Meeting of Parties (MOP) to facilitate engagement.
- ii. Reiterated the need for COMESA Secretariat to develop Regional Anti-illicit Policy and implementation framework.
- iii. Sensitization of industry players on the need to establish track and trace system at national and/or regional level.
- iv. CBC to seek funds/technical assistance to undertake a study on the development of mutual recognition framework for pre-packaged food in COMESA region.
- v. CBC to establish a regional Beverages Association to strengthen regional industry coordination, supply chain partnerships and represent the industry’s position in engagements with the public sector.
- vi. Member States to strengthen national regulations and enforcement mechanism on curbing counterfeit seed trade. COMESA to develop a regional regulation on anti-illicit trade to provide a cross border framework for engagement and collaborative efforts for tackling counterfeit trade in seed.
- vii. Member States to put in place an electronic verification mechanism (such as barcoding systems) for the traceability of seeds to distinguish between authentic and counterfeit seed.
- viii. Food and Beverage sub workgroup, Seed sub workgroup and Tobacco sub workgroup to hold meetings this year to discuss specific issues pertaining to the workgroups.
- ix. Members to propose product standards for harmonisation at regional level by ARSO.
- x. Development of regional framework to facilitate implementation of product standard being development by ARSO.
- xi. CBC to review regulatory regime for plastic waste management for the COMESA member states to determine the impact on the businesses (examining the environment angle).
- xii. CBC to participate in the ongoing survey on the registration of pre-packaged food in member states.
- xiii. Formation of aquaculture sub workgroup of Agroindustry.

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About COMESA Business Council

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

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