

## Africa regional leather design studio launched

To address long standing design weaknesses and improve market entry of the region's leather and leather products in a sustainable manner, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Trade Competitiveness Section in partnership with COMESA-Leather and Leather Products Institute (COMESA/LLPI) have embarked on an ambitious project to establish a Regional Design Studio (RDS).



Michael Habumugisha of Musanze in his workshop. Source: COMESA

The launch of the project and the Training Workshop in Creative and Technical Design will be held at Mombasa Continent Resort, Mombasa, Kenya this week, 9-12 May, 2016.

The Regional Design Studio will address some of the design challenges facing the leather sector such as: lack of mechanism to enhance the development of designing capacity at regional level, a lack of database of existing designers at the regional level; inadequate institutionalised framework for supporting the designers and commercialisation of their work to enhance exports.

The regional design leather studio once established, will provide enterprises in the COMESA Region with the ability to use design strategically to open and transform new opportunities within a continually changing business landscape.

The partners are hopeful that ultimately the studio will boost design capacity in exports of leather products at the regional and global levels. A common platform of bridging the gap between top global players and designers in the leather sector will be attained through already established MoU's premier Institutions in Turkey, Italy, India, China and Korea.

### Competitiveness

It will also help create more inclusive economic growth and sustainable development, effective policy mechanisms for integration and participation in the global trading system, capacity building for improved market access, country's informed decisions for improving their trade competitiveness and industrialisation efforts.

The executive director for COMESA/LLPI; Prof Mwinyikione Mwinyihija stressed the importance of the Regional Design Studio by saying that the leather sector in eastern and southern Africa has great potential to deliver the much needed linkages into global value chains (GVC) and huge 'trickling down' effect of our rural and pastoral communities.

Currently, the region is the largest source of basic raw material. Studies show that linking into GVC at lower levels by relying on export of raw materials can be counterproductive as countries fail to explore on existing opportunities towards value

addition and thusly, realize gains in terms of growth, development, productivity and competitiveness.

The launch event will be followed by a design training workshop led by experts' leather designers of global repute and formation of a regional designer's platform for continued engagement of the RDS objectives.

The designers' training workshop will bring together more than 50 designers and other stakeholders representing national, regional and international partners in the leather sector from 11 Eastern and Southern Africa countries namely Swaziland, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Rwanda; COMSEC, COMESA/LLPI and a leading design firm from Canada.

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