ASCENT NEWS

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"Energy for All: ASCENT Delivers 39 million Connections so far"

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Foreword

HE. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe
Secretary General, COMESA

It is with great pleasure that I introduce Volume 1 of the ASCENT Newsletter— a timely publication that reflects COMESA's enduring mandate to advance regional integration through coordinated, market-driven development. At the heart of this mandate lies energy: a critical enabler of trade, industrialisation, and socio-economic transformation across Member States. Reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy systems are essential for connecting economies, facilitating cross-border investment, and unlocking the full potential of regional value chains.

The Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (**ASCENT**) Program represents a strategic vehicle through which COMESA is advancing this vision. Implemented in close partnership with the World Bank, and aligned with the broader Mission 300 initiative, ASCENT demonstrates the power of regional collaboration in addressing shared development challenges. This partnership reflects a strong commitment to mobilising resources, expertise, and innovation to accelerate energy access while reinforcing regional integration objectives.

COMESA views ASCENT not only as an energy program, but as a platform for deepening regional cooperation and policy harmonisation. By strengthening institutional capacity, aligning regulatory frameworks, and fostering a more enabling environment for private sector participation, ASCENT supports the development of integrated regional energy markets. These efforts are essential for enhancing energy security, promoting cross-border infrastructure, and ensuring that Member States benefit from economies of scale and shared investments.

Key interventions under ASCENT are designed to advance both national priorities and regional outcomes.

Importantly, ASCENT places people at the centre of regional integration. By expanding access to modern energy services, the program enhances livelihoods, supports enterprise development, and creates opportunities for women, youth, and underserved communities. In doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive and equitable regional economy, where the benefits of integration are broadly shared.

Through its partnership with the World Bank and collaboration with Member States and development partners, COMESA is leveraging ASCENT to bridge the gap between national energy strategies and regional integration goals. By catalysing investment, strengthening institutions, and promoting harmonised approaches, the program is helping to build a more connected, resilient, and sustainable energy landscape across the region.

COMESA remains committed to working with its partners to ensure that ASCENT delivers tangible and lasting impact. As we move forward, we are confident that this initiative will not only accelerate progress toward universal energy access, but also reinforce the foundations of regional integration, driving shared prosperity for all Member States.

Preface

Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah
Assistant Secretary General – Programmes

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the ASCENT Quarterly Newsletter for 2026. The ASCENT Program stands as a strategic platform for accelerating sustainable energy access, strengthening resilience, and driving inclusive growth across the COMESA region.

At its core, ASCENT is anchored in a set of well-defined pillars and operational components that collectively support the development of bankable energy projects, strengthen enabling environments, and scale up investment in sustainable energy systems. Central to this framework is the Regional Energy Access Accelerator Platform (REAAP), which serves as a coordinated hub for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and alignment of technical and policy efforts.

Through its **Project Preparation Facility,** ASCENT supports the advancement of high-quality energy projects from early-stage concepts to investment-ready opportunities. This includes targeted financing and technical assistance for feasibility studies, project structuring, and transaction preparation—ensuring that a strong pipeline of viable projects is developed to attract public and private investment.

The program's **Advisory Support component** provides tailored policy, regulatory, and institutional guidance aimed at strengthening the enabling environment for energy sector development. By enhancing regulatory frameworks, improving planning processes, and supporting institutional capacity building, ASCENT facilitates more efficient and coordinated sector development.

Complementing these efforts is a robust **Knowledge Exchange pillar**, which promotes peer learning, dissemination of best practices, and regional collaboration. This component enables stakeholders to share experiences, replicate successful models, and scale proven solutions across the region, thereby enhancing the overall impact of program interventions.

ASCENT also integrates **Digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems**, which play a critical role in improving transparency, tracking performance, and strengthening accountability. These systems support data-driven decision-making and are essential for demonstrating results, mobilising climate finance, and ensuring effective program implementation.

Together, these pillars are designed to operate in a complementary manner, which assists in bridging the gap between project concepts and large-scale deployment, strengthening policy and institutional frameworks, and facilitating the flow of knowledge and investment. Through this integrated approach, ASCENT is contributing to expanded energy access, increased private sector participation, and enhanced sustainability of energy systems.

By focusing on these core components, ASCENT reinforces its role as a structured, scalable, and results-oriented program—driving measurable progress toward sustainable energy access and long-term development outcomes across the COMESA region.

Editorial

Advancing Access to Sustainable and Clean Energy – Powering Development, Driving Mission 300

Access to sustainable and clean energy is more than a technical ambition—it is a moral and developmental imperative. Energy fuels progress, enabling education, healthcare, industry, and connectivity. Without it, communities remain locked in cycles of poverty and exclusion. With it, they gain the power to thrive.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) underscored the centrality of energy in achieving poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Today, as we advance toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the call remains urgent: universal energy access is the foundation upon which every other goal rests.

Clean energy solutions like solar, wind, hydro, and modern biomass are not only environmentally sound but also economically transformative, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and opening pathways for innovation and green jobs.

Within this vision, Mission 300 stands as a bold commitment: to empower 300 million Africans with sustainable energy access. This mission is not just about numbers, it is about lives changed, schools lit, clinics powered, and enterprises enabled. It is about ensuring that no community is left behind in the global energy transition.

The Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation Program - ASCENT's work is at the heart of this transformation. By convening governments, private sector actors, and development partners such as the World Bank, ASCENT is building bridges that accelerate investment, foster innovation, and amplify Africa's voice in the global energy discourse. Our initiatives from flagship Carbon Days to regional stakeholder dialogues like the ASCENT Week, are designed to translate ambition into measurable impact.

The time to act is now. The mission is clear. The impact will be lasting.

Daniel Banda
Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Expert – ASCENT Project

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Editorial Team:

Contributors:
Daniel Banda
Nawina Imwiko
Dr. Derrick Ndimbwa
Dr. Maria D. Phiri
Oswald Ndengede
Rejoice Mutasa
Benedict Tembo – Freelance Journalist

Editor(s):
Ahid Maeresera
Daniel Banda
Nawina Imwiko
Dr. Malama Chileshe

Artwork/Layout
Philip Kambwafwile

Photography
Daniel Banda
www.worldbank.org

COMESA urges Member States to harness full potential of $5bn ASCENT Power Initiative

By Benedict Tembo Freelance Writer

Dr. Dev Haman, Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance at COMESA

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Assistant Secretary for Administration and Finance Dr. Dev Haman has urged partner Member States to focus on five strategic priorities to realise the full potential of the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT).

Mooted in June last year, ASCENT is a US$5 billion initiative aimed at electrifying 100 million people across Eastern and Southern Africa by 2030.

During the opening ceremony of the ASCENT Week, Dr Haman said firstly, there was need to align Member States' energy policies and standards to attract investment and enable cross-border trade.
"Secondly, we need to invest in infrastructure development by expanding generation, transmission and distribution networks, especially in underserved areas. Thirdly, we need to engage the private sector by creating predictable, transparent environments for private capital to thrive," he said.

He also said there is need to build capacity by investing in technical, managerial and financial skills across institutions. "And finally, we shall put in place an inclusive Energy Access framework to ensure that the transition benefits all, especially women, youth and vulnerable populations," Mr Haman said. He underscored COMESA's commitment to the renewable transition which he said was unwavering.

"We see it not as an end, but as a means towards achieving our broader aspirations of economic growth, social equity, regional unity, and environmental stewardship. I have no doubt ASCENT will be productive and impactful," Dr Haman said.

He said the gathering at Ciela Resort was not only a symbol of commitment, but also a signal of collective purpose - a purpose rooted in the desire to build a resilient, interconnected and sustainable energy future for the Eastern and Southern African region.

"We meet at a critical juncture in our development journey. Globally, the energy sector is undergoing a seismic shift moving away from fossil fuels and toward clean, renewable and decentralised systems.
In COMESA, this transformation is not aspirational, it is essential," he said.

"Our industries face high energy costs, rural communities remain largely off grid and our economies are vulnerable to external shocks from volatile fuel prices to the intensifying impacts of climate change," he said. Yet, within these challenges lies opportunities.

"Most of the countries represented here are endowed with abundant renewable energy potential: solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal. The question is not whether we can harness these resources but how quickly, how equitably, and how sustainably we can do so," he said.

Speaking at the same event, COMESA Assistant Secretary for Programmes Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah said universal energy access targets are unlikely to be attained at the current pace, which is particularly challenging for low-income and rural communities living in developing countries.

"Yet the global transition to a renewable, decarbonised, decentralised and efficient energy system provides a sustainable solution to delivering energy to communities at the last mile," Dr Kadah stated.

He said policy and institutional reforms targeted at stronger governance and smarter energy policies can unlock investment and accelerate progress.

"As countries make that shift, energy needs, priorities and capacities of diverse gender and vulnerable groups and communities need to be integrated into the energy policies and strategies to ensure that our efforts reflect the differentiated and context-specific realities and needs of our region," Dr Kadah said.

He was happy to acknowledge that ASCENT was designed to meet the challenges associated with energy access by accelerating energy access through grid and off-grid solutions.

"We are here to facilitate the effective optimalization of regional platforms through dialogue and knowledge exchange, supporting Member States in preparing bankable projects, providing technical assistance and policy advisory services, mobilising the private sector, and mobilising development financing as well as ensuring that ASCENT interventions are inclusive, scalable, and sustainable," said Dr Kadah. And Government declared its full commitment to joining ASCENT.

During the official opening session, Zambia's Minister of Energy Makozo Chikote said Government believes that through regional collaboration, shared innovation and strategic investment, ASCENT can bridge the energy access gap, not just for Zambia, but for its neighbours in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, Namibia, Botswana and beyond.

Mr Chikote said ASCENT's three pillars - regional and national platforms, grid electrification, and scaling distributed renewables align seamlessly with Zambia's national energy strategy.

"We are particularly encouraged by the programme's emphasis on clean energy technologies. Zambia enjoys one of the highest solar irradiation levels in the region, averaging 5.5 kWh/m²/day. Yet, our installed solar capacity is under 400 MW. This is a missed opportunity we intend to correct. I believe that ASCENT offers the technical and financial scaffolding to scale this capacity exponentially," he said.

In a speech read for him by minister of Environment and Green Economy Mike Mposha, Mr Chikote said Zambia's economy has grown steadily over the past decade, driven by mining, agriculture, and manufacturing among other key sectors adding that the country has increased national electricity access from 34 percent in 2021 to 54 percent by 2023 while the rural access increased from eight percent to 34 percent during the same period.

He also urged the private sector to seize the opportunity ASCENT presents.

Thirty-Nine Million Electricity Connections as Carbon Finance Takes Center Stage

The momentum behind Africa's energy transformation continues to build, with the World Bank revealing that the ASCENT Programme has already connected over 39 million people to electricity from the targeted 300 million people in Sub Saharan Africa since its launch in June 2024. The update drawn from the programme's publicly available tracker, updated every six months was shared during the official opening of the ASCENT Carbon Days event in Nairobi on 10 February 2026.

Addressing delegates from across Eastern and Southern Africa, Mr Eric Fernstrom, the World Bank Group's Regional Practice Director for Infrastructure, described the milestone as a powerful demonstration of what coordinated investment, strong government leadership, and regional collaboration can achieve. The World Bank, he noted, is currently supporting progress through more than 150 energy projects spanning the full value chain.

"About a year after the launch of the ASCENT Programme, we are already at 39 million people connected," Fernstrom said. "You can follow the progress on our public tracker, which publishes new data every six months."

Mr Fernstrom commended the COMESA Secretariat and partners of the ASCENT Regional Knowledge Platform for convening key stakeholders in the carbon market space and fostering an environment where countries can exchange knowledge and build shared capacity for carbon market innovation.

A major focus of the Nairobi gathering was the region's growing opportunity to leverage carbon finance as a catalyst for expanding clean energy access. Mr Fernstrom emphasized that significant groundwork has already been laid to unlock this potential, particularly through ASCENT's efforts to strengthen digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (dMRV) systems that ensure the integrity of emission reduction credits.

He reiterated the alignment between ASCENT and Mission 300, the flagship initiative led by the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank, and other partners, which aims to connect 100 million people in Sub Saharan Africa to reliable and affordable electricity by 2030.

The meeting heard that if ASCENT countries successfully bring their projected emission reduction credits to market, they could collectively generate over one billion dollars in carbon finance.

Importantly, the Regional Practice Director clarified that carbon finance is not meant to serve as profit from individual projects—but rather as a renewable funding stream to expand more projects, scale faster, and reach underserved communities more effectively.

He said that with ASCENT Carbon Days now underway, the region stands at a pivotal moment—one where strong climate ambition, digital innovation, and collaborative action can redefine the future of clean energy access across Eastern and Southern Africa.

Mr Eric Fernstrom, World Bank Group's Regional Practice Director for Infrastructure

COMESA, World Bank Host ASCENT Carbon Days 2026

COMESA Secretariat through the ASCENT Programme conducted a successful Carbon Days event in Nairobi, Kenya, from 10 to 12 February 2026, marking an important milestone in the region's pursuit of accelerated sustainable and clean energy access. The gathering underscored the region's commitment to positioning itself at the forefront of carbon market innovation while advancing national and regional climate and energy goals.

Held under the theme "Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access while Harnessing the Transformative Potential of Carbon Markets," the event brought together Climate/Carbon, Energy and Digitalization Focal Points from the nine ASCENT countries—Burundi, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Madagascar. The objective was to fast track the expansion of modern, reliable, and clean energy systems through a coordinated approach to carbon market development.

The Carbon Days Event aimed to build a shared and updated understanding of how ongoing ASCENT Energy projects can generate high quality carbon credits. Discussions focused on operational priorities, the ASCENT Carbon project approval process, and emerging opportunities for marketing and selling carbon credits, including options for transactions, required procedures, and identification of potential carbon buyers.

Speaking during the opening session, Dr. Bernard Dzawanda, Director of Infrastructure and Logistics at the COMESA Secretariat—represented by ASCENT Project Coordinator Dr.

Participants to the ASCENT Carbon Days I Nairobi

Malama Chileshe reaffirmed that the ASCENT Carbon Program is designed to unlock carbon finance to accelerate energy access. This aligns with commitments made under each country's National Energy Compact toward achieving Mission 300.

"Carbon market development under ASCENT is not simply about financing, it is about creating a predictable and transparent framework that allows emission reductions from renewable energy and clean cooking technologies that will be recognized, monetized, and traded. This ensures that our region harnesses carbon finance as a cornerstone of sustainable energy access, while positioning Eastern and Southern Africa as a leader in global carbon market innovation," Dr. Dzawanda said.

He emphasized that carbon market development within ASCENT is not merely a financing pathway but a mechanism for creating predictable, transparent frameworks that ensure emission reductions from renewable energy and clean cooking. He noted that carbon credits, each representing one metric ton of CO reduced or removed, play a crucial role in the global climate response.

Officially opening the ASCENT Carbon Days, World Bank Regional Infrastructure Practice Director, Eric Fernstrom, urged country teams to use the platform as an opportunity to share lessons and strengthen understanding of how World Bank–supported energy access projects can generate carbon credits by accelerating implementation and deploying national digital Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (dMRV) systems linked to the regional

Cygnum Capital Appointed Manager of **COMESA/ASCENT's PPF**

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa has signed a two-year agreement with Cygnum Capital to serve as Manager of the USD 25 million demand-driven Project Preparation Facility (PPF). As Facility Manager, Cygnum Capital will oversee the design, operationalization, and administration of the PPF, working closely with COMESA, the World Bank, and regional partners to increase the number of projects prepared to bankability.

The signing which took place on 23rd february, 2026 marked the beginning of a partnership between COMESA and Cygnum which will soon usher in a digital platfrom for processing projects and eventually culminate into many projects being supported across the region.

The PPF is designed to support distributed renewable energy (DRE) and clean cooking projects, integrate environmental safeguards, gender equity, and social inclusion into project design. As well as bridge the gap between promising energy concepts and bankable projects ready for investment.

Over the two-year mandate, Cygnum Capital will establish a robust pipeline of renewable energy and clean cooking projects and provide technical assistance and financial structuring support to project developers. The PPF Manager shall also ensure projects meet international standards for sustainability and inclusivity as well as facilitate partnerships between governments, private investors, and development institutions.

Speaking in an interview, ASCENT Project Coordinator at the COMESA Secretariat, Dr. Malama Chileshe, emphasized the importance of the Facility:

"The Project Preparation Facility is a gamechanger for our region. Too often, promising energy projects fail to attract financing because they lack proper preparation. By bridging this gap, the PPF will unlock investment opportunities, accelerate clean energy deployment, and directly improve the lives of millions across Eastern and Southern Africa."

The Facility is expected to tackle several long-standing barriers including limited project bankability as many renewable energy initiatives stall at concept stage due to insufficient technical and financial preparation.

The PPF also aims to reduce high transaction costs that developers face during feasibility studies, legal structuring, and environmental assessments and will provide financial access by Small and medium-scale projects who often struggle to secure funding from commercial banks and investors.

On the other hand, the Facility shall reduce the social and environmental gaps during project implementation especially that projects sometimes overlook gender inclusion, community engagement, and sustainability safeguards.

Cygnum Capital Asset Management Ltd (CygCap) is an independent advisory firm and asset manager operating across frontier and emerging markets, with a core focus on Sub-Sahara Africa.

Dr. Malama Chileshe - ASCENT Project Cordinator

ASCENT Carbon digital MRV platform. "This week offers a valuable moment to consider how your country specific ASCENT projects can effectively leverage carbon finance to scale up energy access while advancing your national climate priorities," he said.

Mr Fernstrom further explained that ASCENT Carbon was established with a clear and ambitious purpose to make carbon financing work at scale for energy access.

In his welcoming remarks, Engineer Eric Kijuru highlighted Kenya's longstanding position as a regional leader in clean energy development, noting that over 75% of the population now has access to electricity, with more than 90% of grid power generated from renewable sources such as geothermal, wind, and solar.

Lighting Up Zambia's Future: Inside the Launch of the REAAP–ASCENT Clean Energy Transformation

On a warm December morning in Lusaka, the ballroom at Pamodzi Hotel hummed with anticipation. Government leaders, development partners, energy experts and community voices gathered for what many described as a defining moment in Zambia's clean energy journey, the official launch of the Accelerated Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Project.

Backed by the World Bank and implemented through COMESA, the ASCENT initiative promises to do more than extend power lines. It seeks to reshape Zambia's energy landscape, ensuring that clean, affordable electricity becomes a reality for Zambian household in rural communities.

Valued at USD 200 million, the ASCENT Project aims to connect over 369,000 households by 2030. But beneath the numbers lies a much deeper national struggle: a 51% electricity access rate, with a stark divide between urban access (80%) and rural access (33%). For millions, daily life remains in the dark—literally.

The Regional Energy Access Accelerator Platform (REAAP), anchored within ASCENT's mission, is designed to close Africa's energy access gap through targeted investments, policy reforms, and strengthened regional integration. By embedding REAAP into ASCENT, the initiative provides a collaborative hub for member states to share best practices, harmonize policies, and accelerate the rollout of distributed renewable energy and clean cooking solutions.

ASCENT's mission, nested within the REAAP framework, is to close that gap through targeted investments, policy reforms, and strengthened regional integration. As the energy demand continues to climb, ASCENT is poised to become one of Zambia's key levers in transitioning to a modern, green and inclusive energy system.

A Landmark Moment: Government Slashes Connection Fees by Over 90%

Officiating the launch, Minister of Energy Hon. Makoza Chikote captured national attention with a transformative announcement: ***"Under the ASCENT Zambia project, the cost of a standard on grid connection will be reduced from ZMW 4,846 to ZMW 300 for all rural communities."***

A reduction of over 90% - the single largest connection subsidy in Zambia's history

The minister emphasized that universal access requires collaborative effort, beyond government alone, and called on **ZESCO** and the **Rural Electrification Authority (REA)** to ensure that every community benefits. He also revealed that the 2026 application window for the subsidy opens on 22 December 2025, targeting 100,000 new connections in a single year—a bold acceleration under ASCENT.

"This initiative is not just about infrastructure; it's about transforming lives," he said, highlighting ASCENT's role in unlocking opportunities for households, entrepreneurs and young people.

COMESA: A Regional Vision for Shared Prosperity

Representing COMESA Assistant Secretary General Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, ASCENT Programme Coordinator Dr. Malama Chileshe underscored the project's wider regional implications.

"ASCENT is a flagship programme that demonstrates COMESA's commitment to sustainable development. While Zambia is the starting point, this project will extend benefits to neighbouring countries, fostering regional energy integration and resilience."

ASCENT Zambia Launch

Within the ASCENT framework, REAAP becomes a cornerstone for regional harmonization which is building a future where energy flows seamlessly across borders, powering economies and enhancing stability.

World Bank: Clean Energy as a Catalyst for Development

World Bank Country Manager Dr. Achim Fock reiterated the institution's strong backing for Zambia's sustainable energy ambitions. He positioned electricity access as the foundation for thriving communities.

"Reliable and affordable electricity does more than power lights—it supports small businesses, boosts modern agriculture, strengthens health systems and transforms education."

He also noted the World Bank and African Development Bank's continental commitment through the Mission 300 initiative, which seeks to connect 300 million Africans to electricity by 2030.

"We are proud to support Zambia in closing its energy gap. Access to clean energy is fundamental to improving living standards and achieving climate goals."

A Renewable Future Within Reach

With Zambia's energy demand steadily rising, the ASCENT Project represents a timely and strategic investment. It aligns national ambitions with regional goals under REAAP, all while promoting a shift away from fossil fuels toward a resilient, green economy.

The partnership of COMESA, the Government of Zambia, the World Bank and local utilities signals a collective commitment to build an energy future where no Zambian is left in the dark.

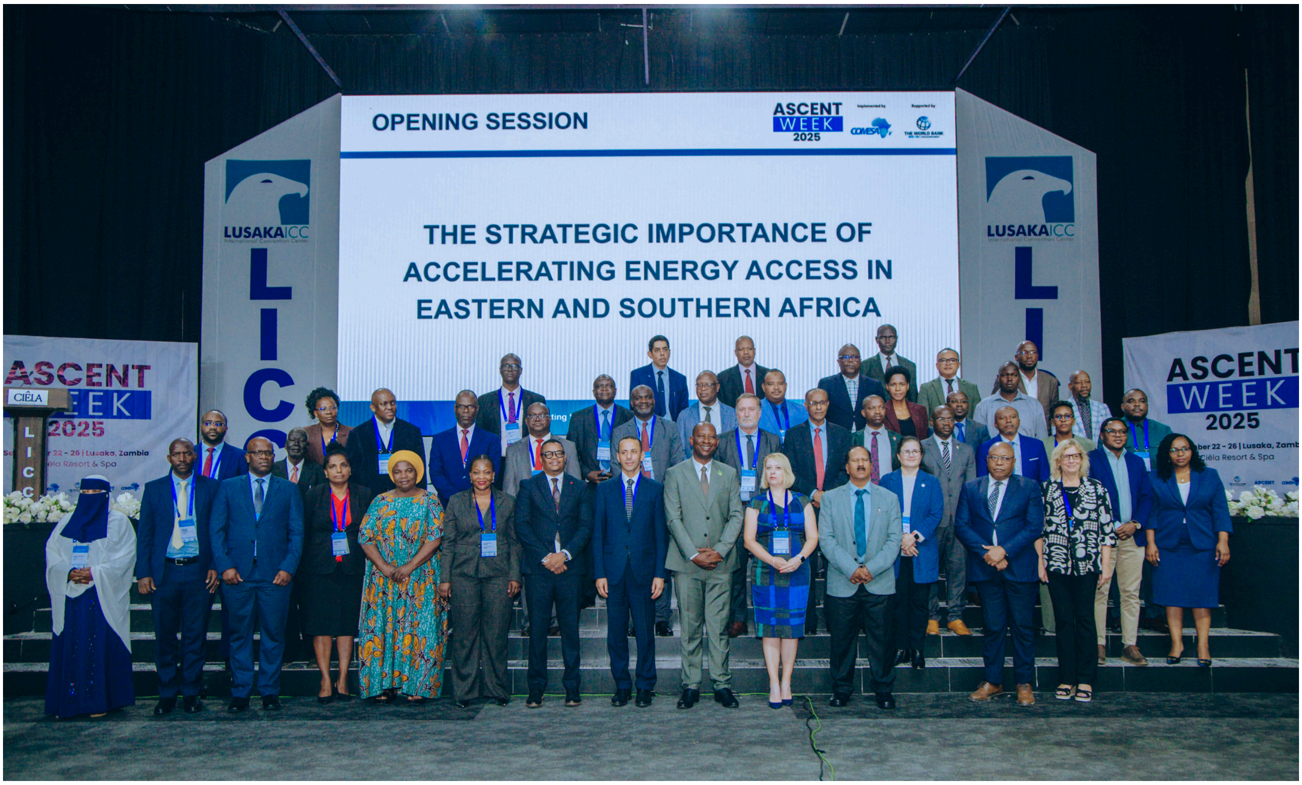
As the event concluded, one thing was clear: ASCENT is not merely a project—it is a promise.

A promise of opportunity.

A promise of equity.

A promise of a cleaner, brighter and more connected Zambia.

ASCENT Week 2025 Ignites a New Era for Regional Energy Transformation



ASCENT Week 2025 Group Photo

Over 400 high-level stakeholders from the energy sector, including representatives from the public and private sectors, regional organizations, and the international community, gathered in Lusaka for the inaugural Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT Week) from 22-26 September 2025. The event aimed to reshape the energy landscape across Eastern and Southern Africa, focusing on expanding sustainable and clean energy access.

Hon. Makoza Chikote - Zambia's Minister of Energy

Organized by the COMESA Secretariat in partnership with the World Bank, ASCENT Week addressed energy access for over 100 million Africans. The event marked

Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah_COMESA Assistant Secretary for Programmes

Ms. Yadviga Semikolenova, World Bank Energy Practice Manager for Eastern and Southern Africa

a crucial step in the region's pursuit of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

The ASCENT Programme is a multi-billion-dollar initiative designed to accelerate energy access through innovative solutions, digital technology and regional cooperation. With an initial investment of $5 billion and plans to mobilize an additional $10 billion from development partners and the private sector, ASCENT aims to electrify homes, power industries and unlock new economic opportunities across more than 20 countries.

Central to the programme is COMESA's $50 million Regional Acceleration Platform, which provides technical assistance, digital monitoring and knowledge exchange to participating nations. Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, COMESA's Assistant Secretary General for Programmes emphasized the significance of ASCENT Week, stating, "It is not just about energy access—it's about unlocking opportunity, empowering communities and building resilient economies." He highlighted COMESA's commitment through the Regional Energy Access Acceleration Platform (REAAP), which supports Member States with expertise and tools to achieve tangible results.

Dr. Dev Haman, Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance, called on Member States to prioritize policy harmonization, infrastructure development and private sector engagement. "Aligning energy policies and standards will attract investment and facilitate cross-border trade," he explained. He also stressed the importance of expanding generation, transmission and distribution networks, especially in underserved regions.

"It is not just about energy access—it's about unlocking opportunity, empowering communities and building resilient economies."

The week featured workshops, policy dialogues and interactive sessions aimed at sharing best practices, accelerating impact, ad planning the next phases of ASCENT's implementation. Participants included government officials, energy ministries, rural electrification agencies, utilities, regulators and project teams involved in ASCENT.

Zambia's Minister of Energy, Hon. Makoza Chikote, highlighted the country's leadership role in regional energy development. Represented by Hon. Mike Mposha, Minister of Green Economy and Environment, he affirmed Zambia's commitment to scaling up access, modernizing infrastructure and ensuring reliable, affordable energy for all Zambians. "Hosting ASCENT Week showcases our dedication to regional progress," he said.

The World Bank also underscored the importance of collaboration. Ms. Yadviga Semikolenova, World Bank Energy Practice Manager for Eastern and Southern Africa, noted, "The ASCENT Program signifies a new era of partnership and innovation. Working through regional platforms like COMESA allows us to scale solutions faster and ensure no community is left behind."

ASCENT Week 2025 is guided by five key objectives: raising awareness of the program's implementation, exploring ways to accelerate results, sharing successful practices, supporting national efforts, and defining the program's future steps. The event has set a clear path toward transforming energy access across the region, fostering regional cooperation and achieving sustainable development goals.

Linking Digital Transformation to ASCENT's Energy Access Agenda

The COMESA Secretariat has reaffirmed that digital transformation is no longer optional but a necessity for sustainable development, economic growth, and social inclusion, an approach that strongly complements the objectives of the Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Programme.

Speaking at the official opening of the 2nd Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting for the Inclusive Digitalization for Eastern and Southern Africa (IDEA) Project, Assistant Secretary General – Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, emphasized that IDEA offers a collaborative platform for countries to overcome policy barriers and accelerate innovation in digital access. This digital push is closely aligned with ASCENT's vision of leveraging technology-driven solutions to expand clean energy access and improve service delivery across Member States.

Dr. Kadah highlighted significant progress since the IDEA Project's launch in April 2025, including efforts to expand affordable, high-quality broadband connectivity, develop secure and interoperable digital platforms for regional integration, and promote high-impact digital applications across key economic and social sectors. These advancements are critical enablers of ASCENT's implementation, particularly in strengthening digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (dMRV) systems, enhancing data-driven decision-making, and enabling real-time tracking of energy access progress across the region.

"IDEA represents a transformative regional effort aimed at expanding affordable, high-quality broadband connectivity; strengthening safe and interoperable digital platforms; and supporting high-impact digital applications across priority economic and social sectors, which will in turn positively benefit our citizens," he stated. This transformation directly supports ASCENT's broader mandate to accelerate electrification through innovation, regional coordination, and the integration of digital tools into energy planning and delivery.

Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah

The Assistant Secretary General underscored that digital transformation is now an essential driver of sustainable development and regional integration—principles that are also at the core of ASCENT. By improving digital infrastructure and services, Member States are better positioned to implement scalable clean energy solutions, attract private investment, and enhance regional energy cooperation through platforms such as the Regional Energy Access Accelerator Platform (REAAP).

"Digital transformation is not merely an option but a necessity for sustainable development, economic growth, and social inclusion," he said, reaffirming COMESA's commitment to harnessing digital innovation as a catalyst for both energy access and broader socio-economic transformation.

The PSC reviewed the 2025 Progress Report, assessed key achievements and lessons learned, and approved the 2026 Annual Work Plan and Budget. It also adopted the Terms of Reference for the Technical Working Group and clarified COMESA's role in supporting implementation aligned with regional priorities. These governance and coordination mechanisms mirror ASCENT's structured, multi-stakeholder approach to delivering impactful, scalable interventions across the energy sector. Dr. Kadah commended Member States, national Project Implementation Units, the IDEA Project Coordination Unit, and regional partners for their commitment, while expressing appreciation to the World Bank for its continued technical and financial support—support that also underpins ASCENT's implementation across Eastern and Southern Africa.

He urged participants to uphold collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity, noting that decisions made will shape the region's digital and energy future for years to come. The meeting concluded with a clear roadmap for 2026 and renewed commitment toward building a more connected, digitally empowered, and energy-secure Eastern and Southern Africa, where digital transformation and clean energy access advance hand in hand under initiatives such as ASCENT.

COMESA and World Bank Champion Digital MRV for Regional Energy Transformation

Mr. Ahid Maeresera, Technical Manager for ASCENT

The COMESA, in partnership with the World Bank, convened a high-level virtual webinar on Digital Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (dMRV) under the ASCENT Program. The event, hosted on the Prospects platform, marked an important step toward strengthening regional capacity for data-driven energy access planning and climate resilience.

Sponsored by the World Bank through the ASCENT Project, the webinar which took place on 12th November 2025, attracted over 60 Monitoring & Evaluation experts and program managers from across the region, particularly those who missed earlier ASCENT training or required updates.

The webinar focused on practical skills, including navigating and interpreting the ASCENT dashboard, managing data ingestion workflows, and applying MRV for policy evaluation. Key expected outcomes included strengthening stakeholder capacity to use digital tools for monitoring and planning, improving coordination and transparency across regional energy programs and supporting climate-aligned electrification strategies through robust data analytics.

Opening the webinar, Mr. Ahid Maeresera, Programme Manager for ASCENT at COMESA Secretariat, underscored the strategic importance of digital solutions adding that the dMRV platform stands as a cornerstone for regional energy transformation, ensuring that every household connected contributes to a greener, more inclusive future.

Mr Maeresera hinted that at the heart of this transformation is the ASCENT Regional dMRV Platform, hosted on Prospects which provides standardized, interactive dashboards that enable including real-time tracking of implementation at national and regional levels, benchmarking performance across countries and delivery models and alignment of progress with COMESA's regional energy and climate objectives.

He added that by integrating these capabilities, the platform empowers Member States to make evidence-based decisions, optimize resource allocation, and enhance accountability in the energy access ecosystem.

"ASCENT is driving progress towards ambitious energy access targets, connecting millions of households through diverse delivery models. To achieve this, we need transparent, real-time systems for tracking and decision-making," Mr Maeresera said.

The Eastern and Southern Africa face urgent energy access challenges, with millions of households still lacking reliable electricity. The ASCENT Program, coordinated by COMESA, is spearheading efforts to accelerate electrification across 21 Member States, leveraging diverse delivery models and partnerships. However, the scale and complexity of these initiatives demand transparent, real-time systems to track progress and inform policy decisions.

For Member States, adopting dMRV is more than a technical upgrade but a strategic enabler for achieving universal energy access, meeting climate commitments, and fostering sustainable development. On the other hand, by harmonizing data systems and reporting standards, the region can accelerate progress toward SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and regional climate resilience targets.

"Climate finance is not just about numbers—it's about resilience, opportunity, and transfor-mation,"

Eritrean Minister of Land, Water and Environment, Hon. Tesfai Ghebreselassie with ASCENT Project Coordinator Dr. Malama Chileshe joined by Dr. Derick Ndimbwa, Carbon Finance Expert, and Ms. Ireen Simonga, Administrative Assistant and Mr. Kibrom Weldegebriel, Acting Director General in the Ministry

Eritrea Steps into the Climate Finance Spotlight with COMESA ASCENT

In the heart of Asmara, against the backdrop of the National Consultation Workshop on ASCENT GREEN, Eritrea took a decisive step toward shaping its climate future. On December 5th, 2025, the country's Minister of Land, Water and Environment, Hon. Tesfai Ghebreselassie, welcomed a delegation from the COMESA ASCENT Project led by Dr. Malama Chileshe, Project Coordinator. The meeting was more than a courtesy call—it was a signal of Eritrea's readiness to embrace innovative climate finance solutions and align with regional ambitions for sustainable energy access.

"Eritrea is ready to work hand in hand with regional partners to advance the green agenda." — Hon. Tesfai Ghebreselassie

The ASCENT team, including Dr. Derick Ndimbwa, Carbon Finance Expert, and Ms. Ireen Simonga, Administrative Assistant, joined forces with Eritrean officials, among them Mr. Kibrom Weldegebriel, Acting Director General in the Ministry.

Together, they explored how the Green Climate Fund (GCF)—through a proposal jointly advanced by COMESA and the World Bank—could unlock new opportunities. Discussions spanned results-based financing, risk mitigation, private sector participation, and carbon credit mechanisms, painting a picture of how climate finance can be harnessed to power renewable energy projects, boost efficiency, and protect vulnerable communities.

"Climate finance is not just about numbers—it's about resilience, opportunity, and transformation," Dr. Chileshe said.

For Eritrea, the engagement was more than technical—it was symbolic. Minister Ghebreselassie reaffirmed the nation's commitment to collaborate with COMESA and development partners, underscoring a vision of resilience and green growth. His remarks echoed a broader regional momentum toward climate-smart development, where partnerships and innovative financing are seen as the keys to unlocking sustainable futures.

The ASCENT GREEN program, as part of COMESA's broader climate strategy, is designed to weave climate action into the fabric of regional development. By ensuring member states gain access to innovative financing solutions, ASCENT is not only accelerating energy access but also reshaping the narrative of climate resilience in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Eritrea's engagement marks a fundamental moment, one where ambition meets opportunity, and where regional collaboration could light the path to a low-carbon, sustainable future.

"ASCENT GREEN is about turning ambition into action—making climate goals achievable for all member states," Stated Dr. Derick Ndimbwa.

COMESA and World Bank Host Webinar on Carbon Markets

On 8 December 2025, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the World Bank convened a high-level webinar under the theme "Fundamentals of International Carbon Markets and Emerging Trends." The session brought together more than 70 delegates from ASCENT Project Implementation Units across participating countries, as part of the World Bank's Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Carbon Program.

The event aimed to strengthen the capacity of project implementation units and key stakeholders to effectively engage in international carbon markets.

Delivering the keynote address, COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, highlighted ASCENT's innovative approach to leveraging carbon markets and emphasized that by monetizing emission reductions from renewable energy and clean cooking technologies, countries can unlock new revenue streams, attract investment, and secure a stronger role in the global transition to a low-carbon future.

"Today's webinar is designed to build the capacity of project implementation units and stakeholders to engage effectively in these markets. Over the next ninety minutes, you will gain practical insights into how carbon projects are designed, validated and verified, understand the distinction between compliance and voluntary markets and explore emerging global trends that will shape opportunities for our region," Dr. Dzawanda noted. He was represented by ASCENT Gender Expert Dr. Maria Phiri. He encouraged participants to engage actively, share experiences and draw on the expertise of facilitators to ensure ASCENT delivers not only energy access, but also climate resilience and financial innovation for communities.

Approved in November 2023, ASCENT is a bold and transformative initiative designed to close the persistent energy access gap across more than 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Through ASCENT, COMESA aims to Provide electricity access to 100 million people and deliver clean cooking solutions to 20 million households.

COMESA's ASCENT Programme
Champions Integrity in Carbon Markets

As the global community intensifies efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the need for credible and transparent carbon markets has never been greater. This message was strongly echoed on 29 January 2026, when the Accelerating Sustainable & Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) programme under COMESA hosted a high level webinar on International Carbon Standards and their Role in Shaping Global Climate Action.

The webinar held in collaboration with the World Bank and the Global Carbon Council brought together over 60 government representatives, technical experts, and project implementers from ASCENT wave one countries.

The webinar covered practical insights on elaboration of New Carbons Standards for energy access, highlighted steps on how to help generate high quality carbon credits and demystified new carbon standards on energy access and clarified its components. The session also provided an update on the timeline on the implementation of Carbon standard and its link to Digital MRV tools.

In his keynote remarks, ASCENT Project Coordinator, Dr. Malama Chileshe, underscored the central role of internationally recognized carbon standards in ensuring environmental integrity and unlocking climate finance for Africa.

"Our strategic outcome is clear," Dr. Chileshe stated. "By mastering international carbon standards, ASCENT countries will be better positioned to leverage carbon markets, accelerate clean energy deployment, and contribute meaningfully to global climate objectives."

Dr. Chileshe emphasized that as the world accelerates its shift toward a low carbon future, internationally recognized carbon standards remain essential for ensuring credibility and building trust in carbon markets.

"Whether under compliance frameworks such as the Paris Agreement Article 6 mechanisms, or voluntary initiatives like the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and the Gold Standard, these frameworks ensure that emission reductions are real, measurable, and verifiable."

According to Dr. Chileshe, the transparency and integrity embedded in these standards are essential for attracting sustainable investment and guaranteeing that climate finance delivers genuine impact especially for developing regions such as Eastern and Southern Africa. He highlighted that for COMESA Member States, adopting and applying international carbon standards goes far beyond compliance.

"For our region, understanding and applying these standards is not just a technical exercise. It is a strategic imperative," he said.

Aligning national and regional energy projects with global methodologies, he noted, positions African countries to access global carbon finance with confidence, strengthen investor trust in renewable energy and clean cooking initiatives as well as ensuring environmental integrity while advancing national climate commitments.

"Such alignment is especially critical as African countries seek to scale up sustainable energy solutions and leverage carbon markets as engines for development."
In closing, Dr. Chileshe called on practitioners and policymakers to seize the opportunity to shape the future of carbon finance in Africa.

"I encourage each of you to engage actively, share your experiences, and take full advantage of the expertise of our facilitators," he urged. "Together, we can ensure that our region not only participates in carbon markets but also helps shape their evolution toward greater integrity and inclusivity."

World Bank Energy and Carbon expert Martina Bosi highlighted the development of a new carbon standard for energy access, which aims to enhance transparency and credibility in carbon markets. She underscored the importance of strong foundational knowledge on carbon standards, noting that clear policies and aligned practices are critical for credible carbon market activities under the ASCENT project.

Ms. Bosi reiterated the importance of developing a solid understanding of carbon standards, particularly the underlying concepts, key terminologies, and relevant policy frameworks during the implementation of the ASCENT project.

She emphasized that this foundational knowledge is essential for ensuring alignment with international best practices, supporting credible carbon market activities, and enabling all team members to engage effectively with partners and stakeholders throughout the project cycle.

"Our strategic outcome is clear," Dr. Chileshe stated.

"Policies, both national and international play a central role in how the ASCENT project is designed, executed, and assessed," Martina Said.

The ASCENT programme continues to champion sustainable energy transformation across the COMESA region, with carbon market readiness emerging as a central pillar in the journey toward a climate resilient future.

COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051
Lusaka, Zambia

+260 211 229 725

www.comesa.int
https://reaap.comesa.int

ascentproject@comesa.int

facebook.com/ComesaSecretariat/

@comesa_HQ

Comesasecretariat

@comesasecretariat5989