

Supporting women and youth-led SMEs in the AfCFTA UN Women-ECA partnership in IATF 2021 and beyond

I. Background and context

Officials from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Liaison Office to the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) -ECA will collaborate on an initiative aimed at supporting women and youth-led Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the AfCFTA. This initiative will build on lessons learned from the Hyatt-Addis Ababa Women Trade Fare, co-led by UN Women and the African Union Commission (AUC) in November 2019, and extend support to women and youth entrepreneurs at the Intra-Africa Trade Fair (IATF), that will take place from 15-21 November in Durban, South Africa.

The theme for 2021 being the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), UN Women Liaison Office has booked 54 sqm at IATF 2021, to support women-led enterprises that wish to exhibit their products and use the space for meeting buyers and sharing experiences with women from various regions.

ECA, through ATPC, proposes to sponsor 35 SMEs to participation in IATF 2021- particularly women and youth-led SMEs. The main objective of this intervention is to support SMEs to identify and seize market opportunities under the AfCFTA and to expand their AfCFTA business networks. These businesses are expected to benefit from various discussion sessions as well as networking, shared experiences, and the establishing of linkages with other SMEs, larger enterprises, and investors from different regions.

Going forward, the intention is to build on UN Women-ECA collaboration in IATF 2021 and beyond, particularly as this relates to strengthening the export and entrepreneurship capacities of women and youth-led businesses in the AfCFTA. In particular, UN Women proposes convening a side-event that seeks not only to further elaborate on the 2019 discussions, but also to establish the priority needs and concerns of women entrepreneurs and youth-led SMEs in the AfCFTA. The following three initiatives may be considered as part of strategic collaboration between UN Women and ECA at IATF 2021 and beyond:-

II. Supporting women-led businesses in the AfCFTA: UN Women-ECA strategic collaboration at IATF 2021 and beyond

1: Collaboration on UN Women-sponsored pavilion at IATF 2021

As part of a UN Women-ECA collaboration, UN Women will offer spaces to both UN Women and ECA-sponsored SMEs to exhibit products in the UN Women-sponsored pavilion at IATF 2021. UN Women-supported businesses can display samples of their goods and products in the UN Women-sponsored pavilion. In addition, entrepreneurs can make use of the pavillion to network, particularly to meet with potential buyers as well as to share information and contacts

so that collaboration with fellow entrepreneurs and larger private sector representatives can continue post-IATF 2021. Benefits that accompany an onsite presence, include:

- Access to the exhibitor portal
- Exhibitor listing online.
- Social Media Exposure
- VTF – digital networking platform
- Trade and investment Conference
- B2B and B2G government meeting.
- Creative Africa Nexus Summit

2: ECA-UN Women convened side-event on the topic of “reaping the benefits of the AfCFTA through SME integration into regional/continental value chains”

This proposal would entail convening a separate side event on the margins of IATF 2021 during the morning of on Tuesday, 16 November. Convened for approximately 3 hours, the session entitled “**reaping the benefits of the AfCFTA through SME integration into regional/continental value chains**” will seek to guide and better equip SMEs with value chain integration strategies within the context of the AfCFTA. The working session will seek to inform SMEs representatives on the opportunities presented by regional value chains, while highlighting the main constraints confronting and limiting SME participation in regional value chains.

The session will further seek to raise awareness on how the AfCFTA Agreement and instruments can support more equitable participation in regional value chains. It will explore best practices and lessons learned by entrepreneurs who have successfully grown their businesses or have been unable to grow their businesses because of challenges they confront. The objective of the session **is to inform policy solutions and capacity building efforts to support SME-led efforts to export and integrate into higher value-added intra-regional value chains.**

The expected results/outcomes of this side event for beneficiary SMEs are as follows:

- Increased capacity to understand AfCFTA implications on their businesses (including the role of Governments)
- Better capacity to identify and position in, high value-added segments of RVCs

Panel session

ECA-UN Women convened side-event on the topic of “reaping the benefits of the AfCFTA through SME integration into regional/continental value chains”

16 November 2021 (8:30 am to 12:00)

Venue: Onomo Hotel, Durban, South Africa

Half day		
16 November 2021 (8:30 am to 12:00)		
Session 1: Panel on SME participation in RVCs under AfCFTA		
08:30 – 09:00	Registration	
09:00 – 09:15	Opening session / moderation	UN Women (Nadira Bayat)
09:15- 09:30	AfCFTA for SMEs: Emerging issues and Market access	ECA (Mahlet Girma) and UNDP (Komi TSOWOU)
09:30-09:40	Inclusive AfCFTA implementation: support for SMEs at national level /	AfCFTA National Committee Cote d’Ivoire (Fatoumata Fofana)

	complementary policies	
09:40-09:50	SMEs Participation in Regional Value Chains	SMEs (Nancy Gitonga)
09:50-10:00	Logistics to support SMEs in supply chains	Achil Yamen, Cameroun Shippers Council
10:00 -10:10	Trade in services	(TBT)
10:10-10:45	Q&A Discussions on the presentations	All
Coffee Break 10:45-11:00		
Session 2: Entrepreneur Experience Sharing Discussion		
11:00 to 12: 00pm	<p>Discussion sessions on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful entrepreneurs who have built their businesses for export / How to manage failures • Growing businesses for the export market • How to participate in regional value chains 	Moderator(s) (Agnes Gitau TBT) + SMEs
Lunch		

3: Establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem for women and youth led businesses in the AfCFTA: UN Women-sponsored coffee session

UN Women proposes to sponsor a coffee session on **Thursday, 18 November from 14:30-17:30**. The objective of the session is to explore and agree on priority challenges confronting women-led businesses in the network and to identify targeted interventions that will support these businesses on their trading journeys in the AfCFTA. It is important to note that lack of access to gender-responsive infrastructure, credit and finance constitute major barriers that prevent women entrepreneurs across the continent from growing their businesses. While access to trade finance is a critical lever for empowering women-led businesses to grasp new export, business and regional value chain opportunities created through the AfCFTA; this alone is not enough. Support must extend beyond access to trade finance to and other context-specific programmes to strengthen women's entrepreneurial skills, including through business development curricula, leadership, mentorship, networking, mind shift training etc. The focus for the coffee session should be on the creation of an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem that goes beyond networking and exhibition objectives at IATF 2021. Key intervention areas for support could include skills development, capacity building and training, establishment of a platform to support advocacy at country and regional levels, the creation of partnerships to support access to finance and other priority needs identified by women and women-led businesses in the entrepreneurial ecosystem coffee session.

The session will be useful in helping to develop training and capacity building programmes that identify market access, infrastructure and financing constraints as well as technical barriers to trade. It will further examine requirements in relation to AfCFTA export ready capacity development and training programmes for women entrepreneurs. This should include examining priority needs, including in relation to increased access to trade-related information on promising export markets; as well as increased access to AfCFTA trade promotion programmes targeted at women exporters. Other context-specific awareness and information sessions that increase the capacity of women-led businesses in the network to better understand the implications of the AfCFTA for their businesses and to identify new opportunities that will be

created through the AfCFTA, will be highlighted through this session. Support can further extend to identifying tools, including online market intelligence tools that provide information and data on African trade and markets.

Following the convening of the coffee session, UN Women and ECA technical advisors will map out the nature of support to be included in the design of a sustained ecosystem at the national and regional level for women-led businesses, within allocated time-lines. This could include *inter alia* encouraging partnerships with businesses that have been forged at IATF 2021, including new clients and/or suppliers; as well as monitoring of expanded networks established between women-led businesses and other larger firms operating across the continent. Targeted interventions will, to a large extent, be defined by the priority needs, issues and concerns identified by entrepreneurs participating in the UN Women-sponsored entrepreneurial ecosystem session.

UN Women and ECA can track progress, evaluate the effectiveness and consider the outcome of interventions and support provided to this network of women-led businesses to be export ready. A mid-term review of support extended to this network should be undertaken and a full report back on progress should be made at IATF2023. Women entrepreneurs participating in this initiative can serve as AfCFTA champions over the course of the next two years and beyond.

Thursday, 18 November 2021 14:30-17:30		
Establishing an entrepreneurial ecosystem for women and youth-led SMEs in the AfCFTA		
14:30- 14:40	Welcome	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marie Goretti Nduwayo: Liaison Advisor, UN Women, Ethiopia 	
14:40–15:00	Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maxime Houinato, Regional Director, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office Eunice Kamwendo, Director, ECA Sub Regional Office for Southern Africa
Session 1: Promoting entrepreneurship and regional value chain opportunities for women and youth-led SMEs in the AfCFTA		
15:00–16:00	Supporting the growth of entrepreneurship as a tool for women’s economic empowerment in the AfCFTA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaining from access to network and mentoring opportunities/successful entrepreneurs who have created new business opportunities and graduated from medium to larger enterprises/export firms through links with mentors and networking support Identification of best practice and lessons learned Regional value chain linkages, focusing on building business linkages in the region; and how SMEs have been able to link with larger firms in value chains, including by sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women-led SME Women-led large-scale enterprise/export firm Youth representative (ECA) All participants through interactive Q&A
Session 2: Entrepreneur experience-sharing		

16:00–17:15	Leveraging regional experiences of SMEs: sharing lessons learned and best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All participants
17:15-17:25	Summary of discussions and key take-aways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nadira Bayat: Gender and Trade Consultant, UN Women
17:25-17:30	Thanks and closing remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letty Chiwara: UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, AUC and ECA

III. Expected output

Several outputs are expected to arise from the UN Women-ECA collaboration in the context of women and the AfCFTA at IATF 2021 and beyond:

- i. UN Women–ECA IATF 2021 Outcome Report, containing strong policy and programme recommendations that will inform the design of:
 - National policies and complementary measures to address and remove systematic barriers, so that women-led SMEs and entrepreneurs share in the gains of the AfCFTA Agreement
 - Training, information and awareness creation sessions and other targeted capacity building programmes at the national and regional level, that respond to priority needs and provide the required support for women and youth-led businesses to identify new export and other opportunities in the AfCFTA
- ii. Priority insights to support a better understanding among AfCFTA negotiators of the gender dimension of AfCFTA Phase I and II issues.

IV. Communications Strategy

The Communications Plan will guide UN Women and ECA communications at IATF. The objectives of the Plan include promoting women and youth led businesses to strengthen their export and entrepreneurship capacities in the AfCFTA, promoting the work of ECA and UN Women and supporting networking opportunities for women and youth-led businesses to leverage new opportunities in and through the AfCFTA.