

VIRTUAL SESSION REPORT

Unlocking Opportunities for African Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA

A Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue
8th February 2021



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Executive Summary

The African Continental Free Trade Area AfCFTA is a powerful vehicle for empowering women entrepreneurs as significant actors in boosting intra-African trade. By reducing the costs of trade through a reduction in trade restrictions under the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA and its various Protocols, women entrepreneurs can move up the value chain to higher-value sectors, that include marketing, processing, distribution, as well as Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and other industrial processes. Further, ensuring that African women play an instrumental role in promoting what Africa produces and sells through **Made in Africa** and **Buy in Africa** will boost intra-African trade, while empowering women, their families, communities and societies. This approach accelerates poverty reduction goals set out in AU Agenda 2063: the 'Africa we Want' and UN Agenda 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, leveraging opportunities in the AfCFTA for women entrepreneurs will require utilising provisions in AfCFTA Annex on Standards and Phytosanitary Measures to address market access constraints. Women entrepreneurs need skills development and capacity building in technical standards requirements such as certification, including *inter alia* Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), branding, labelling and packaging to harness new export opportunities through the AfCFTA. To unlock the innovation and excellence of African women entrepreneurs, it requires African Governments' and policymakers', private sector and development partners' support to entrepreneurs through capacity building so they can leverage technology and use e-commerce to expand their access to markets and join value chains. Capacity building must be combined with digital skills training, specialised technical assistance, as well as support for increased access to corporate supply chains, markets, financing partnerships and e-commerce platforms.

Policymakers and implementers of the AfCFTA at national, regional and continental levels should establish mechanisms and strategies for the effective participation of women in cross-border trade, value chains and public procurement. This requires responding to women's priority needs by ensuring women's access to information, opportunities, and services. Indeed, a multi-pronged strategy through gender mainstreaming in AfCFTA National Strategies can help to identify gender-based trade constraints that tend to disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs, as well as practical and targeted interventions that support entrepreneurs to leverage new trade and economic opportunities in the AfCFTA.

Empowering young African women entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA requires supporting their equal participation in national policy processes. Accordingly, AfCFTA State Parties should ensure the meaningful representation of women-led organisations and Business Associations in AfCFTA National Implementation Committees, Trade Facilitation Committees, and other national AfCFTA processes. Further, through critical resources and tools like the non-tariff barriers (NTBs) Reporting, Monitoring and Eliminating Mechanism facilitation of cross border trade for traders, especially women traders in the context of the AfCFTA will be efficient. Notably, not all government regulations or procedures that are costly to a trader are considered an NTB. However, to effectively support the traders, the platform is designed to facilitate identification of an NTB by allowing users to simply give details regarding the difficulty they are facing with the expectation of government institutions responding timely to resolve them.

Throughout the dialogue, various concrete recommendations on how to advance women economic empowerment were suggested. These include:

Gender and AfCTFA

- There is a need to focus on specific provisions of the Agreement and see them through a gender lens.
- Sensitize and ensure the equal participation of women in AfCTFA national coordinating and oversight structures
- Close the gender-gap in access to finance.
- Develop of gender training manuals and guidelines on small scale trade
- Promote and implement gender-responsive trade facilitation (including digital trade facilitation)

Harness the Power of Multi-stakeholder Approach

- Importance of an ecosystem of partners, including the private sector, civil society and development partners that must come together as part of a ‘business *unusual*’ approach that brings and integrates solutions to help accelerate the impact of women’s economic and enterprise development interventions.

Strengthen National and Regional policies

- Crowding women voices, sensitizing and ensuring their participation in the national committees through women led organizations, women cooperatives and cross border trade associations is critical to supporting their business growth.
- Continuously review trade policies and national budgets allocations to ensure they are responding to addressing and achieving better gender parity in enterprise ownership and growth.
- Lobby policy makers, government and private sector players to draft policies to strengthen the current National policies addressing, testing, certification, conformity, labelling of products, land ownership and equal rights to own and rent property hence help to eliminate constraints of property ownership and access to collateral as well as harmonizing standards across countries.
- Strengthen trade measures that safeguards standards (e.g., regarding environment, safety etc.) licensing and certifications and transitional periods on tariff progression.

Promote Cross border trade through the RECs and Business Councils

- Facilitate best case studies and experiences on eliminating trade barriers in order to increase participation of women in trade.
- Support border infrastructure development including markets, storage facilities, childcare facilities, lighting effective participation of women cross border traders.
- Effective implementation of simplified trade regime i.e., simplify customs administration and systems under the Customs Cooperation Annex to help streamline procedures for trade benefiting many informal cross border traders.
- Small Scale Trade Facilitation Initiatives e.g., capacity building for women small scale cross border traders and boarder officials, other service providers.
- Promotion of Local Sourcing of Products (Affirmative Procurement).

Dedicated Investment in capacity and skills development and finance for women entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA

- Put more capital in the hands of women to scale up their businesses and take advantage of the new market opportunities in the AfCFTA more especially post COVID-19.
- Continuous capacity development for women-led Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) on market access requirements, including technical standards requirements such as certification, branding, labelling and packaging.
- Developing Market Access guides for women-led SMEs under the AfCFTA.
- AfCFTA programs needs to explore Innovative lending approaches for young women not based on land ownership and offer an alternative opportunity to increase women's access to capital.
- Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA, empowering women in the export sector.
- Profiling women and youth SMEs in Global Value Chains.
- Target demand driven products and services and to help women entrepreneurs break into new export markets.
- Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement.
- Support trade associations and networks and share trade related information on the NTBS to increase awareness and unlock more markets for women to trade.
- Facilitate information and Networking Platforms for Women Entrepreneurs.
- Promote "buy made in Africa" and gender sensitive and affirmative action in public procurement to ensure inclusion of women.
- Support ICT Skills development and empower women's participation in E-commerce and digital trade solutions.
- Ensure universal access to affordable internet and energy.
- Sensitize and train women entrepreneurs on the available digital resources and tools such as the NTBs Mechanisms accessed through tradebarriers.africa and the online marketplace platforms such as www.women4intraafricantrade.com;

Support women to raise awareness and advocate for their rights and dignity as growth-oriented business owners

- Support business networks and business associations to train on women's rights and empower them to negotiate for support and time for the businesses at domestic level.
- Run campaigns to educate on the value of women running prosperous businesses to help reduce social-cultural barriers and optimize women's business and trade potential.

Background

Trading under the largest free trade area commenced on 1st January 2021 after 53 African Union Members signed the new era of optimism and opportunity for Trade across Africa, The Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The agreement provides an opportunity to boost trade among African countries while accelerating the economic empowerment of women. However, to increase the gains from its implementations, an inclusive approach is required that leaves no one behind including all players and partners especially post the COVID-19 pandemic. There are numerous opportunities provided by provisions of the agreements, though African governments are expected to be the key drivers of the spirit of the agreement with their respective National policies and strategies. However, in order to advance women's full participation in the AfCFTA implementation, more so post COVID-19, the National policies ought to be gender-responsive and have the contribution of women. With this understanding the Africa Union Commission-Department of Trade and Industry (AUC-DTI) in collaboration with UN Women, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Center for Accelerated Women Economic Empowerment (CAWEE) convened a high-level policy dialogue webinar themed: **Unlocking Opportunities for Young Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA: A Multi-stakeholder Dialogue.**

In the discussions that took place during this policy dialogue, it was emphasized that a multi-stakeholder approach is key to the implementation of the AfCFTA with special focus to strengthening the national and regional policies to support gender equality objectives. Keen attention was placed on the critical intervention proposals from the experience and learning of the various studies and contribution of young women in attendance to inform the formulation of National gender-responsive policies. Understanding the important role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in driving the AfCFTA, the high-level dialogue took note of the key learning emerging from the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) that can be scaled up to advance gender equality objectives and women's economic empowerment as part of the inclusive AfCFTA implementation. The objective of this high-level dialogue was to provide a platform for sharing key learnings and experiences from the RECs and Women Business Associations, deliberation on the policy and legal framework, mobilize for support and commitment by stakeholders towards young women's local and regional business innovation and entrepreneurial initiatives as part of the inclusive AfCFTA implementation. Therefore, this report summarizes the deliberations and key presentations from various speakers during the dialogue.

Session 1 - Opening Remarks

Women's Entrepreneurship and Trade in Africa during COVID-19. Mr Hussein Hassan, Director of African Union Commission Department of Trade and Industry (AUC- DTI)

The AfCFTA Agreement if implemented appropriately, will expand enterprise and investment on the continent. It will lift millions out of poverty and contribute to the socio-economic development of Africa. It provides an opportunity for African countries to use untapped social capital to better advantage in order to grow their economies as it has been estimated that gender inequality costs African countries about USD 96 billion (6% of GDP) per year.¹ This implies that gender equality is not only the right thing for African countries to practice but it is also the smart thing to do to ensure inclusive growth of African economies. One of the general objectives of the AfCFTA commits to *"promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties."* Thus, ensuring that gender equality is promoted in all AfCFTA processes is at the heart of the agreement. In this way the AfCFTA is a vehicle for women's economic empowerment on the continent.

¹ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

To underline this commitment to women's empowerment in the context of the AfCFTA, the leadership of the African Union, the 13th AU Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government in December 2020 decided that a Protocol on Women and Young People Trade is to be developed as a legally binding instrument under the AfCFTA.

There is a belief that this Protocol, would fully acknowledge the “powerful untapped economic force” that African women represent, as well as address the peculiar trade constraints challenging women on a continuous basis, such as limited access to finance, to technology, to appropriate trade or business intelligence, limited knowledge of relevant market openings, etc. Such constraints undermine the continent's economic development and inclusive and sustainable development. Women on the continent play an important role in intraregional trade activities, either through formal trade or through informal and small-scale activities, and women who have relevant access to appropriate technology, to finance, and business information, tend to make better decisions designed to build and grow their businesses.

On the other hand, women entrepreneurs and traders must also be proactive to seize business opportunities where they present themselves, even in non-traditional industries and sectors of the economy. The AfCFTA as one of the Agenda 2063 flagship projects thus provides a significant opportunity for women, giving them a head start in increasing their economic empowerment. To identify these business opportunities, the DTI teamed up with UN Women to produce a Study on the Opportunities in the AfCFTA for Women Entrepreneurs. The study launched in July 2019, outlines some specific actions that can be taken at national and regional levels to enable women entrepreneurs to fully participate in the AfCFTA.² This valuable document continues to be a useful resource and the recommendations and findings can be used together with relevant AfCFTA National Strategies to ensure that women entrepreneurs will be given the fullest support to fully participate and reap the benefits they deserve in the 'Africa we Want'. The DTI is committed to continuing the engagement with our partners in this endeavour, including in dialogue, further research and appropriate policy action.

Dr. Tapiwa Uchizi on behalf of Ms. Victoria Maloka, Ag Director of African Union Commission Women, Gender, Development Directorate (AUC- WGDD)

The AfCFTA is seen as a catalyst for young women following the Declaration of years 2020 to 2030 as the new Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion.³ In the Declaration, African leaders recommitted to scale up actions for the progressive gender inclusion towards sustainable development at the national, regional and continental levels. The exponential potential on the continent will not be realized in a vacuum but through purposed gender sensitive economic policies, a sound business environment and political commitment focused on gender mainstreaming in AfCFTA National Strategies.

The aspect of financial inclusion will ensure women, who are commonly excluded from the formal financial sector either because of their income level and volatility, location, type of activity, or level of financial literacy, benefit from strengthened financial services and capacity building. This will be especially useful for young women living in rural areas and urban-informal settlements, to gain access to technology and to use it to increase productivity in all industrious sectors and benefit from tailor-made financial products such as the use of mobile money applications as a tool for expanding access to banking and finance that respond to the need for formal and reliable means to save, access and borrow money. Correlated, the African Union Fund for African Women (FAW) is being converted into

² https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field_office_africa/attachments/publications/2019/opportunities_for_women_entrepreneurs_in_the_context_of_the_african_continental_free_trade_area_afcf.pdf?la=en&vs=5102

³ <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200615/new-decade-womens-financial-and-economic-inclusion-why-scaling-actions>

a Trust Fund for African Women (TFAW) and it will be part of the concrete solutions that will be made available for young women to realize economic justice and financial inclusion.

In doing this, the efforts will also be aligned to the African Union strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) and the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, which push the inclusion of young women in Africa's development agenda. These and several other related African Union instruments, recognize that that gender equality is a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development and presents a platform to various opportunities to entrepreneurship.

Ms Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa

Both the *Preamble* and General Objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement recognize the importance of gender equality. Such high-level continental development frameworks present greater opportunities for accelerating progress in the implementation of gender equality commitments. The AfCFTA Agreement can boost wealth creation channels for growing Small & Medium Enterprises, especially women-owned businesses, unlocking the potential of African women traders within the continent to trade amongst themselves. However, the Member States need to also pave opportunities for women traders in giving them access to credit and enhancing their technical knowledge, so that they compete in regional markets since the effective implementation of AfCFTA essentially depends on how signatory Member States formalize.

This dialogue provides an important platform where ideas are discussed on concrete strategies to boost women's entrepreneurship through the African Continental Free Trade Area. Because, as a 'youthful continent', accelerating youth entrepreneurship and particularly that of young women is an essential step for the realization of the sustainable development, integration, peace and governance goals in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

Evidence shows that across Africa, women face many barriers to achieving their full potential and that of their businesses. This ranges from restrictive cultural practices and discriminatory laws to highly segmented labour markets. They carry out the majority of agricultural activities but benefit little because of bottle necks in trading processes. Interestingly, women in Africa are more likely than men to be entrepreneurs, making up 58 % the continent's self-employed population⁴. However, studies show that women entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa continue to earn lower profits than men (34 % less on average) owning a third of all businesses and in some countries represent up to 70% of employees.⁵

While Africa has the highest rate of female entrepreneurial activity in the world, most female-led enterprises are informal or micro with little prospects for growth. In general, women-led businesses are under-valued in the national GDP of African economies. Moreover, women informal cross border traders (ICBT) address vital issues of livelihoods such as food and income security, yet they are neglected by mainstream trade policies and institutions, thus undermining the profitability and visibility of their activities. Even more however, young women are less likely to take up entrepreneurial roles in part due to discriminatory norms and practices. In Africa, young women particularly face a double burden. Not only are they discriminated against because of their sex, but also due to their age. However, gaps related to policy conduciveness as well as access to ICT, entrepreneurial and soft skills remain key barriers. Therefore, empowering women entrepreneurs is a smart economics. Given that

⁴ [https://ideas4development.org/en/ffemale-entrepreneurship-key-ingredient-africa-growth/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20women%20in%20Africa,34%20%25%20less%20on%20average\).](https://ideas4development.org/en/ffemale-entrepreneurship-key-ingredient-africa-growth/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20women%20in%20Africa,34%20%25%20less%20on%20average).)

⁵ <https://ideas4development.org/en/ffemale-entrepreneurship-key-ingredient-africa-growth/>

African is the world leader in women business owners, unlocking their potential can make a huge contribution to the continent's growth and prosperity. Thus, we need to level the playing field for women's businesses, so we can help their businesses and African economies grow.

Promoting young women's economic empowerment and skills development is a key pillar in UN Women's Youth and Gender Equality Strategy. The strategy guides its interventions and collaborations at all levels globally. For example, in 2016, UN Women launched a "Global Coalition of Young Women Entrepreneurs" to promote young women's innovation and entrepreneurship. The following year, 2017 through its multi-partnership initiative UN Women a virtual skill (open web platform) school to support women and girls to benefit from learning path that can equip them in 21st century life and soft skills including digital skills. Further, UN Women and SAP, the world's largest provider of enterprise application software, did collaborate to accelerate industry-wide change and remove the barriers to the advancement of women and girls in innovation, technology and entrepreneurship. While in Africa, since 2005, UN Women has been working on women including young women in ICTB, among others, in the promotion of a favourable tax regime, promote women's graduation in the formal sector for better access to market opportunities such as trade fairs, skills building, and trade related services and the provision of entrepreneurial, negotiation and advocacy skills. Most recently UN Women in Africa published a study titled "Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in the Context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)"⁶ which offers the most current evidence on the state of women's entrepreneurship with clear recommendations for accelerating the GEWE agenda in the AfCFTA. Thus, the discussion today will be informed by the main findings of this study. These and many other initiatives show UN Women's commitments to put at the center of the discussions young women's role, contribution and priorities so that they are not left behind.

In conclusion, the key strategic priorities for gender and youth responsive implementation of the AfCFTA provides the need for Member States to ensure GEWE is mainstreamed in their national AfCFTA implementation strategies, institutional arrangements and processes. Secondly, equal representation of young women in all aspects of the African Continental Free Trade Area including monitoring and evaluation, the technical committees that will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement. Third, Gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex is key to analyzing the gender impact of trade policy, and subsequently to strengthen policies so that they advance equal economic empowerment of women and men. Lastly, The Africa demographic dividend agenda requires multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the development and implementation of interventions to leverage existing complementarities, the available resources, and to strengthen coordinated action. Therefore, assure participants of UN Women's commitment to collaborate with stakeholders for a gender responsive implementation of the AfCFTA under strong AU leadership.

Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, Director Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

The AfCFTA ushers in a new era of optimism and opportunity for trade across Africa, the agreement has started at a time of an unprecedented health and economic crisis. Though Africa has experienced multiple tests in the past, the challenges triggered by the pandemic continue to test the limits of the African people, communities and institutions. Evidence on the impact of the lockdown measures and the economic slowdown paints a worrying picture. The crisis has highlighted the weaknesses that exist in Africa's social and economic systems, exacerbated the divisions within the society, and has threatened to reverse the gains made towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁶ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/07/opportunities-for-women-in-the-acfta>

In particular, the pandemic is having devastating consequences for women and girls. The lockdowns were characterized by domestic violence increase dramatically⁷. As businesses and sectors close, millions of women's jobs disappeared, and many girls may never return to school. These are alarming trends. However, a positive sign from the pandemic has been an increased awareness and ownership of these critical issues. The scale at which they have manifested during the pandemic has meant that all stakeholders have had no choice but to be attentive to recognise the uneven impacts of the crisis on women.

Therefore, it implies that this situation can be leveraged as a great opportunity to reset and push for gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive policies that explicitly insert at the heart of them, tools to increase gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Fitting this in the context of the historic and revolutionary African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), it offers an opportunity for women-owned businesses to increase cross border trade, promote entrepreneurship and great opportunities for business growth and expansion across the continent.

Therefore, for women to benefit from the AfCFTA, critical, timely and urgent interventions must be taken towards ensuring member states have the topical guidance to craft policies, which can minimize the gendered impacts of the pandemic and promote women's economic empowerment as a key pillar of their recovery and rebuilding efforts. These includes closing the gender gap in access to finance, build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA, empowering women in the export sector, empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement, empower women's participation in e-commerce and digital trade solutions and sensitization on AfCFTA and inclusion of women's voices in AfCFTA national implementation efforts.

[Session 2: Thematic Areas under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement \(AfCFTA\): Challenges and opportunities for Young Women Entrepreneurs](#)

The regional study on “Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in the Context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)”. Talumba Ireen Chilipaine, UN Women AfCFTA Consultant

The signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) at the March 2018 10th extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of the African Union (AU) was a tremendous milestone in the pursuit of integrated and inclusive economic growth in Africa. For such growth to occur, it was perceived that, there is need to address inequalities in all its forms- including gender inequality. Therefore, it remains critical to establish from the onset what the AfCFTA means for women, more especially their participation in intra-African trade.

Ms Talumba's intervention focused on the regional study commissioned the UN Women ESARO in collaboration with AUC that aimed at exploring opportunities as well as challenges for women entrepreneurs in the context of the AfCFTA. The study focused on the following key areas of interest; Women Informal Cross Border Trade (WICBT), women's participation in Regional Agriculture Value Chains and affirmative/preferential public procurement. The study further profiled selected women-led enterprises – specifically those in the East African Women in Business Platform. The businesses were looked at in terms of the agriculture value chain, source of raw materials (if any), major export markets, estimated annual trade values, key constraints and key opportunities, as well as success highlights.

She noted that at continental level, the AfCFTA offers a window of opportunity for African countries to boost intra-African trade, diversify and structurally transform their economies. The AfCFTA is also considered as an effective tool/strategy for achieving broad based economic growth, poverty

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

reduction as well as gender equality and equity (Article 3). Thus, the study identified rich opportunities offered by the AfCFTA for women entrepreneurs and women owned businesses, mainly through the following:

- i. The AfCFTA's protocol on Rules of Origin, permit access to cheaper raw materials and intermediate inputs. As an Example, the AfCFTA plans to adopt a change in tariff heading of 35 percent in value addition as a means of supporting continental trade in ICT and agro-processing. Thus, within the context of regional value chains, women entrepreneurs have the ability to produce goods with significant African local content in terms of raw materials and value addition in line with the preferential trade regime of the AfCFTA.
- ii. The AfCFTA establishes trade negotiations that should benefit all key players in terms of flexibility and policy space, either in the form of exemptions or specific positive requirements within the trade agreement framework.

Regarding Flexibility – countries are able to build on the productive capacities of their trade sector with greater comparative advantage before fully opening up to trade [Notable examples are, Livestock VC in the case of Botswana, Grain Trade in the case of Malawi, Horticulture in the case of Kenya etc]. This gradual liberalisation to trade enables small scale producers (the majority of whom are women) to enhance their competitiveness in intra-African trade.

On Policy Space – The AfCFTA takes the following trade measures into account: safeguards, standards (e.g. regarding environment, safety etc) and transitional periods on tariff progression. If properly harnessed, these trade measures will allow countries to protect their producers against competition via import surges and counterfeit products. As a point of illustration, the AfCFTA is to attain market integration among African Member States. Market integration is key to realising food and nutrition security, allowing food products to move between counties in order to meet deficits in the other country. However, this can also pose a danger when unregulated foods flood the markets with questionable food safety standards and requirements. The AfCFTA's provision on policy space in terms of safeguards and standards will ultimately protect local producers against such import surges which usually competes with well manufactured local products.

- iii. The AfCFTA's negotiations on exclusion lists and sensitive products takes into consideration restrictive trade liberalization measures on certain specific products deemed essential for women's needs e.g., agro-processing products and reproductive health products. This specific targeting of public goods in the AfCFTA has a direct bearing on public procurement systems where women entrepreneurs have a comparative advantage in leveraging domestic markets.
- iv. The AfCFTA adopts preferential trade regimes facilitating small scale cross- border traders and small holder farmers through measures that promote their integration into Regional Value Chains. For example, provision of the AfCFTA annex on standards and phytosanitary measures entails mutual recognition of standards, licensing as well as certification of service suppliers across the continent, making it easier to meet export standards and satisfying regulatory requirements for niche markets.

However, to successfully operationalise the provisions of the AfCFTA to ensure that women entrepreneurs leverage on the above outlined AfCFTA opportunities/provisions as they remain critical for women entrepreneurs to successfully access markets under the AfCFTA. For example, AfCFTA's provisions on mutual recognition frameworks for standards, licencing and certifications remains one of the most critical issues for ensuring market access for SMES across the continent.

Profiling of Women entrepreneurs in the UN Women study demonstrated that women have the ability to identify their niche markets. Women are also increasingly aware of the emerging market trends to which they can export their products. Women-led SMEs participate in both regional and international

export markets, but market access challenges and key constraints, including compliance with SPS Measures and regulatory requirements limit their effective participation. Specifically, women entrepreneurs are grappling with expensive certification requirements (e.g., organic, fair trade, HACCPs, GRASPs, Global Gap) as well as Technical Barriers to Trade (TBTs) that are to do with packaging and labelling. Cost of Organic Certification for example, can range between \$3000- \$5000 depending on the export market being pursued. And often times, buyers of their products from the importing country, are unwilling to co-invest with them in these market access requirements. Leveraging the opportunities of the AfCFTA for women entrepreneurs require utilising provisions in AfCFTA Annexes on standards and phytosanitary measures to address market access constraints. Secondly, differences in regional food standards and regulations are another hindrance to the development of regional/continental markets more especially for SMEs. Some notable challenges include limited regional harmonisation of food laws/standards among African countries. All these translate into high cost of doing business for SMEs which usually translate into NTBs. Often times, SMEs lack sufficient trade knowledge around these market access requirements, which often result into trade barriers for products that do not fall within the prescribed requirements for the importing country.

Going forward, consideration must be given by African policymakers, private sector and development partners to support interventions that would harness SME's new export opportunities under the AfCFTA. These could be in form of:

- Continuous capacity development for SMEs on market access requirements, including technical standards requirements such as certification, branding, labelling and packaging to
- Developing Market Access guides for SMEs under the AfCFTA
- Promoting trade facilitation measures in support of SMEs intra African trade.

Leveraging the AfCFTA for an inclusive post COVID-19 recovery: Ms. Beatrice Chaytor, AUC Department of Trade and Industry

The AfCFTA is a powerful vehicle for empowering women entrepreneurs as significant actors in boosting intra-African trade. By reducing the costs of trade through reduction in trade restrictions under the Agreement and its various Protocols, women entrepreneurs can move up the value chain to higher-value sectors that include marketing, processing, distribution, as well as STEM and other industrial processes. Leveraging on the AfCFTA Agreement, its Protocols and subsidiary instruments is important since there is no separate chapter on gender and trade in the AfCFTA Agreement. The Agreement does not contain gender-specific provisions that promote gender equality in specific areas though it is anticipated that such legally binding commitments will come in the future Protocol on Women and Trade to be announced during the AU Extraordinary Summit in December 2020.

First, the Preamble of the Agreement highlights the importance of gender equality in the development of the AfCFTA, while Article 3 (e) sets out the need to promote and attain gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties as one of the specific objectives of the Agreement. Therefore, there is need to focus on specific provisions of the Agreement and see them through a gender lens. Further, there are a number of provisions in the Agreement – although not gender-specific – that could be leveraged to empower and advance new trade and economic opportunities for women generated by the AfCFTA whether they are workers (wage workers and self-employed), producers, entrepreneurs (owners of informal and formal enterprises), small-scale and informal cross-border. Though the key questions should be “What does the promotion and attainment of the objective of gender equality mean for each provision that is being implemented?”

The application of Rules of Origin provisions will ensure that women entrepreneurs who use significant African content in their products will have those products qualify as originating products eligible under

the AfCFTA preferential trade regime in terms of raw materials and value addition. Further, the provisions of the Annex on Standards and Phytosanitary measures entail harmonisation of standards, licensing and certification across the continent, makes it easier for women entrepreneurs to meet export standards and satisfy regulatory requirements for diverse markets. Simplifying customs administration and systems under the Customs Cooperation Annex will help streamline procedures for trade benefiting many informal cross border traders. In addition, the newly operational NTBs Online Reporting and Monitoring Mechanism will add to the implementation of the provisions in the Annex on NTBs/TBTs designed to reduce and eliminate NTBs, thus impacting positively on the available market access for women entrepreneurs.

Article 4 of the Protocol on Trade in Services gives States the right to regulate in accordance with their national policy objectives. Where those national policy objectives include gender parity and equality, then the domestic regulations of the State Party to implement the whole Protocol should reflect that policy objective. However, the implementation of Article 27 (2) (d) of the Protocol on Trade in Services the export capacity of formal and informal women service suppliers, can be improved through Member States scheduling specific commitments and developing regulatory frameworks that will ensure that for instance, women engineers and IT professionals can be upskilled, and have their qualifications recognised in other territories in the AfCFTA space.

In order to make this legal agreement work for women there is a need for all the actors to look at the overall AfCFTA Agreement. In the first instance, it is State Parties that have the responsibility to implement. They have to take the bare skeleton of the AfCFTA Agreement and put all the muscle, veins, arteries, blood cells on to it to make it a fully functional instrument that ensures inclusive trade. This means laws, policies, strategies (including through AfCFTA National Strategies) and practices (at state, provincial and local levels) that support women in doing business, in working in their jobs, in starting their business, in owning property, in accessing finance, accessing business and trade information, in developing skill sets in technological and managerial capacity, etc.

Next, the business community, armed with information about the content of the AfCFTA Agreement and its provisions, must ensure that business models are restructured for efficiency and productivity – to take advantage of projected increased manufacturing and agribusiness, to take advantage of the 4th industrial revolution and for development of regional value chains that enable women owned SMEs to supply goods and services to larger value chains.

All women entrepreneurs should study the AfCFTA Agreement and learn the provisions that apply to their businesses. For this reason, it is critical for businesswomen to tap into available business networks, business training opportunities and access necessary trade information and credit channels. These are critical factors in the success of women in trade, arming them for competition.

The RECs and business councils associated with those RECs, leveraging their best practice examples, should provide as much capacity building and training for women entrepreneurs so that they can develop their products and services, explore and break into new markets, get onto regional value chains, and diversify their product and services offerings for the integrated continental market.

To make the AfCFTA to work for women, more so post COVID-19 pandemic, the first thing is to do what the AfCFTA is designed to do - bringing down the costs of trade – by reducing all trade barriers, whether they are tariffs or non-tariff barriers (NTBs), or cumbersome customs procedures. By reducing the barriers to trade in goods and services, women will move up the value chain and get into sectors which are more valuable – into marketing, processing, distribution, into STEM and more industrial processes, etc. Therefore, the aim should be to help women entrepreneurs to develop comparative advantage into competitive advantage. Helping women entrepreneurs connect to larger

value chains at the domestic and regional level will help them to grow and expand their businesses in sectors such as tourism, heavily dominated by women. Reducing barriers, developing and maintaining standards, will impact beneficially on the development of the sector and on women professionals and entrepreneurs in that sector.

Increasing investments in vital infrastructure such as energy, road and rail, transport systems, ICT, financial, and other infrastructure will help women entrepreneurs who trade in perishable food products requiring cold chain, storage and long-distance transportation to access markets. In the wake of the pandemic, innovation and enterprise is likely to thrive – the digitisation of supply chains and the rapid expansion of e-commerce platforms – can all benefit women if they can upgrade their managerial and technical skills. In facilitating women to access credit and finance, it is critical to understand what the women entrepreneurs' specific needs are and how can specific funds be set up for women-owned businesses, to improve their capacity to take advantage of the AfCFTA.

Moreover, some affirmative action may be needed in respect of certain policies, such as government procurement. About USD 15 trillion passes through government to suppliers through public procurement systems on an annual basis; however, only 1 per cent of this goes to women-owned businesses⁸. Governments need to recognize how procurement can release the potential for women-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. Well-designed public procurement policies have the potential to speed technological development, increasing trade margins and overall productivity. In this respect, governments need to find ways to integrate women-owned businesses into public procurement supply chains.

Lastly, other issues such as rights to land, accessing investments, taxation, skills development, access to educational facilities, are all factors in the ways that women entrepreneurs and professionals can make use of the opportunities in the AfCFTA. Access to trade knowledge and intelligence by women entrepreneurs, showing where the opportunities are, gives them the potential to develop value chains, obtain products, and supply their products to consumers. If the AfCFTA can be leveraged in this way, the possibilities are truly endless for women entrepreneurs doing business in the AfCFTA space.

Empowering women in AfCFTA implementation: strategic actions for consideration

Nadira Bayat: Gender and Trade Expert, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Ms Bayat's intervention focused on Empowering women in AfCFTA implementation: strategic actions for consideration. She noted that while the AfCFTA has the potential to expand women's economic opportunities and outcomes, gains will not be automatic. Leveraging the promise of the AfCFTA will require an inclusive approach to AfCFTA implementation. The AfCFTA Agreement is a continental Agreement, but implementation will take place at the national level. National Strategies to implement the AfCFTA Agreement have been identified as a targeted means through which to ensure a coherent and strategic approach towards translating opportunities in the Agreement into concrete socio-economic benefits, while preparing for and reducing potential risks. Over the course of 2019, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC) have and continues to support those African countries that have requested assistance in the design of AfCFTA National Strategies. Gender mainstreaming is central to the design of these Strategies.

At the core of gender mainstreaming is a strong understanding of how women contribute to and participate in trade in their different economic roles. Specifically, gender mainstreaming seeks to identify priority sectors and markets where potential exists for women's economic empowerment, as

⁸ <https://www.intracen.org/news/Public-Procurement-a-Tool-to-Boost-Womens-Economic-Empowerment/>

well as non-traditional sectors and products with high export growth and employment creation potential. This process identifies opportunities in key regional value chains with positive socioeconomic impact - specifically in creating productive employment and decent jobs in the aftermath of COVID-19. Particular attention is paid to key economic sectors.

Trade integration, and in this case, through the AfCFTA offers tremendous opportunities for export growth. However, women entrepreneurs - young African women entrepreneurs in particular - tend to confront disproportionately higher trade barriers that limit opportunities for growth and consequently their ability to take advantage of new opportunities in an expanded continental market. Targeted support is required to ensure that young African women entrepreneurs are able to expand and scale up their business operations, raise productivity levels, improve competitiveness to grow beyond borders. If there is no targeted strategy in place, accompanied by deliberate interventions that address the specific needs of women-owned businesses, women entrepreneurs will not be able to meaningfully participate in the AfCFTA.

Ms Bayat provided a high-level overview of key entrepreneurship and economic empowerment interventions that have emerged at the conclusion of the process of gender mainstreaming in AfCFTA National Strategies, for women to benefit in the AfCFTA. These interventions include:

- AfCFTA sensitization and ensuring the equal participation of women in AfCFTA national coordinating and oversight structures
- Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA
- Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement
- Close the gender-gap in access to finance
- Implement gender-responsive trade facilitation (including digital trade facilitation)
- Empower women's participation in E-commerce and digital trade solutions

Ms Bayat highlighted the important role that women play – both individually and through women's organisations and associations –in conveying the priority needs and concerns of female entrepreneurs; as well as in supporting the process of gender mainstreaming in their country's AfCFTA National Strategy. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of an ecosystem of partners, including the private sector, civil society and development partners that must come together as part of a 'business *unusual*' approach to support economic empowerment interventions identified in AfCFTA National Strategies, as part of support for inclusive AfCFTA implementation.

[Session 3: Supporting young women entrepreneurs in the context of the AfCFTA: Discussants](#)

This session featured various speakers with diverse background but working very directly as or with women entrepreneurs either through conducting business or providing platforms for business. The speakers were invited to share their remarks while responding to target questions centered around the key learnings that can be scaled up to advance gender equality objectives and women economic empowerment in the implementation of the AfCFTA. These key issues are the pillars that will support young women entrepreneurs to successful trade in the new era of AfCFTA.

[Ms Kuenia Motsoapitso Malapo, Acting Head United Nations Conference on Trade and Development](#)

The Non Tariff Barriers Reporting, Monitoring and Eliminating Mechanism accessed through <https://tradebarriers.africa/> is key to facilitate trade for traders, especially women traders in the context of the AfCFTA. Not all government regulations or procedures that are costly to a trader are considered an NTB. However, to effectively support the traders, the platform is designed to facilitate

identification of an NTB by allowing users to simply give details regarding the difficulty they are facing with the expectation of government institutions responding timely to resolve them. It also facilitates communication between countries through their focal points. The NTBs mechanism is also designed and built with various features like SMS to allow entrepreneurs to easily raise or report their NTBs.

Ms Beatrice Simwapenga Hamusonde, Director Gender and Social Affairs, The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

The RECs will play a critical role in driving the AfCFTA. What are some of the key learnings emerging from the COMESA that can be scaled up to advance gender equality objectives and women's economic empowerment as part of inclusive AfCFTA implementation? Based on these lessons, what would you identify as key policy and programme priorities that must be in place at the regional level to support these goals?

COMESA stands for common market for eastern and southern Africa. It is one of the regional economic communities – that are building blocks to the African Union. Ms Hamusonde answering to the question on the role of RECs in driving the AfCFTA emphasized that COMESA being a regional block means it is closer to member States than the African Union, hence it is well positioned to play a critical role in driving the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

COMESA's vision is *"To be a fully integrated, internationally competitive regional economic community with high standards of living for all its people (women, men, girls and boys) ready to merge into an African Economic Community"* The COMESA vision is inclusive and does not leave anyone behind. The vision is also forward looking into COMESA being part of the African Continental Economic Community.

The Founding Leaders of COMESA were cognizant of the fact that COMESA cannot achieve its objectives and vision without the participation of women, gender responsive policy and legal environment, and mainstreaming of gender in programmes and projects among others.

For instance, the

- A. Treaty establishing COMESA calls for Member States and other stakeholders to ensure the
 - a. Ensure participation of women at all levels of COMESA work – gender mainstreaming
 - b. ensure existence of conducive policy and legal environment
 - c. ensure Support for women in business to continue effectively to the regional economic development agenda
- B. COMESA Gender Policy - highlights measures to address challenges that act as barriers to the effective participation of women in Trade, trade related sectors as well as social related issues.

For instance, in trade: issues of concern include among others:

- i. Most women run small, informal, individual businesses (not shareholders in large firms or cooperatives).
- ii. Women have limited access to information on investment opportunities, markets, financial services.
- iii. Women have limited knowledge on export management, pricing & packaging and capacity to comply with standards and regulations.
- iv. Limited access to productive resources such as equipment, inputs, land and technical services, etc.
- v. Limited access to information on trade/business opportunities.
- vi. Limited participation in trade fairs, business networks.
- vii. Limited access to information on business registration; tax, labour laws, etc.
- viii. Harassment and protection issues at borders, storage, sanitary and childcare facilities

C. COMESA Initiatives

- 1) Simplified Trade Regime which comprises
 - i. A common list of good produced from within the COMESA region that do not attract tax.
 - ii. Allocation of an agreed threshold of value of goods that are free from tax.
- 2) Small Scale Trade Facilitation Initiatives – implemented currently in 20 boarders
 - i. Capacity building for women small scale cross border traders and boarder officials, other service providers.
 - ii. Awareness raising on the opportunities under the small-scale trade facilitation programme
 - iii. Trade information desks at boarders to support women in completing forms; and to disseminate information to women and collection and documentation of data on women cross border traders
 - iv. Development of gender training manuals and guidelines on small scale trade
 - v. Research on the free movement of the people measures
 - vi. Promotion of collection and documentation of gender disaggregated data on small scale trade to ensure availability of data to inform policy and programmes.
 - vii. Border infrastructure development including border markets, storage, childcare facilities among others.
 - viii. Promote women’s participation in the cross-border trade associations and networks.
- 3) Promotion of Local Sourcing of Products (Affirmative Procurement)

COMESA under its Business Council promotes buying products produced from COMESA Member States especially with focus on products by women entrepreneurs. CBC organizes trade fairs to provide a platform for women including young women entrepreneurs to exhibit their products.

4) Profiling women and youth SMEs in Global Value Chains

COMESA is conducting a survey in its member States to profile women and youth SMEs in selected value chains (horticulture; leather, leather products; and ago-processing). The profiling will enable us to identify the situation of women in these value chains to enable follow-up support including capacity building on SPS measures, technical issues such as packaging, licensing, labeling, certification, branding.

In short, the project will ensure targeted support for women and youth SMEs – enhance women and youth participation in regional and global value chains and capacity-building on international and regional trade requirements.

5) Information and Networking Platform for Women Entrepreneurs

COMESA-EAC and ECOWAS have jointly developed an information and networking platform for women entrepreneurs. The platform covers 38 countries belonging to the three RECs. The platform enables women to access information on business registration, export and import regulations, markets and investment opportunities, trade finance, and social services that women in business require.

The platform enables women to network, learn from one another, mentor one another and advance themselves in business. Peer-to-peer coaching/mentorship, business-to-business learning, sharing of experience and opportunities in the region and at continental level through the AfCFTA.

The platform targets young women to provide support services for women. This will create jobs for young women.

D. Recommendations

- i. Awareness raising for women and young women on the opportunities that the AfCFTA offers to enable them benefit
- ii. Promote “buy made in Africa” and gender sensitive and affirmative action in public procurement to ensure inclusion of women.
- iii. Support border infrastructure development including markets, storage facilities, childcare facilities, lighting effective participation of women cross border traders.
- iv. Support ICT skills development for women to enable them use ICTs to access markets, information and to network – strengthen African grown e-commerce solutions.
- v. Ensure universal access and affordable internet and energy.

To conclude, Policymakers and implementers of the AfCFTA at national, regional and continental levels should establish mechanisms and strategies for the effective participation of women in cross- border trade, value chains and public procurement. This requires responding to women’s priority needs by ensuring women’s access to information, opportunities, and services.

Ms Juliet Kasiita, Founder and Team Leader, The Winpreneurs Uganda

What are some of the most Significant Gender-specific Business and trade barriers confronting Young Women entrepreneurs and how should these barriers be effectively addressed in targeted AfCFTA women's economic empowerment programmes

Despite the AfCFTA being a powerful vehicle for empowering women entrepreneurs, there are still numerous gender-specific barriers that women confront. To begin with, socio-cultural barriers which include customary practices like unequal balance in responsibilities limits the participation of women hence inhibiting their growth. This social norms and barriers may keep women away from joining business trade platforms or network hence limiting their ability to access market information for trade. In addition, Legal constraints also affects many women entrepreneurs to engage effectively in trade. This hinders women from navigating barriers like access to credit as they are requested to provide a marriage certificate. Interestingly, in some countries registering a business is more difficult for a woman as they may be required to show permission from a male guardian.

Therefore, in order to help leapfrog young women businesses, Ms Juliet shared very great perspectives and insights from her experience as a woman entrepreneur on how these barriers confronting young women entrepreneurs can be effectively addressed in targeted AfCFTA women’s economic empowerment programmes. To unlock the Innovativeness and excellence of African women entrepreneurs, policy makers, governments, institutions and the private sector will need to address these barriers through:

1: Lobbying policy makers, government and private sector players to draft informing policies address the following;

- To strengthen the current National policies addressing, Testing, certification, conformity, labelling of products, land ownership and equal rights to own and rent property hence help to eliminate constraints of property ownership and access to collateral as well as harmonising standards across countries.
- Strengthen existing Innovative technologies that allow for user friendly fit for purpose e- commerce as a driver to broadening the marketplace and allow women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses through standardisation. This will include embracing technologies that harmonise and offer better border operations and reduce paperwork in customs departments across borders hence better turnaround times for movement of goods.

- AfCFTA programs will make more sense for young women entrepreneurs if its players explore Innovative lending approaches not based on land ownership and offer an alternative opportunity to increase women’s access to capital. (*Our credit markets still lack innovation for cash-flow based lending or exporters’ credit. We can tap into the current available innovations to overcome this barrier*).
- Continuously review trade policies and ensure they are Informing policies that address gender-related biases for achieving better gender parity in enterprise ownership. For example, draft policies that foster larger sized firms among women. Ensure that the regulations (land) and laws are reviewed to be economically and socially driven and not politically aligned making them difficult to implement.
- Reducing barriers by cutting red tape and streamlining border bureaucracy may lower trade costs considerably. These barriers impact both men- and women-owned and managed businesses but very consequential for women owned businesses. Sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS) have the greatest impact in the agro-food sector. A World Bank study (2015) shows that SPS and their lack of harmonization are a burden for small producers, many of whom are women in developing countries.

2: Dedicated Investment in capacity and skills development for women entrepreneurs to help them trade productively and meaningfully in the region through;

- Support trade associations and networks to share trade related information on the NTBS hence more awareness and unlocking more markets for women to trade.
- Offer training programmes on the benefits of supporting women entrepreneurship clustering for accountability, a key driver to accessing non collateralized lending and access to finances for business growth.
- Offer Legal support and training making use of Pro Bono services offered by legal practitioners and creating awareness of legal implications while doing business. This reduces low participation of women in trade negotiations that AfCFTA advances on several regulations that affect women participation in AfCFTA itself.

W/ro Nigist Haile, Founder and Executive Director, Center for Accelerated Women’s Economic Empowerment (CAWEE)

Can you tell us a little bit more about the objectives of this project and how young African women entrepreneurs can get involved? Can you also identify targeted support that could be provided by the UN and other partners to support the objectives of this project?

W/ro Nigist provided insights on the ‘Boosting Intra-African Trade: Women Taking the Lead’ project started in September 2020 and spearheaded by CAWEE that seeks to support women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda to leverage on the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). She highlighted that the project is focused on facilitating intra-African trade in 4 African countries: (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda), supported by the US Government; focusing on each of the 4 countries African Women’s Entrepreneurship Program Chapters, (AWEP - an initiative that started in 2010 by the former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton) in supporting African women in businesses to benefit from the AGOA (African Growth & Opportunity Act) provisions.

The main goal of the project is to start facilitating trade among Africans within the Continent, starting with women entrepreneurs, with special focus of engaging the mentioned 4 countries, to show case that it is possible to Boost Intra-African Trade and Women Taking the Lead Role on that.

The major objectives of this project include:

- Creating platform for the Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda women entrepreneurs, to network, exchange of information on products and services (on our website under construction www.women4intraafricantrade.com)
- Educating women entrepreneurs involved in the targeted four countries on the content, benefits, rights, obligations and opportunities of the AfCFTA and how best those women entrepreneurs can prepare themselves to benefit from it;
- Facilitating trade in between the four countries, where each of the countries can be sellers as well as buyers;
- Promoting what Africa produces and sells: “Made in Africa” and “Buy in Africa”;
- Preparing 100-120 company profiles of prominent African women entrepreneurs from the targeted four countries and posting that on the project website, as well as disseminating the soft and print copies of those company profiles to potential buyers;
- Facilitating and supporting the women entrepreneurs of the targeted four countries to open shops in the respective cities of those countries, in prime places, targeting opening at least 2-3 shops in each of the cities, i.e. in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in Accra Ghana, in Nairobi, Kenya and in Kigali, where 8-12 high-end boutique shops are expected to be opened in prime places in those four mentioned countries Capital Cities.
As a result of the Covid pandemic, the four countries have agreed, beyond establishing the physical shops, to start working on establishing virtual market places with Ethiopia in preparations.
- Creating a showcasing platform for potential international buyers to products produced and services provided by the African women of those targeted four countries;
- Bringing out policy ideas/recommendations, through the side events expected to be organized during the up-coming Continental Events (2021 in Kigali, and 2022 in Addis Ababa) to inform policy makers in AU Member States, the Continental Organs and concerned stakeholders, in promoting conducive business environment for African women;
- Advocating on the rights and capacities of African women entrepreneurs (using electronic as well as print media) and informing all the concerned ones that, African women entrepreneurs have the right to trade, that they are able to trade among themselves that can serve as a show case to others to continue doing business within Africa;
- Disseminating good practices to the rest of the other African countries and support them in scaling-up the best practices of this particular project.
- With a focus to this policy advocacy session, our Young African WEs operating in the mentioned four countries can directly contact us; you are most welcome to benefit from the project’s services, our respective countries contact details will be put on the chat box.

On Targeted & Expected Support to be Provided by the Concerned Partners:

i. Governments:

- In developing each of our countries National AfCFTA Implementation Strategies, W/ro Nigist implored the respective African Governments to give opportunity to women in business to take part and contribute in this process;
- Opening up opportunities for the private sector & civil societies participation in the implementation of the AfCFTA;
- Preparing conducive business environment, so that women’s businesses can grow, expand and flourish.

ii. AUC and UN:

- Supporting Trade Promotion Organizations like CAWEE, AWEP Chapters and others in equipping us with the basic knowledge on the AfCFTA, organizing trainings to the core leaders of such organizations as well as organizing Training of Trainers;

- Capacity building of women on awareness raising and knowledge transfer, educating the women on the content of the AfCFTA and the benefits that they are expected to get, so that they can be able to prepare themselves;
 - Providing skills training on product and services development, branding, labeling, packaging, etc., so that companies prepare their products and services to benefit from this Continental market;
 - Providing technical skills training on doing business virtually, on digital literacy, where particularly this time a positive thing that we are capitalizing from Covid will be preparing women in business to start working on virtual market places.
 - Building the capacities of female trade negotiators, which our Continent needs most.
- iii. Private Sector & Partners:
- Particularly in working on e-commerce, logistics is expected to be a serious challenge.

In the preparations to start working on the Accra, Ghana virtual market place, the cost of sending to products to buyers through DHL for example is found to be very expensive, which definitely discourage potential on-line buyers, as the shipping cost is expected to be covered by the buyers.

- The ultimate target of the trade facilitation is selling the product or delivering the service within the Continent, unless the issue of logistics is giving the focus it deserves, this will make trading very difficult.

Closing Session: Commitment to Support Young Women Entrepreneurs

Dr. Tapiwa Uchizi on behalf of Ms. Victoria Maloka, Ag Director of African Union Commission Women, Gender, Development Directorate (AUC- WGDD)

The AUC-WGDD is committed to supporting young African entrepreneurs by ensuring and supporting Member states to incorporate and prioritize their national strategies and policies on AfCFTA that takes into consideration the challenges/barriers in trading by women and young women. Further, with the understanding that empowering young African women entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA requires supporting their equal participation in national policy processes, the directorate will ensure inclusive participation by all key stakeholders in AfCFTA including young women, scaling up capacity building and awareness raising through the development and implementation of the 2020-2030 African Women Decade on financial and Economic inclusion. In addition, the directorate will continue partnering and collaborating with other technical departments of the AUC such as DTI and Department of Economic Affairs as well as other with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), UN agencies and other development partner in ensuring that we come up with appropriate interventions that are gender sensitive and takes into account the young women.

Tikikel Tadele on behalf of Ms Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa

The AfCFTA has brought to the fore important facts, challenges, and entry points to accelerate the GEWE agenda. The young women have stated what they hope will change if they have to meaningfully contribute to the realization of the continental integration agenda. First, investing in young women's economic empowerment and skills development is one of the most urgent and effective means to drive progress on gender equality, poverty eradication, and inclusive economic growth. This is because empowering women entrepreneurs is a smart economics as it generates tremendous dividends for society. Thus, the need to level the playing field for women's businesses, so we can help their businesses grow.

Secondly, understanding that there are various opportunities for the gender responsive implementation of the AfCFTA at different levels, what would thus be critical is assessing the implementation strategies through a gender lens to leverage the existing structures including policy making structures gaps related to policy conduciveness as well as access to ICT, entrepreneurial and soft skills remain key barriers that national level efforts need to address.

Further, UN Women continues to forge transformative partnerships with the AU, the UN system and other key strategic stakeholders including the private sector to ensure that women economic empowerment remains a central consideration in all efforts. UN Women calls upon private sector representatives to be inspiration for women and girls by creating ecosystems that transform families, communities, markets and societies by recognizing women as equal and powerful economic agents of change. For greater impact, all efforts will be stepped up to engage with grassroots and civil society organizations including rural women, domestic workers, refugees and migrants, disabled and low-skilled women to ensure that women economic empowerment initiatives leave no one behind.

In addition, the ambition of the sustainable development goals cannot be achieved without putting women in the center of our efforts. Their talent, vision, leadership and entrepreneurial spirit unleashed are prerequisites to reaching the present and future African women and girls want, need and deserve but also for a sustainable, integrated, peaceful and prosperous continent driven by the potentials offered by its young people and women in line with the vision in Agenda 2063.

Lastly, UN Women in its endeavors considers their collaboration with the AU catalytic. In the context of AfCFTA, UN Women will remain committed to step up the collaboration through key flagship actions that will mobilize all relevant stakeholders while relying on collaborations with the UN System partners including UNECA, UNCTAD and UNIDO. This will be to leverage on existing knowledge, expertise and resources for coherent interventions in supporting gender responsive continental and national actions in AU Member States.

Outcomes and Recommendations

The AfCFTA is indeed a powerful vehicle for empowering women entrepreneurs as significant actors in boosting trade as it unlocks their potential in business. Key recommendations to empower women entrepreneurs include:

Gender and AfCFTA

- There is a need to focus on specific provisions of the Agreement and see them through a gender lens.
- Sensitize and ensure the equal participation of women in AfCFTA national coordinating and oversight structures
- Close the gender-gap in access to finance.
- Develop of gender training manuals and guidelines on small scale trade
- Promote and implement gender-responsive trade facilitation (including digital trade facilitation)

Harness the Power of Multi-stakeholder Approach

- Importance of an ecosystem of partners, including the private sector, civil society and development partners that must come together as part of a ‘business *unusual*’ approach that brings and integrates solutions to help accelerate the impact of women’s economic and enterprise development interventions.

Strengthen National and Regional policies

- Crowding women voices, sensitizing and ensuring their participation in the national committees through women led organizations, women cooperatives and cross border trade associations is critical to supporting their business growth.
- Continuously review trade policies and national budgets allocations to ensure they are responding to addressing and achieving better gender parity in enterprise ownership and growth.
- Lobby policy makers, government and private sector players to draft policies to strengthen the current National policies addressing, Testing, certification, conformity, labelling of products, land ownership and equal rights to own and rent property hence help to eliminate constraints of property ownership and access to collateral as well as harmonizing standards across countries.
- Strengthen trade measures that safeguards standards (e.g., regarding environment, safety etc.) licensing and certifications and transitional periods on tariff progression

Promote Cross border trade through the RECs and Business Councils

- Facilitate best case studies and experiences on eliminating trade barriers in order to increase participation of women in trade.
- Support border infrastructure development including markets, storage facilities, childcare facilities, lighting effective participation of women cross border traders
- Effective implementation of simplified trade regime i.e., simplify customs administration and systems under the Customs Cooperation Annex to help streamline procedures for trade benefiting many informal cross border traders.
- Small Scale Trade Facilitation Initiatives e.g., capacity building for women small scale cross border traders and boarder officials, other service providers.
- Promotion of Local Sourcing of Products (Affirmative Procurement)

Dedicated Investment in capacity and skills development and finance for women entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA

- Put more capital in the hands of women to scale up their businesses and take advantage of the new market opportunities in the AfCFTA more especially post COVID-19.
- Continuous capacity development for women-led SMEs on market access requirements, including technical standards requirements such as certification, branding, labelling and packaging.
- Developing Market Access guides for women-led SMEs under the AfCFTA
- AfCFTA programs needs to explore Innovative lending approaches for young women not based on land ownership and offer an alternative opportunity to increase women's access to capital
- Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA, empowering women in the export sector
- Profiling women and youth SMEs in Global Value Chains
- Target demand driven products and services and standards readiness to help women entrepreneurs break into new export markets.
- Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement.
- Support trade associations and networks and share trade related information on the NTBS and increase awareness and unlocking more markets for women to trade
- Facilitate information and Networking Platforms for Women Entrepreneur
- Promote "buy made in Africa" and gender sensitive and affirmative action in public procurement to ensure inclusion of women.

- Support ICT Skills development and empower women’s participation in E-commerce and digital trade solutions
- Ensure universal access and affordable internet and energy.
- Sensitize and train women entrepreneurs on the available digital resources and tools like the NTBs Mechanisms accessed through tradebarriers.africa and the online marketplace platforms such as www.women4intraafricantrade.com;

Support women to raise awareness and advocate for their rights and dignity as growth-oriented business owners

- Support business networks and business associations to train on women rights and empower them to negotiate for support and time for the businesses at domestic level.
- Run campaigns to educate on the value of women running prosperous businesses to help reduce limiting social-cultural barriers and optimize women’s business and trade potential.

Unlocking Opportunities for African Women Entrepreneurs in the AfCFTA - Dialogue Report

Compiled by: Korkor Cudjoe (Consultant), Ronald Diang’a (Consultant)