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The COMESA Social Charter and Initiatives on Social Policy in line with Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030

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Background to COMESA

• COMESA - largest REC grouping covering 19 African MS with a pop size of over 400 million.

• COMESA’s core mandates is on RI and mainly to facilitates Intra-Regional trade in these Member States.

• COMESA’s overall objective is to improve the livelihoods of the people in the region through deepening REI leading to economic growth and development.

• Essentially, COMESA seeks to achieve this through freer trade, supported by robust physical and soft infrastructure and increased investment in the key productive sectors.
• COMESA was initially established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area (PTA).
• The PTA was established to take advantage of a larger market size and ultimately to create an economic community.
• In order to fulfill this objective COMESA has defined its key milestones within its mandate as follows:
  • Free Trade Area - October 2000;
  • Customs Union - December 2008;
  • Common Market - 2014; and
  • Economic Community - 2025
COMESA’s Initiatives on Social Policy

• At the center of COMESA’s Regional Integration agenda, Social Development is key within the COMESA Region.

• This is based on the fact meaningful economic Development in the region cannot be achieved where the social aspects to development have not been addressed.
  • Indeed RI does not occur in a vacuum and therefore the need to address the soft issues that promote such!

• For COMESA this has called on a number of initiatives in response to such mainly;
  • Policy Harmonization
  • Programme Development anchored on the social aspects e.g the COMESA Youth Programme
COMESA’s Provisions on Social Policy as provided by the Treaty

• The COMESA Treaty has spelt out some provisions to this effect;

  i. Articles 154 and 155

- Articles 154 and 155 of the COMESA treaty makes provisions for the role of women in Development in RI processes

- It is this treaty provision that underpins the ongoing COMESA work on Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment

Through this provision, COMESA MS agree that “women make significant contributions towards the process of socio-economic transformation and sustainable growth and that it is impossible to implement effective programmes for rural transformation without the effective participation of women.”
COMESA’s Provisions on Social Policy as provided by the Treaty

ii. Article 110 on health

Under this article, member States agree to undertake concerted measures to co-operate in health matters. Specifically, Member States are to control pandemics or epidemics, communicable and vector borne diseases that might endanger the health and welfare of citizens of the common market.

iii. Article 143 on Social Charter

The article clearly states that “Member States shall adopt a Social Charter, programmes and regulations for better implementation of programmes in the social and cultural fields such as; employment and working conditions, labour laws, vocational training and the eradication of adult literacy in the region, among others.”
COMESA’s Social Policy Initiatives in line with Agenda 2063 and 2030

These treaty provisions provide a scope through which COMESA is implementing programmes on Social Development in line with the African Union Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030.
The COMESA Social Charter

• The COMESA Social Charter as a legal/Policy framework, is a fundamental building block on Social and Cultural issues within the COMESA Region

• It establishes major principles for the attainment of social justice and enhanced cooperation within the COMESA MS.

• The Charter was adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers during its meeting that was held in February 2014, alongside the 17th Summit of the COMESA Heads of State and Government in Kinshasa, DRC.

• To date, two COMESA MS have signed it namely, Mauritius and Malawi. Madagascar is to become the third country to signing it.
Key Objectives of the COMESA Social Charter

- The COMESA Social Charter mainly aims at the following:
  i. Promote the welfare of the people in the region
  ii. Improve on the quality of life
  iii. Accelerate economic growth
  iv. Achieve Social progress and cultural development and enable all individuals from the region to live in dignity and realize their full potential
Guiding Principles of the Charter

In this respect, MS shall be guided by the following principles in the implementation of the charter among several:

i. Ensure an overall balanced development of people in their economic and social policies and strategies

ii. Establish a people centered national framework for social development

iii. Promote good governance including participatory governance

iv. Build up a culture of cooperation and partnership including in the public and private spheres of activities
COMESA Social Charter Strategic Pillars

• The strategic pillars of the Charter covers the following 11 areas;
  1. Employment and Working Conditions
  2. Labour Laws
  3. Social Protection
  4. Human Resource Development and Youth Empowerment
  5. Wellbeing of the Child
  6. Freedom of Association
  7. Community Development
  8. Education Training and Skills Development
  9. Health Care
  10. Sustainable Development and Protection of the Environment
  11. Elimination of Harmful social and Cultural Practices.
The Following key intervention areas have since been rolled out with the aim of achieving some stated goals and objectives in the COMESA Social Charter:

1. The COMESA Youth Programme
2. The COMESA Health Programme
3. COMESA initiatives on gender and Agriculture

COMESA has put in place a robust reporting system for its MS on various initiatives in line with the goals and indicators of the Agenda 2063 and 2030.
Key messages

- It remains vital that COMESA MS gets to sign and adopt the charter – so far only three.
- Further more, full implementation of the charter can only be attained once the charter has been ratified by at least Eight COMESA MS
- As COMESA, we are calling on our partners and various regional bodies to support in our advocacy Initiatives to MS in order to have a speedy signing of the charter.
- So far COMESA has engaged with the following Ms and advocated for the Social signing, negotiation still ongoing:
  
  DRC, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Zambia and Ethiopia.
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