

CONCEPT NOTE

Leveraging Digital Technologies to Enhance Market Access for Women-owned Export Companies in the horticulture Value Chain

1.0 Overview

In Africa, the horticulture export industry has grown tenfold over the past few years, and the number of local exporters targeting the EU market has increased dramatically.¹ Despite the limited skills and capacity among local private operators, implementation of initiatives to build competitiveness has been the main objective for all exporters targeting the international market for fresh fruits and vegetables. The principal market for horticulture products for most African markets is the European Union (EU). However, horticulture products from the region have been subjected to numerous interceptions and rejections in the EU Market. For example, COMESA notes that, between 2009-2019, Kenya had 874 interceptions of its horticulture products exports due to harmful organisms, and 101 Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) notifications resulting in border rejections of the same products. Similarly, Uganda had 749 interceptions of its horticulture products exports due to harmful organisms, and 76 SPS notifications resulting in border rejections also, for the same reporting period.² A further result of these rejections has seen these countries imposing self-bans on some of their key exports. Within East Africa for example, Uganda's exports suffered the most SPS related interceptions / border rejections in the European Union.³

The data for Southern Africa states is similar on a percentage basis although their market exposure in horticultural exports to the EU is lower than for East Africa. However, the trend of SPS interception and notification exclusions is prevalent for South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Zambia and Mozambique. For example, during the same reported period (2009-2019), South Africa and Zimbabwe recorded the highest number of interceptions for its horticulture exports into the EU market with 486 and 423 interceptions respectively. This was followed by Zambia, Mauritius and Mozambique that recorded 64, 57 and 33 interceptions respectively in the same reporting period.⁴

¹ PIMA Reports: <https://www.standardsfacility.org/PG-606>

² <https://www.standardsfacility.org/PG-606>

³ P-IMA Uganda assessments reports,2020- <https://www.standardsfacility.org/PG-606>

⁴ Europhyt Website - https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/plant-health-and-biosecurity/europhyt/interceptions_en last accessed on 8th October 2023

For women, the horticulture sector offers lower entry requirements in terms of market opportunities both regional and international markets. However, there are several challenges faced by the industry in accessing markets both in terms of sanitary and phytosanitary import conditions that are regulated by importing countries and adherence to market standards demanded by buyers, which are driven by consumer preferences and values such as gender and social inclusion, environmental responsibility and labour standards. The low compliance with SPS regulations has thus led to frequent interceptions of export consignments with higher than acceptable pesticide residual levels (MRLs) and the presence of harmful pests among others. The lack of adherence to private standards and the high cost of private certification schemes limits the number of export companies, particularly women-owned that could benefit from private certification services such as Global Gap, which potentially could facilitate export to high value markets. These challenges pose a threat to the competitiveness of the horticulture exports and the women producers who depend on the industry for their livelihoods. There is need to explore these challenges further and isolate the impacts of such restrictions on women trade and livelihoods.

In light of the above, the Sub regional Office for Southern Africa in collaboration with the African Union Regional Office for Southern Africa (AU-SARO), will organize a side-event on **Leveraging Digital Technologies to Enhance Market Access for Women-owned Export Companies in the Horticulture Value Chain** during the Africa Industrialization Week (AIW), **11-13 November 2023**. Specifically, the planned side event will take place on **Saturday, 11th November 2023** at the **Multipurpose Hall B, at Al Manar International Conference Center, Cairo, Egypt**. This side event will further support SRO-SA's objective of deepening engagement with key partners on inclusive industrialization in order to strengthen interventions in support of women exporters in the Horticulture Value Chain.

2.0 Objectives of the side event

The high-level side event, to be organised in plenary with thematic presentations, will;

- Interrogate the major market access impediments faced by Women-owned export companies in the horticulture value chain;
- Assess the role of digital technologies in driving competitiveness through, for instance, effective risk SPS management systems, traceability applications and enhanced cultivation methods; and
- Proffer recommendations to address the challenges faced by Women-owned export companies in the horticulture value chain.

3.0 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes from the discussions are:

- i. Enhanced understanding and appreciation among the stakeholders on the key market access constraints faced by Women-owned export companies in the horticulture value chain;
- ii. Identification of the key digital technologies for driving the competitiveness of Women-owned export companies in the horticulture value chain;

- iii. Recommendations for accelerating the growth and competitiveness of Women-owned export companies in the horticulture value chain.

4.0 Participation

The Side-Event will be attended by representatives of Member States and their institutions, COMESA, SADC, SADC and COMESA Business Councils, COMESA Federation for Women in Business, AeTrade Group, African Union Commission, Grace Machel Trust, Trademark Africa, Land O Lakes, STDF of the World Trade Organization, GIZ and the United Nations.

5.0 Contacts

For any additional information on the side-event, kindly contact:

Ms. Talumba Ireen Chilipaine
Economic Affairs Officer
UNECA Southern Africa Office
P. O Box 30647
Lusaka, Zambia.
Mobile: +260 975005579
Email: talumba.chilipaine@un.org

and

Ms. Myranda Lutempo
Senior Policy Officer
African Union Southern Africa Regional Office (AU-SARO)
9th Floor Kang'ombe House
Lilongwe, Malawi.
Mobile: +265997756754
Email : LutempoM@africa-union.org
