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AfDB, COMESA seal \$8.6m deal
By NELLA MUKALENGE

THE Africa Development Bank (AfDB) has signed a US\$8.6 million grant protocol agreement to Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) for financing of the airspace integration project.

The airspace integration programme called Communications Navigation Surveillance/Air Traffic Management systems project (CNS/ATM) is one of the priority regional infrastructure projects under the tripartite for COMESA- Southern African Developing Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC).

COMESA Secretary General Sindiso Ngwenya and AfDB resident representative in Zambia Freddie Kwesiga signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organisations during the signing ceremony for the grant protocol agreement of the CNS/ATM project held at COMESA secretariat in Lusaka on February 24.

Mr Ngwenya said the project will provide an enabling legal framework for a unified airspace in the COMESA region.

He said the AfDB has sustained COMESA on public procurement and is funding various reform projects at a cost of US\$2.1million, the agriculture marketing promotion and regional integration programme, at US\$8.6 million.

"In addition to this, the bank has also funded various regional infrastructure projects in the airspace transport and energy sector in excess of US\$5 billion in the eastern and southern African region," he said.

Mr Ngwenya said the project's expected outcome will conclude the Public Procurement Reform Project arrangements to finance, build and operate the regional CNS/ATM infrastructure.

A project implementation unit (PIU) will be set up under the project implementation arrangement to provide daily executive management to the project.

Mr Ngwenya said COMESA is currently working with the bank to develop a regional integration agenda in a more structured and sustainable way, adding that delegates from the AfDB in Tunis will visit the secretariat next month to launch the COMESA airspace integration project.

And Dr Kwesiga said the bank is working with COMESA to enhance performance of its operations through building human and institutional capacity.

Capacity building initiatives have included procurement reforms and trade facilitation.

Dr Kwesiga said the 2010-2014 pipeline projects between COMESA and the bank stand at a cost of US\$1.6 billion.

He said the bank decided to support the airspace integration project as there was a need to assist the air transport industry cope with the growing volume of the air traffic worldwide.

"We want to improve the air traffic navigation safety, mainly through the adoption of modern technologies," he said.

Dr Kwesiga said AfDB will work closely with other co-operating partners within the framework of the medium term strategy to support COMESA, SADC, and the EAC.

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