

## Report on ARFSD Side Event on AfCFTA and Gender Equality

The Side Event on *AfCFTA as a vehicle for gender equality towards Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063: A normative framework perspective* was held on the sidelines of the 8th edition of the Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (ARFSD), scheduled for 25 February-5 March 2022, in Kigali, Rwanda, under the theme *Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063*. Held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, the event was jointly organised by the Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA SRO-EA), the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Toward moving from commitments to action, UNECA, ITC, and UNFPA in Africa collaborated to discuss the ways, extent to which and prospects to attain gender equality, notably through trade under the AfCFTA, in the drive to achieve the global and continental goals in question. Hence, the primary objective of the Side Event was to explore and discuss the significance of the AfCFTA in achieving gender equality towards achieving SDG 5 and Agenda 2063 in Africa. Moderated by Ms. Mama Keita, Director UNECA/SRO-EA and Ludmila Azo, Rwanda Country Director of ITC, the session started with welcome remarks by the UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Fode Ndiaye, and keynote addresses by the Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECA, Mr. Antonio Pedro, the Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, Ms. Diene Keita and the Minister of Gender and Family Protection of the Republic of Rwanda, Honorable Bayisenge Jeanette.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. Ndiaye emphasized the significance of gender sensitive trade policies under AfCFTA because the participation of women in trade potentially increases Africa's GDP by 40%. Quoting UNECA's Executive Secretary Ms. Vera Songwe who referred to the AfCFTA as Africa's Marshall Plan, Mr. Pedro highlighted that the AfCFTA can go a long way in addressing challenges faced by women; close gender disparities as well as increasing Africa's intra-African trade in agri-foods by 40% and expand industry by 39%. Ms. Diene Keita stressed the importance of inclusive legislation, women self-determination, empirical data and evidence-based policy making in consolidating gender equality towards SDGs and aspirations of agenda 2063. She also maintained that women's SMEs account for 60% of Africa's GDP and 450 million jobs on the continent. Furthermore, Honorable Professor Bayisenge Jeanette pinpointed that despite patriarchal challenges still prevalent in Africa, Rwanda's efforts has culminated in the country ranked 7th globally in terms of closing gender gaps with 61% women's representation in parliament. In the panel discussion, Honorable Rubagumya Emma Furaha who is President of the Commission on Political Affairs and Gender highlighted that Rwanda's ratification of the AfCFTA, promulgation of legal frameworks to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women are clear indications of Rwanda's political will and commitment towards SDGs and Agenda 2063. Africa's Regional Coordinator for Equality Now, Ms. Judy Gitau, argued that the AfCFTA recognizes the significance of gender equality right from its preamble and its implementation requires gender sensitivity. Ms. Kaba, Former Minister of Finance and Economy, Guinea and CEO of FALEME CONSEIL concluded that promoting gender equality could boost Africa's GDP by 10% and USD12 trillion could be gained by 2035. Mr. Kahuthu, Regional Coordinator and CEO, East African Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture touched on the importance of public-private sector partnership in mitigating challenges to gender equality in Africa. Ms. Candide Leguede, CEO ECOWAS Federation of Business Women and Entrepreneurs (FEBWE) discussed innovative approaches to foster women's economic empowerment in Africa. Mr Douglas Baguma, Founder of Innovex Uganda, mentioned the importance of dialogue and improvement youth welfare towards African growth under AfCFTA. Finally, Ms. Judith Fessehaie, Senior Programme Officer of ITC's SheTrades Initiative touched on the importance of evidence-based approaches to mitigating gender gaps. SheTrades Initiative supports women producers and entrepreneurs to access regional and international markets. On participation of women in AfCFTA consultations, 70% of women businesses have reported that they have not been consulted. Therefore, we need to make sure that women have a voice in the AfCFTA.

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