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ALSO FEATURES

- CBC elects new board of directors.
- Boosting local enterprises through local sourcing for partnerships.
- Trailblazing women achievements in COMESA.

Building Regional, Going Global.

Promoting Inclusive Private Sector Participation in COMESA for Effective Implementation of the AfCFTA.

CBC Elects New Board of Directors



The COMESA Business Council (CBC) successfully ushered in a new Board of Directors for the 2024-2026 term during its 11th Annual General Meeting (AGM), held on April 30th in Lusaka, Zambia.

Mr. James Chimwaza, representing the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI), was elected as the new CBC Board President. Mr. Mucai Kunyiha of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) will serve as the 1st Vice President, Dr. Sherif El Gabaly from the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI) as the 2nd Vice President, and Mrs. Munkeni Kiekie Eliane from the Federation des Entreprises du Congo (FEC) as the 3rd Vice President.

Other members elected to the board 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).

In his acceptance speech, Mr. James Chimwaza indicated that there is abundant human capital within the COMESA region, particularly its youthful population, which is crucial in driving development initiatives.

Meanwhile, CBC immediate past board president Mr. Marday Venkatasamy stated that the council has recorded success and

growth in the past 5 years he served on the board and called on the new CBC leadership to continue supporting the new president.

The COMESA Secretary General, Her Excellency Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe also presented awards to Mr Venkatasamy and Dr Amanya Asfour for their contributions in the COMESA Business council as past Presidents.

The newly elected CBC Board President previously served as the CBC 2nd Vice President for the 2021–2023 tenure.



Mr Venkatasamy (3rd left) and Dr Asfour(2nd right) presented awards by the COMESA-SG

A Transformative Journey



Since time immemorial, human beings have been programmed to evolve, adapt, and transform themselves and their living environment through a continuous process of creation, invention, and destruction. With a new generation come new ideas, ways of doing things, technology, and culture. Many young people and entrepreneurs in our eastern and southern Africa region have embraced technologies in their business ventures; they use social media as a tool for promoting their products, and use various platforms to reach out to remote areas on the African continent. The CBC encourages and promotes new technological advancements that are progressive and inclusive.

Advancements, however, do not happen easily; barriers and adversaries of all types exist along the way. Those who will succeed against all odds will lead the way. Being an agent of change and working towards a transformational impact in what we do is hard.

First and foremost, one needs the financial, intellectual, and human resources to bring about these

changes. For a business entity wishing to preserve the environment, for example, this may mean investment in new technologies or forms of production. The most daunting challenge, however, is facing resistance to change, or our attitude or aptitude to change. Getting outside our comfort zone, looking at things with different lenses, and embracing new ways of working, new technologies, new ways of doing things, thinking outside the box, and shaking the box are practices that we should embrace to make progress and have a positive impact on our society.

At CBC, we have been bold enough to embrace a transformative journey. We are exploring the benefits of satellite technologies for Africa. At a time when climate change is changing our lives for the worse, this technology can help Africa beat this disastrous phenomenon. We are setting up an online retail payment platform for SMEs, women, and young entrepreneurs to enable these vulnerable groups of our society to transact beyond borders. An e-commerce platform is being developed. An e-academy is already operational to train our people in key areas such as digital transactions and trade.

Soon, we will launch our work-group on technologies to advocate for policies that promote innovation and encourage technological development. We are also conscious of our environment and the impact of climate change.

That is why we are increasingly

involved, along with our partners, in circular economy initiatives and will promote these initiatives among our members. Good governance and practices are key to success.

CBC successfully elected a new board of directors, paving the way for good corporate governance.

Currently, we are working towards implementing a regional anti-corruption code that will be available to promote good practices among our regional enterprises.

To succeed in our transformative journey, we need to be innovative in our thinking and actions. Things have changed so much; Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a reality, and the internet of things is playing an increasing role in our lives. Sticking to redundant principles or practices without an open mind to consider progress will hold us back and hamper progress.

CBC is excited to see the regional commitment to trading, including young people actively engaging in cross-border trading while embracing technological innovation to propel economic growth and create the environment they deserve. The region is moving. With encouragement and a conducive environment, we can do much better and succeed in our transformative journey. This current edition of Biznet tells some of the stories of this journey. Enjoy!

Mr Teddy Soobramanien
CBC-CEO

Cross-Border Trade Vital for COMESA Region SMEs

The COMESA Free Movement Protocol and the COMESA Visa Protocol are key components of the COMESA Economic Integration Agenda, which also includes the Free Trade Area. These initiatives are intended to improve cross-border trade, particularly for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) region.

For SMEs, the capacity to trade across borders is critical to their growth and success. The COMESA Free Movement Protocol and the COMESA Visa Protocol seek to eliminate barriers and expand market opportunities for local firms. These protocols enable SMEs to engage with clients not only locally but also throughout the COMESA area and beyond by permitting the free movement of people across borders.

Entrepreneurs and dealers in border towns like Nakonde (Tanzania-Zambia border) and Kasumbalesa (Zambia-Democratic Republic of Congo border) stand to greatly benefit. Instead of being limited to their immediate surroundings, these enterprises may now reach a larger consumer base, which improves their growth chances. Visa-free travel allowances offered by numerous COMESA countries, including Rwanda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, and Seychelles, increase cross-border mobility. This makes it easier for businesses to travel, discover new markets, and establish regional business relationships.



However, significant challenges remain in fully implementing these free movement protocols across all COMESA Countries. A recent workshop evaluated the progress made so far and the outstanding hurdles. While positive steps have been taken, more work is needed to tear down the persisting barriers to seamless cross-border trade and unlock the full potential of COMESA's economic community for SMEs.

For the SMEs that form the backbone of most COMESA economies, the ability to freely cross borders in pursuit of economic opportunities is absolutely pivotal.

Fully enacting policies that facilitate such cross-border trade must be a top priority to drive entrepreneurship, economic growth, and development across the region. By continuing to support and enhance these protocols, the COMESA region can create a more integrated and prosperous

economic community, benefiting SMEs and the broader regional economy.

Furthermore, these initiatives can significantly promote increased trade, tourism, and job creation within the region. By enhancing cross-border movements, we can foster economic growth and regional integration.

Discussions on the effective implementation of these measures have been ongoing. The COMESA Business Council, in collaboration with member states and various stakeholders, has been at the forefront of these efforts.

They are focusing on streamlining customs procedures, reducing tariffs, and improving transportation infrastructure to facilitate smoother and more efficient cross-border transactions.

Read more on page 6

Membership Spotlight

Celebrating Women Leadership Achievements in the COMESA Region

In the dynamic landscape of the COMESA Business Council, members continue to achieve remarkable milestones both nationally and regionally. Particularly Women within the region showcased exceptional leadership accomplishments. This is a testament to their unwavering commitment and dedication to their roles.

The Immediate past President of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) was honoured with a prestigious decoration from the Mauritian government, highlighting her outstanding service.

Meanwhile, the Malawi Confederation Chamber of Commerce (MCCCI) also scored by electing a female Chief Executive Officer. Both are symbolising a significant shift towards gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership roles within the region.

During this year's Mauritius Independence Day celebrations, (MCCI) Immediate past president, Mrs. Namita Jagarnath Hardowar, was decorated with an honour by the Mauritian government, receiving the title of Commander of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean.

Sharing the achievement, MCCI indicated that the honour and recognition by the government are an indication of her work and dedication to the business community.



**Mrs Daisy Vakarathiwe Kambalame-
MCCI CEO**

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) during their recent annual general meeting elected female board members, Mrs. Munkeni Kiekie Eliane from Federation Des Entreprises du Congo (Fec), as the 3rd Vice President, while Mrs. Hardowar was also elected CBC Board member.

Meanwhile, the Southern COMESA Region has also scored success as the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) appointed Daisy Vakarathiwe Kambalame as its new Chief Executive Officer this year.

These appointments and honours of women in key positions within the COMESA region are aligned with the 2024 International Women's Day theme, "Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress," reflecting the commitment to gender equality and women's



**Mrs Namita Jagarnath Hardowar-MCCI
Immediate past President**

empowerment in driving regional development.

Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) is an apex business association representing all sectors of the economy of Malawi. The chamber has been in the forefront of Malawi's private sector development efforts for over 100 years.

The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the oldest non-profit making institution representing the private sector in Mauritius. As the main voice of the Mauritian business community, it has always maintained close links with Government and increasingly contributed to the development process of the country.

Boosting Local Enterprises: Jescal Enterprise's Vision for Regional Market Expansion



Peanut butter production at Jescal factory

“Our wish is to be the main supplier of coffee and peanut butter in chain stores in Malawi and eventually across the region; thus, having such a project has increased my knowledge and skills needed to reach that capacity,” stated Felix Nkwazi, a participant in the recent CBC Local Sourcing for Partnership (LSP) training for Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Felix Nkwazi, representing Jescal Enterprise, an SME in Malawi, expressed his aspirations during the training, which aimed at enhancing local sourcing and market linkage with corporate businesses.

Jescal Enterprise, founded in 2014 in Lilongwe, specializes in producing peanut butter and coffee. The company empowers over 405 farmers by supplying seeds and purchasing their groundnuts, thereby promoting sustainable agriculture and quality product output.

Like many emerging businesses in the COMESA region, Jescal Enterprise is eager to expand its product supply beyond small local stores to a countrywide and regional scale. This ambition is being realized through the implementation of the Local Sourcing for Partnership project in selected COMESA countries.

Company director, Mrs. Lucy Mandala, highlighted the company's commitment to quality and local empowerment: *“We train the farmers on how to grow groundnuts; this allows us to have only quality products for our processing company. Since 2017, we have been supplying our products to local supermarkets; our peanut butter is in about 10 supermarkets so far.”*

Jescal Enterprise's reach is growing beyond Malawi, with export orders from South Africa, Japan, the United Kingdom, and, most recently, Zimbabwe. The training, themed “Roots to Market: Enhancing Local sourcing for small and medium

Agro-Processors,” marks the second initiative by the CBC to bring this valuable project to Malawi.

Funded by the Business ACP-EU, the LSP project aims to improve the business environment, support private sector growth, strengthen microfinance, and catalyse private investments. It began in February 2018 within the ACP-EU Joint Platform for Private Sector Support framework.

The Local Sourcing for Partnerships (LSP) project focuses on integrating SMEs into value chains within the COMESA region. SMEs are trained on Global Food Safety Management Systems, specifically the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standard, facilitating their inclusion in competitive supply chain networks of corporate companies and key regional value chains.

The project not only provides training on hazards, food handling, and safety measures but also provides an opportunity for local SMEs to connect with established businesses and potential buyers. This is done through a mini exhibition where they showcase their various products. The activity is a platform for corporate businesses to share tips for improvement on the packaging contents and establish business connections to ensure the local SMEs are part of the economic value chain.

Corporate businesses such as Chipiko Stores, SANA, and Panda Superstore attended the LSP training in Malawi, pledging support for local businesses by offering opportunities to purchase their products for their supermarkets.

Cross-Border Trade Vital for COMESA Region SMEs

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Moreover, CBC is working to create a more business-friendly environment by addressing non-tariff barriers and promoting harmonised regulations.

This will not only make it easier for businesses to operate across borders but also attract foreign direct investment, which is crucial for the region's economic development.

In addition to trade, these efforts are expected to boost tourism by making it easier for tourists to travel between countries within the region. Improved infrastructure and streamlined processes at border crossings can enhance the overall travel experience, encouraging more tourists to explore the diverse cultural and natural attractions the region has to offer.

The creation of new jobs is another significant benefit. As trade and tourism flourish, there will be an increased demand for various services and products, leading to the creation of employment opportunities across multiple sectors. This can help reduce unemployment rates and improve the standard of living for many individuals within the region.

Découvrez notre forfait d'adhésion à CBC

Le CBC est la principale organisation faîtière des entreprises des pays membres du COMESA, créée en tant qu'institution du secteur privé du COMESA.

Il représente les intérêts des milieux d'affaires et promeut activement la participation des entreprises à l'intégration régionale, à l'investissement et au commerce international en favorisant une augmentation des opportunités d'affaires et des actions de plaidoyer stratégique. Le CBC fournit des services sur mesure qui sont axés sur les intérêts des entreprises et des secteurs d'activité.



DÉCOUVREZ NOS FORMULES D'ADHÉSION

Membres principaux	Les membres honoraires / corporatifs	Membres associés	Entreprises émergentes
Il s'agit d'associations nationales d'entreprises du secteur privé représentant divers secteurs de l'économie nationale des États membres et d'autres sociétés.	Il s'agit de sociétés et d'autres groupes d'intérêt admis par l'Assemblée générale après dépôt d'une demande d'adhésion.	Il s'agit d'associations nationales d'entreprises connues, d'agences de promotion des investissements et des exportations, d'institutions d'appui au commerce. Cette catégorie comprend également les associations régionales du secteur privé.	Il s'agit d'entreprises en phase de démarrage ou de petites et moyennes entreprises.
La cotisation annuelle est de 2,000 dollars des États-Unis.	La cotisation annuelle pour cette catégorie est de 5 000 dollars des États-Unis.	La cotisation annuelle est de 2 500 dollars des États-Unis.	La cotisation annuelle pour cette catégorie est de 1 000 dollars des États-Unis.

A sustainable future through the circular economy

As the global community converges to catalyse the transition towards a circular economy, Africa stands poised to play a pivotal role in shaping sustainable solutions that address its unique challenges and harness its vast potential.

Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and emerging businesses in Africa are the backbone of the continent's economy, yet the majority are unaware of the crucial role they play in advancing the circular economy and the benefits it brings. By adopting the elimination strategy, SMEs can reduce unnecessary packaging, thereby cutting material costs and enhancing operational efficiency.

Dr. Henry Roman, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Regional Representative for Southern Africa, in his article published on March 7th, 2024, highlights the circular economy as a potential solution for recycling, waste management, product reuse, and natural system regeneration.

According to Dr. Roman in his article, to tackle plastic waste, an upstream mindset is essential, focusing on three key strategies: elimination, reuse, and material circulation. Elimination means designing out unnecessary packaging or avoiding it altogether. Reuse involves developing business models



Photo credit: [Kevin Dooley](#)

where packaging can be used multiple times. Material circulation entails redesigning packaging to ensure it is recyclable or compostable.

By supporting the reuse strategy, SMEs can develop innovative business models that extend product lifecycles, such as product leasing or refill programs. Additionally, by redesigning packaging to be more eco-friendly, SMEs can keep materials in circulation, reduce their environmental footprint, and align with global eco-friendly trends.

By focusing on sustainable practices, SMEs can improve their resilience against supply chain disruptions and comply more easily with environmental regulations. Implementing circular economy strategies also promotes local economic development and skill enhancement.

Furthermore, these sustainable practices attract investors, grants, and green financing

and green financing, providing SMEs with a competitive edge in the market. By embracing the circular economy,

African SMEs can drive sustainable growth and contribute significantly to a more regenerative and inclusive economic future.

A global dialogue on circular economy was held at the World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF) 2024 in Brussels this April, and it served as a powerful platform to amplify Africa's voice and showcase its leadership in driving innovative circular initiatives. By fostering cross-border collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and collective action, Africa can pave the way for a future where economic growth coexists harmoniously with environmental preservation, social equity, and resource stewardship.

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34th Malawi International Trade Fair: A Remarkable Success



President Dr Lazarus Chakwera (3rd right) touring exhibitions

By Orama Chipwanyanya

The 34th Malawi International Trade Fair, hosted in Blantyre, the country's economic zone, drew participants from various regions who showcased their products and forged business deals. This multi-sectoral event is a cornerstone of Malawi's trade landscape, offering a vital platform for domestic and international exhibitors to connect with potential clients, policymakers, and trade and investment partners.

President Lazarus Chakwera inaugurated the trade fair, emphasising the relevance of this year's theme, "Boosting Malawi Export Capacity Through Enhanced Production." The president highlighted the importance of addressing Malawi's trade imbalance, which is largely due to the country's dependency on imports.

He reaffirmed the government's dedication to enhancing agricultural productivity

through mega-farm initiatives and irrigation projects to mitigate the effects of climate change-induced disasters.

President Chakwera also encouraged the private sector to leverage government initiatives and policies, such as the Special Economic Zones Act and the One-Stop Border Post initiative, to tap into the myriad of trade opportunities available.

The Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) President, Wisely Phiri, supported the government's long-term strategies aimed at increasing the country's foreign exchange earnings. He emphasised that boosting exports is crucial for achieving the Malawi 2063 vision.

The seven-day event was lauded by exhibitors as a significant platform for business growth and brand visibility.

Joseph Chidwala, Business and Communications

Officer for Mzuzu Coffee Planters Coffee Planters Cooperative Union, praised the fair for facilitating productive interactions in an engaging environment.

"This year, we attracted potential customers and partners who were impressed by the superior quality of our products. We have created a database of prospects and expect to see improvements in our business segment soon," Chidwala remarked.

Palisha Ghambi from Synthesis Agriculture noted that the trade fair has been beneficial for their agri-based company. "Participating in the trade fair has helped us introduce various farming innovations to the market," Ghambi said, reflecting on the positive impact of the event on their business.

For over three decades, Malawi has hosted international trade fairs to bring together exhibitors from within and outside the country, facilitating experience sharing and market expansion.

This year's event, themed "Boosting Malawi's Export Capacity through Enhanced Production," attracted over 170 exhibitors, both locally and internationally, from countries like Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



**Mr Wisely Phiri
MCCCI President**

A sustainable future through the Circular Economy



Amb. Dr Mohamed Kadah (L) signing the Agreement with Acting Director for Africa, DG International Partnerships, Mr Christian Stausboll in Brussels, Belgium
Photo by COMESA Secretariat

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The continent's commitment to circularity not only holds the key to unlocking sustainable development but also serves as an inspiration for the rest of the world to embrace a more regenerative and inclusive economic paradigm.

The forum aimed to drive the implementation of circular solutions on the ground by highlighting innovative approaches guided by the latest scientific evidence. Other discussions revolved around partnership potential and strategies to advance circular initiatives in various sectors, particularly in Africa. Also underscored was the urgent need for collaborative action to

address global challenges such as climate change and resource depletion.

In driving the circular economy agenda in the COMESA region, the European Union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) signed an agreement to jointly implement the SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa (SWITCH-2-CE in ESA) programme.

According to the European Commission, the SWITCH-2-CE in ESA Programme aims to strengthen collaborative efforts among partners to

drive an inclusive transition to a circular economy in East and Southern Africa.

By focusing on promoting green and circular business models in packaging and plastic waste, as well as electronics and e-waste value chains, the programme seeks to mitigate climate change and foster sustainable development in the region by providing policy and regulatory frameworks, business-enabling projects, capacity building, and access to finance through grant facilities for SMEs.

CBC Pictorial



COMESA SG with current and former Board members during the 11th AGM



BDI partners during a tour of Trade Kings Bigtree factory



SMEs display their products during LSP Training in Kenya



CBC paid a courtesy call on CBC member Business Eswatini



CBC is the recognized Business Member Organization, established as a private sector institution of COMESA. CBC represents the interests of businesses sectors at a regional level. The services provided go beyond advocacy, to actively promote business participation in regional integration, investment and global trade. This is done by facilitating the growth of strong business synergies, the development of business opportunities, business alliances, legislative and strategic advocacy. We provide custom tailored services that are driven by both industry and enterprise interests.



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