

# COMESA members challenged on MDGs

Kigali, Tuesday. THE outgoing chairman of COMESA Council of Ministers yesterday called upon the regional bloc's 19 member states to mobilise every resource available to develop economy in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Also Ugandan minister of trade and industry, Daudi Migereko warned that the member states would hardly attain the MDGs unless new resources are mobilised which requires African countries put in place a number of complementary actions.

He made the remarks while officially opening the 19th meeting of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Council of Ministers.

The year 2005 marks the fifth anniversary of the Millennium Declaration, which is an international agenda for reducing poverty

and improving people's lives by 2015.

However, several reports, mostly generated by international agencies, seem to reach a consensus that Africa is the only continent that is not likely to meet the MDGs.

"This is indeed a pessimistic projection, which we must react to as policymaker," Migereko said, adding "we must take the necessary measures to correct this projected negative trend and image."

According to Migereko, COMESA's programme are in line with the objective of increasing economic growth rate to the level of 7 percent per year on average to meet the MDGs.

However, "I am aware that on average, in COMESA we have achieved about 4 percent, which is still far below the required target," the minister said.

Migereko suggested

COMESA members deepen domestic financial and banking sector reforms in order to enhance domestic resource mobilisation.

He also called on member states to improve business environment to encourage greater private sector investment form within and outside Africa.

"Africa's share of global foreign direct investment is only 1 percent and scope exists for attracting more inflows through implementation of appropriate policies," said the outgoing chairman.

COMESA will hold its 10th summit in Kigali, capital of Rwanda on June 2-3. Thirteen heads of state and government, have confirmed participation at the forthcoming summit.

Preceded by the meeting of the Council of Ministers, the two-day summit is expected to highlight issues

of the regional bloc such as trade liberalisation, customs cooperation, industry and energy, transport and communication and economic and social development.

The theme of the summit is "Deepening regional integration through customs union."

The summit will discuss the progress made by countries that have not joined the Free Trade Area and pending applications by countries that aspire to join COMESA.

COMESA is a major regional economic grouping in Africa with a combined population of 380 million and gross domestic product of 190 billion US dollars.

The regional bloc had planned to launch a customs union on its 10th anniversary last December, but it failed to take off due to fear of its adverse impact on some member countries. — Xinhua