IOC: Mauritius, Comoros, Madagascar and Seychelles receive COVID-19 materials

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IOC Secretariat mobilized EUR 4 M from the AFD for the provision of medical supplies and equipment to Mauritius, Comoros, Madagascar and Seychelles. The assistance also covered for the costs of chartered flights for the timely delivery of the assistance to the beneficiaries.

Mauritius benefited of EUR 746,883 worth of medical supplies since last year, including an ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machine for the treatment of serious cases. Additional assistance to Mauritius is in the pipeline such as the provision of a biosafety laboratory (EUR 350,000), reagents for COVID-19 testings (EUR 84,000), etc.

IORA Disaster Risk Management Experts met for the first time

The first meeting of the IORA Expert Group on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) was held virtually on 19 January 2021. The meeting focussed on finalizing the IORA Work Plan on DRM and the IORA Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), aimed at developing a speedy, coordinated and effective HADR strategy within the Indian Ocean Rim region.

IORA’s 7th Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) held virtually

The 7th Indian Ocean Dialogue was held from 2-3 February 2021 and aimed at building a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in the Indian Ocean Rim region. Professor D. Jhurry, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius, made a presentation on Inclusive Public Health and Sustainable Development in the IOR region.
GIZ has signed, on 6 January 2021, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that extends and expands the programme of cooperation between IORA and GIZ to 30 June 2022, increasing the total value of the programme to EUR 2.195 million. The focus of the renewed programme will continue to be on Maritime Safety and Security, Disaster Risk Management and Blue Economy, along with an additional emphasis on climate-change aspects.

**SADC Protocol on Industry: Mauritius hold consultations for ratification**

Mauritius signed the SADC Protocol on Industry in August 2019 and consultations are ongoing regarding the ratification of the Protocol. The Protocol aims at improving the policy environment for industrial development in the region and supports the implementation of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap.

**Mauritius benefits from SADC’s RVAA Programme**

A sum of USD 105,000 has been allocated to Mauritius by the SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (RVAA) Programme for the year 2020/2021. A 10-day Training Workshop on Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (VAA) for the Mauritius National Vulnerability Assessment Committee (NVAC) Members was held in January-February 2021. The training provided the necessary orientation for the Mauritius NVAC to decide on its primary vulnerability assessment and analysis approaches and to develop an informed plan for undertaking its first VAA under the SADC RVAA System.

**Mauritius receives equipment under SADC’s SARCIS-DR Project**

The SADC Climate Services Centre is implementing the Southern African Regional Climate Information Services for Disaster Resilience Development (SARCIS-DR) project funded by the EU with a view to strengthening capacity of national meteorological and hydrological services to generate and disseminate climate information. As part of the project, the Mauritius Meteorological Services has benefitted from a High-Performance Computing Hardware (worth USD 18,788) comprising a Server, UPS, Network Switch and Client Workstation. Mauritius also received three Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) to the tune of USD 26,346 under the SARCIS-DR project during the year.

**Mauritius becomes 10th COMESA Member State to launch 50MAWSP digital platform**

Mauritius launched its 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) digital platform on 11 February 2021, becoming the 10th COMESA Member State to launch the digital networking initiative which is aimed at facilitating a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs.
Foreign Affairs Minister, Hon. Alan Ganoo, spoke of more concrete, tangible and meaningful cooperation in the IOR region during the virtual celebrations of the 24th Anniversary of the IORA on 25 March 2021. He also called for the inclusion of Health as a new Priority Area of the IORA.

Mauritius benefits from the SADC-EU-Germany COVID-19 Response Project

As part of the SADC-EU-Germany “COVID-19-relevant Medical and Pharmaceutical Products” (CMPP) Project, Archemics Pty, a private local company has benefitted from funding assistance to the tune of €99,996.00 to produce sanitisers and disinfectants for supply to the region. The CMPP Project aims at increasing manufacturing capacities for COVID-19-relevant items in the region, including production of personal protective equipment, sanitisers and disinfectants, ventilators and related equipment, and pharmaceuticals vital for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. The CMPP Project intervention is a component of the overall project “Support towards Industrialization and the Productive Sectors in the SADC region (SIPS), which is managed and implemented by GIZ.

Mauritius encourages IORA Member States to become party to the IOC-driven MASE Agreements.
SADC Council: Hon. Ganoo asks SADC to support vaccines production in Mauritius

Participating virtually in the SADC Council of Ministers on 22 June 2021, Minister Alan Ganoo called upon SADC countries to express interest in the setting up of a biotechnology plant in Mauritius. Hon. Ganoo also advocated for a more equitable distribution of vaccines to Africa which has been allocated merely 1% of its vaccine needs.

Mauritius advocates for a Regional Sustainable Health Initiative at the 11th Bi-annual IORA CSO

Mauritius participated actively in the 11th meeting of the Bi-annual Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) of the IORA, held virtually on 15-16 June 2021. Among others, Mauritius pushed for an IORA Sustainable Health Initiative, a proposal elaborated by the University of Mauritius in collaboration with the Regional Integration Division which will allow IORA Member States to collaborate in the health sector, particularly with a view to swiftly respond to sudden disasters. The aim is to develop an IORA Regional Health Action Plan which provides for complementing the capacities of Member States in health diagnosis, treatment, care delivery and recovery.

COMESA develops new Medium Term Strategic Plan for 2021-2025

COMESA has come up with a new five-year Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) for 2021-2015, which will guide the implementation of COMESA projects and programmes. The new Plan will focus on Market Integration, Infrastructure/Connectivity, Gender and Social Integration taking into account the Island States priorities such as Blue Economy, Maritime Security and Maritime Connectivity. The new MTSP has been finalized in consultation with COMESA Member States and will be adopted at forthcoming COMESA Summit scheduled in November 2021.

IORA and UN Women promotes Women’s Economic Empowerment

IORA is collaborating with UN Women to strengthen women’s economic empowerment and to promote the Women’s Empowerment Principles in the region. The initiative is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In June 2021, the UN Women–IORA Report on “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Indian Ocean Rim: Progress and Challenges” was launched. Mauritius, together with Australia, co-chairs the IORA Working Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment.
COMESA launches Online Portal for Civil Society and Private Sector

COMESA, in collaboration with the Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union and Save the Children International, has launched, on 21 May 2021, an online platform for the CSO and Private Sector which will serve as an information sharing hub to promote collaboration and partnership in the implementation of regional peace and security programmes.

IORA re-prioritises Blue Economy activities due to the pandemic

The IORA Working Group on the Blue Economy (WGBE) held its second Meeting virtually on 12 April 2021. Member States discussed on the implementation of the WGBE Work Plan and on post-COVID strategies, including re-prioritisation of activities in this area of cooperation.

IOC-driven METISS Cable now operational

The MEltingpoT Indianoceanic Submarine System (METISS) cable became operational in March 2021, linking Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion to South Africa.

University of Mauritius Offers COMESA’s Master of Regional Integration programme

The University of Mauritius, in collaboration with COMESA, launched a new master programme in Regional Integration in April 2021. The course is being run online and offers practical skills and tools for policy development with a view to supporting the process of deepening Regional Integration in Africa. Under the EU TradeCom II Capacity Building Programme, 3 Mauritian Nationals are being awarded full scholarships ($ 3,417 per student) for the two-year programme.

MCCI launches Call for Bids for IORA project on ADR

The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) launched a Request for Proposals for a study on dispute resolution in the Indian Ocean region, as part of an IORA project which aims at setting up a collaborative platform for sharing of best practices, pooling of resources and implementing joint projects in the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), with the aim of facilitating trade & investment in the IORA Region. Following the call, an expert from India has been roped in for the study.

METISS is a consortium of six regional operators. The IOC Secretariat has facilitated this project, conducting studies, involving international experts, raising awareness, and making a strong plea for regional digital connectivity.
IOC, in collaboration with the EU and the OACP, launched, on 4 June 2021, a regional photo contest entitled “Islands facing climate change: challenges, impacts and solutions”. The competition is conducted within the scope of the regional component of the GCCA+ programme and aims at raising awareness of the effects of climate change in the islands, while also highlighting the local solutions implemented by communities, civil society or public actors. The deadline for participation in the contest is 31 August 2021.
The 33rd COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Taskforce meeting was held virtually on 8 June 2021. The meeting noted that the approval of harmonised tripartite guidelines will help attain a coordinated approach to the fight against the pandemic by providing a seamless flow of essential commodities such as food and medical supplies. During the meeting, SADC handed over the rotational Chairpersonship of the Tripartite Task Force to the EAC.

SADC Ministers of Employment and Labour met virtually

The SADC Ministers of Employment and Labour and Social Partners meeting, on 30 April 2021, reviewed implementation of COVID-19 measures by Member States so as to stabilise the economy and labour markets, and ensure safe and healthy working conditions, as well as strengthening global and regional solidarity. The meeting also considered the draft SADC Employment and Labour Policy Framework (2020–2030).
COMESA prepares a strong pathway for Industrialization

In May 2021, COMESA approved the implementation strategy of the regional local content policy framework and the management of the Special Economic Zones and Industrial Parks. These frameworks will enable the implementation of the COMESA Industrialization Strategy and Action, which was adopted by the Ministers in 2019, to guide the structural economic transformation of the region.

Mauritius submits 7 projects under SADC’s SNRL Programme

The SADC Strengthening National and Regional Linkages (SNRL) Programme, initially targeted to eight SADC Member States, has been extended to Mauritius. Co-funded by the European Union and Germany, the Programme is aimed at enhancing the capacity of SADC Member States’ structures to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan priorities at the national level. The total funds available under the programme is EUR 12 million and Mauritius has submitted seven projects for funding consideration. So far, funds have been allocated for the development of a national Aquaculture Strategy by the Competent Authority Seafood for Mauritius. Training will also be given to relevant stakeholders.

IORA and AFD signs EUR 100,000 Financing Agreement

IORA and France through l’Agence Française de Développement (AFD) signed a Financing Agreement in June 2021 to provide staffing and capacity building support to the IORA Secretariat to the tune of EUR 100,000. France’s support to the IORA is a key component of the project to “Strengthen the Capacities of IORA in Promoting the Blue Economy and Fisheries Management”, with a total value of 1 million euros over 3 years.

SADC deploys military forces to support Mozambique

SADC has decided to deploy troops to help Mozambique defeat Islamic insurgents in Cabo Delgado. The Extraordinary Council of Ministers on 28 June 2021 agreed to finance the military intervention which is part of the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security, recognized by the UN Security Council. A budget of US$12 million has been allocated for the deployment.

COMESA & SADC advances regional strategy for statistics development

COMESA has developed a new Regional Strategy for Development of Statistics (2021-2025) which is expected to run concurrently with the COMESA MTSP 2021-2025. SADC, on its part, has kick-started the development of a regional Protocol on Statistics.