

Foreword

COMESA has acknowledged and recognised the need to mainstream gender in all its regional activities in order to ensure that both females and males equitably participate in and benefit from regional development. In this regard, COMESA will make deliberate efforts to correct and facilitate the removal of all existing impediments that hinder the effective participation of both women and men in the activities of the regional bloc. In order to realise this, the **7th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 2002 adopted the COMESA Gender Policy (CGP) and the Addis Ababa Declaration on Gender.**

In line with Articles 154 and 155 of the COMESA Treaty, and also in recognition of the fact that sustainable economic and social development of the region requires the effective participation of women, men and the youth, the COMESA Gender Policy advocates equal and full participation of women in all aspects of COMESA activities and other operations taking place in the region.

The comprehensive COMESA Gender Policy emphasises the principle of affirmative action across all spheres of COMESA policies, systems, structures, programmes and activities in order to redress existing gender imbalances. Integrating gender into the mainstream of the work of COMESA is therefore an important goal of COMESA's vision and strategy in the 21st Century.

COMESA will ensure that the guiding principles and macro policies of the region, including resource allocation, are gender responsive. Affirmative action will be employed to ensure that barriers that prevent women's effective participation in core COMESA activities such as trade and investment, infrastructure development, science and technology, and women-in-business programmes are addressed and removed. Affirmative action will also be applied to ensure that the policies, programmes, projects, Administrative procedures and practices of the COMESA Secretariat, COMESA institutions, COMESA structures and their Budgets are gender sensitive.

The policy will also facilitate the engendering of legislation in member states in order to promote women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, credit, technology and information. COMESA will, through multifaceted campaigns, promote awareness of the need to change harmful and negative cultural practices that hinder women's

effective participation in regional programmes and activities. It will also endeavour to mainstream cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, Poverty, Governance, Environment, Information Communication and Technology, drug abuse and others into all its policies, programmes, structures and operations.

The full implementation of the COMESA Gender Policy will significantly contribute to the overall attainment of COMESA's vision and strategy for the 21st Century. The effective and sustainable implementation of this policy depends on the commitment of all the States and governments, and that of all women, men and youth of the region. I therefore urge all stakeholders to fully implement this policy.

Ato Meles Zenawi

**President of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and
Chairperson of the COMESA Authority and 7th Summit**

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