

Comesa pact II boosts Kenya's leather sector

The Common Market for East and Southern Africa's (COMESA) Programme for Building African Capacity for Trade (PACT II) has played a tremendous role in equipping necessary knowledge and skills to the Kenya's leather sector players through sharing experiences by other investors in the region and at the international arena.

By Dr. Mwinyihija M. and Onyango G. J

Joining the core team of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) is a milestone for the Kenya Leather Development Council (KLDC) since it is an opportunity for the organization to play an active role in critical activities that affect the leather sector within the region at the national and international platform.

This breakthrough follows a successfully held workshop in the country hailed as 'COMESA PACT II' that aimed at building capacities of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) and Technical Support Institutions (TSIs) for regional and International Leather Markets. The Kenyan leather sector has reaped tremendously from the programme first by having KLDC join the core team and secondly through business tours by Kenyan tanners which have provided exposures to the best leather production practices by successful countries in the region. Through buyers/sellers meetings conducted in India and Italy, Kenyan tanners got an opportunity to discuss business with buyers in these countries and the exact benefit in terms of accrued business contracts will be released soon after completion of the evaluation process by the secretariat and the PACT II team of COMESA/LLPI.

Challenges in the leather sector vary from one country to another. For instance, in Kenya, the sector encounters such impediments as inadequate micro-financing institutions and minimal value addition initiatives while others such as Ethiopia have continued to address the constraints successfully.

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Mr. Sindiso Ngwenya, the Secretary General for COMESA, however, is emphatic on the need for member countries to embrace value addition with utmost seriousness through development of small and medium size enterprises so as to promote inter-regional and international leather trade. He is thus optimistic that if this is adopted and other result oriented programmes put in place, tangible developments will be realized in the region and Africa at large. This will translate to employment creation, poverty reduction and rural development.

He further reiterates that with abundant raw material resource available in the region it is important to embark on structured but result oriented project design that will spur positive development. The importance of involving the private sector is also highly advocated for in order to drive the sector to greater heights. Intra countries trade is identified as one of the crucial areas for development of the sector as opposed to the current situation where most countries prefer to deal with overseas markets yet economies of scale could easily

be realizable within the region.

Despite the challenges experienced in the leather sector, it's worth noting that most countries in the COMESA region are doing well in value addition of leather. This is so especially in tanning of Nile perch in Uganda and sole manufacturing in Sudan. The Ethiopian leather industry is vibrant and countries have a lot to learn from them and emulate their strategies for upstream value addition initiatives. This should be directed towards stimulating and sustaining the leather industry in the country by venturing into the sale of leather products in the international markets.

All these gains are only possible through spirited initiatives such as COMESA PACT II programmes which apart from sharing experiences in the leather sub-sector, are also involved in decisive areas of marketing of leather and goods which could serve on the skills development and empowerment of SMEs key for achievement of success in the leather subsector in the COMESA region and beyond.