



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK

## **National Workshops:**

**Unlocking opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises in Zimbabwe  
under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**

Organized by the

**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

**Subregional Office for Southern Africa**

(in collaboration with the Africa Trade Policy Centre)

Under the aegis of

**the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and Small and Medium Enterprises  
Development of Zimbabwe**

25-26 August, 2025

Venue: Rainbow Towers Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe.

28-29 August, 2025

Venue: Rainbow Towers Hotel, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

## **Concept Note**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Changing the longstanding narrative of Africa, as a region that is lagging in intra-regional trade, has become a top priority for the continent's Heads of State and Government. This commitment was first expressed through their 2012 Decision to "Boost intra-African trade" and was reaffirmed in June 2015, during the 25<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Johannesburg, where it was agreed for the historic step to be taken to launch negotiations towards the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This decision was reinforced by an unprecedented level of political will on the continent. Remarkably, within just three years of negotiations, the core foundations of the AfCFTA Agreement, such as the Phase I protocols, were adopted and signed by 44 countries in Kigali on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>. The momentum continued with the adoption of the Phase II protocols<sup>2</sup> in 2024, reflecting sustained political commitment. In parallel, and with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), at least 30 countries have drafted and adopted national AfCFTA implementation strategies to guide the effective rollout of the Agreement at the national level.

Trading under AfCFTA officially begun on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021<sup>3</sup>. The agreement is expected not only to boost trade across the continent but also to serve as an unprecedented catalyst for private sector development, sustainable economic growth, increased investment, decent job creation, and reduced poverty among other benefits. However, the extent to which countries will benefit from the AfCFTA depends largely on their level of development, capacities to adapt to the new trade environment, reform their business environment, improve on infrastructure and unlock opportunities for their private sectors from the continental market. The implementation of national AfCFTA implementation strategies will greatly contribute to this. The AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth call for special attention to be paid to these groups. One of the key actions to be undertaken is to strengthen the capacities of the private sector on the rules, procedures, and instruments for implementing the AfCFTA Agreement, as well as on market opportunities and challenges. This will enable them to participate effectively in the regional integration process and reap the benefits of the AfCFTA.

Pre-existing national conditions (strong policy frameworks, adequate infrastructure, institutional readiness, competitiveness of the private sector, export readiness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) ) can also significantly influence how quickly and effectively a country can capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Agreement. Indeed, no country can trade what it does not produce and what a country produces and exports matters.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Phase I protocols of the AfCFTA consist of the Protocol on Trade in Goods, the Protocol on Trade in Services, and the Protocol on Dispute Settlement Mechanism. The AfCFTA Agreement officially entered into force in May 2019, following the deposit of the 22<sup>nd</sup> instrument of ratification to the Chairperson of the AU Commission, while the operational phase was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019, at the 12<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Summit of AU Heads of States in Niamey, Niger. The first preferential trade transactions between AfCFTA State Parties began two years later, with the launch of the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) in July 2022, which officially started in October 2022.

<sup>2</sup> The Phase II protocols of the AfCFTA cover key areas beyond traditional trade, including investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights (IPR), women and youth in trade, and digital trade. These protocols represent a critical step toward deepening economic integration across the continent. However, they still require additional ratifications by Member States before they can enter into force and be fully implemented.

<sup>3</sup> The implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement was slightly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the strength of a country's industrial sector, its ability to access affordable inputs, the availability of skilled labor, the competitiveness of its private sector and SMEs in particular and the presence of an enabling investment climate are all critical factors in determining its ability to fully leverage the potential of the AfCFTA. In addition, an industrial policy aimed at promoting inclusive growth through targeted support for women and youth can help ensure broader population participation, thereby making the benefits of the AfCFTA more equitable and sustainable. The private sector is a critical driver of the AfCFTA process, as without their participation in trade and industry, countries will not be able to materialize the intended benefits of the AfCFTA in terms of increased intra-regional exports and imports, increased levels of intra-regional investment and creation of decent jobs.

Against the foregoing, the ECA Subregional Office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA), in collaboration with the ECA Africa Trade Policy Centre, and under the aegis of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and SME development, will be organising two national workshops (in Harare and Bulawayo), targeted mainly at Zimbabwean SMEs in order to train them on the AfCFTA and on how to unlock opportunities from the AfCFTA.

The national workshops will be supported by resource persons from other development partners including SADC Secretariat, COMESA secretariat and the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Members of the public sector in Zimbabwe will also be invited, in order to stimulate public-private sector dialogue on the state of play of the AfCFTA in Zimbabwe, on the challenges in implementing the AfCFTA Agreement, and on the challenges faced by the private sector in Zimbabwe to trade across borders, with an aim of delineating targeted support towards the SMEs and understanding the role of various State actors.

These two workshops form part of a subregional capacity building programme on the AfCFTA for the private sector in Southern Africa that ECA SRO-SA is rolling out, with support from ECA ATPC and funding from DANIDA. The workshops also intend to meet an official request for technical and financial support that the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and SME development had addressed to the ECA SRO-SA in February 2025.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP**

The two national workshops will pursue the following main objectives:

- Assess the level of AfCFTA implementation in Zimbabwe and challenges in implementation.
- Strengthen the capacities of public and private sector stakeholders, particularly small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Zimbabwe, in understanding and applying the operational instruments and protocols of the AfCFTA.
- Enhance understanding among government officials and private sector actors of the AfCFTA implementation instruments: Rules of Origin, E-Tariff Book, Non-Tariff Barrier (NTB) Notification Tools, and PAPSS.

- Sensitize SMEs on the market opportunities, benefits, and challenges of the AfCFTA, and provide guidance on how to leverage these benefits.
- Unpack for SMEs the Protocol on Digital trade and create awareness on the role that e-commerce can play in boosting their market access opportunities
- Facilitate the dissemination of information and knowledge related to the AfCFTA agreement and its operational instruments, enabling SMEs to meet regulatory and normative requirements.

### **3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- Enhanced knowledge of the state of implementation of AfCFTA among public and private stakeholders.
- Strengthened capacities by public and private stakeholders to implement the national AfCFTA strategy.
- Improved private sector understanding and knowledge of the agreement, and its protocols, and operational aspects including the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative.
- Increased capacity of SMEs to implement the provisions of the AfCFTA and use related tools (Rules of Origin, online platform for NTB reduction and elimination, e-tariff book, etc.).
- Enhanced awareness of market access opportunities available under the AfCFTA for Zimbabwean SMEs.
- Strengthened capacities by SMEs in Zimbabwe to leverage e-commerce and digital trade in the context of the AfCFTA.
- Development of best practices and recommendations for the private sector in the context of the AfCFTA.

### **4. EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

The expected results of the workshop are:

- 2 Workshops in Harare and Bulawayo
- 20 Government Officials capacitated on AfCFTA
- 100 SMEs sensitized on AfCFTA

### **5. FORMAT**

The national workshops will be only in-person and will consist of technical presentations followed by Questions & Answers sessions.

### **6. PARTICIPANTS**

The national workshops are expected to bring together approximately 60 participants, including government representatives and at least 45 SMEs.

The main beneficiaries will consist of export-ready entrepreneurs and SMEs engaged in intra-African trade.

Key institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Zimbabwe, ZimTrade, the Zimbabwe Development Investment Agency (ZIDA), the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, the Zimbabwe Confederation of Industries, and the Zimbabwe Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will be represented. In addition, technical partners and development agencies including the ECA African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC), the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), COMESA, SADC, TRALAC and DHL- Zimbabwe will participate, alongside staff from UNECA.

## **7. DATE AND VENUE**

25-26 August, Rainbow Towers Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe.

28-29 August, Rainbow Towers Hotel, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

## **8. LANGUAGE**

English.

## **9. CONTACTS**

For further information, please contact:

1. Ms. Bineswaree Bolaky (bineswaree.bolaky@un.org), Economic Affairs Officer, Subregional Office for Southern Africa, Economic Commission for Africa, Lusaka, Zambia.
2. Ms. Beauty Razemba (beautyraz3@gmail.com), Deputy Director, Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives Development, Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and SME Development, Republic of Zimbabwe.