



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



Capacity Building Workshop: **Unlocking AfCFTA Opportunities: Capacity Building for Youth and Female-led SMEs in Libya and Tunisia** **09–12 September 2025**

Concept Note

Background and Rationale

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are essential drivers of economic development in Libya and Tunisia, acting as a significant source of employment and nurturing entrepreneurship. However, despite their critical importance, SMEs, particularly those led by women and youth, encounter numerous challenges, including limited access to finance, compliance with international standards, and skills gaps. Many SMEs struggle to secure the funding necessary for growth, meeting global quality standards remains a significant hurdle, and there is a notable deficiency in skills related to digitalization, export readiness, and sustainable practices.

These obstacles considerably undermine their competitiveness and hinder their ability to integrate into regional and continental markets, particularly those facilitated by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Additionally, these structural barriers are intensified by the escalating effects of climate change and broader socio-economic vulnerabilities. To effectively address these challenges, targeted, inclusive, and practical interventions are essential. Such measures will empower SMEs to bolster their resilience, enhance market access, and contribute significantly to sustainable economic transformation.

In this context, the Sub-Regional Office for North Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA-SRO-NA) has broadened its SME support program to specifically target women and youth entrepreneurs. Building on successful initiatives previously implemented in Libya, Mauritania, and Morocco, the program aims to provide SMEs with the knowledge, tools, and networks necessary to thrive in increasingly competitive and dynamic markets.

Programme Overview

This edition of the programme will provide capacity-building support to a joint cohort of 35 SMEs—25 from Tunisia and 10 from Libya. The initiative is structured to combine theoretical knowledge with hands-on application and peer learning between the two countries.

Structure and Methodology

The training will be delivered through a **hybrid model** consisting of virtual and in-person components:

- **Pre-Workshop Virtual Sessions:**

Three online sessions will be organized via Zoom prior to the in-person workshop. These sessions will provide theoretical foundations for the three core modules of the training. Tentative dates for these sessions are

- August 20, August 27, and September 3, 2025 (Tunisia).
- August 21, August 28, and September 4, 2025 (Libya)

- **Hybrid workshop organized in Tunis (in-person and online)** *(September 9–12, 2025):*

The workshop will focus on practical applications, including group exercises, case studies, and peer exchanges between Libyan and Tunisian participants. This hands-on approach is designed to build operational skills and stimulate cross-country learning.

- **Post-Workshop Follow-Up** *(September 16, 2025):*

A virtual two-hour session will be held to assess the knowledge retained and to reflect on the application of skills acquired.

Training Content

The programme will focus on three thematic areas, to be delivered across multiple sessions. Each theme will be addressed through a practical lens, supported by real-world examples and interactive exercises. Topics will also be adapted to include country-specific content, particularly for Libya and Tunisia, such as domestic financing mechanisms and commercial potential.

Eligibility and Participation

The programme targets SMEs and cooperatives that meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Enterprises with 5 to 150 employees
- Cooperatives with fewer than 80 employees

To ensure effectiveness, each SME is encouraged to designate at least one physical participant for the in-person sessions. However, additional staff from the same enterprise may join the virtual sessions.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Certification

To tailor the training to participants' needs, a pre-training questionnaire will be administered to assess existing knowledge and identify learning priorities. Following the completion of the workshop, a feedback and evaluation mechanism will be implemented to measure the programme's impact. Participants who complete the training will receive a certificate of participation issued under the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) logo.

Development Objectives

This programme directly contributes to the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely:

- SDG 5 – Gender Equality,
- SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth,
- SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure,
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, and
- SDG 13 – Climate Action.

By strengthening the entrepreneurial capacities of women and youth-led SMEs, the programme aims to promote inclusive economic growth, regional integration, and sustainable development in North Africa.

Objectives of the SME Program:

In line with its commitment to enhancing business competitiveness and promoting sustainable growth, the ECA-SRO-NA launched a capacity-building program for women-led SMEs in Morocco in 2023. In 2024, the program was expanded to include Mauritania and Libya. In 2025, the program was expanded to include young entrepreneurs and was rolled out in Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia.

The program aims to enhance the skills of women and youth-led SMEs in areas such as export readiness, digitalization, and sustainable ecological practices. It also provides policymakers with a multidimensional strategy centered around three main pillars designed to address the barriers faced by women and young entrepreneurs and SMEs in the region:

Access to Markets, Competitiveness, and Development of Exportable Products: This module will equip SMEs with the essential knowledge and tools needed to expand into regional and international markets. It covers key aspects such as:

- Quality standards and certifications required to facilitate integration into international and African markets
- Market analysis and target customers
- Formulation of vision and strategic objectives
- Design of an innovative business model

Participants will learn strategies to enhance product competitiveness through value addition, branding, and packaging, while also exploring opportunities presented by trade agreements and export facilitation programs. In particular, the program will focus on export opportunities and regional integration, especially within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Practical case studies will help SMEs develop market-ready products and establish sustainable business relationships.

Access to Financing and Financial Management for SMEs: This module is designed to help SMEs strengthen their financial capabilities, analysis their financial risks and secure the funding necessary for growth. It covers key topics such as:

- Identifying and accessing various financing options, including bank loans, microfinance, venture capital, grants, and crowdfunding
- Basics of smart financial management and building dynamic budgets
- Preparing visual financial reports
- Developing fundable business proposals.

Additionally, the course provides practical training in financial planning, budgeting, cash flow management, and risk management, resilience and risk mitigation strategies to ensure long-term financial viability. Through case studies and interactive exercises, SMEs will gain the skills needed to make informed financial decisions and enhance their financial resilience.

Promoting Digitalization and Climate Change Adaptation: This component will focus on enhancing the resilience of businesses to economic and environmental challenges through a dual approach:

- Integrating digital technologies to boost productivity and competitiveness of SMEs.
- Building a brand identity
- Creating a professional online store, digital marketing campaigns, and measuring their success
- Digital security for small businesses
- Promoting sustainable practices to reduce the environmental footprint by designing a long-term sustainability plan

It explores the incorporation of digital solutions such as e-commerce, mobile payments, data analytics, and automation to improve productivity and market access. Additionally, the course highlights sustainable business practices, including energy-efficient technologies, principles of the circular economy, and climate-smart production methods that minimize environmental impact. Participants will also learn how to access green financing opportunities and develop business models that align with climate adaptation strategies. Through practical case studies and hands-on exercises, SMEs will acquire the skills necessary to navigate the digital economy while ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change.

Participants

- Women and youth-led SMEs and cooperatives in Tunisia and Libya.
- Number of participants : 35 SMEs—25 from Tunisia and 10 from Libya.

Location and Dates :

- Date: September 9-12, 2025.
- Location: Tunis Marriott Hôtel

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