

Three States ready to pilot the COMESA electronic Certificate of Origin



The Focal Point Persons from Eswatini, Malawi and Zambia with COMESA officials

Three COMESA Member States, Eswatini, Malawi, and Zambia, have successfully integrated and interfaced their national systems with the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) system. They are now poised to commence the first phase of piloting its implementation.

The COMESA e-CO is a vital component of the COMESA digital Free Trade Area (FTA) Action Plan, which includes e-Trade, e-Logistics, and e-Legislation. The development and implementation of the COMESA e-CO fall under e-Logistics, aimed at facilitating intra-regional trade.

This initiative will eventually replace the manual Certificate of Origin procedures currently in use by Member States. It comes with a web-based e-CO system accessible via web browsers, aligning with the COMESA Protocol on Rules of Origin and its implementation Guidelines. The COMESA Secretariat is overseeing the e-CO implementation through the

Divisions of Trade and Customs, and Information and Networking.

From 19 – 21 February 2024, e-CO national focal persons were in Lusaka, Zambia, to meet with the COMESA Project Implementation Team for joint testing of the system integration and exchange of e-CO through the Platform. This was a crucial step in preparing for the pilot phase of the e-CO.

During the meeting's opening, Dr. Christopher Onyango, Director of Trade and Customs at the COMESA Secretariat, highlighted key achievements in implementing the COMESA e-CO. These include the development and adoption by the Council of Ministers of the software life cycle, regulations for e-CO implementation, and amendments to the Protocol on Rules of Origin and its Appendixes. Additionally, the implementation Procedures Manual and e-CO User Guides have been prepared.

National situational assessments were conducted to review the readiness and needs of Member States. Further engagements are ongoing with Member States that have responded to the questionnaire and indicated their readiness. The Secretariat has also aided selected Member States, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Seychelles, in preparing their country-specific action plans to interface and pilot the COMESA e-CO system, as well as providing necessary training and support.

During the joint technical meeting, the three Member States provided national status reports on their preparations for piloting the e-CO and shared their experiences with other counterparts. The meeting also agreed on a joint piloting action plan and outlined constructive recommendations and specific actions to guide all in commencing the piloting of the COMESA e-CO before May 2024.