



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



SADC-WIB  
WOMEN IN BUSINESS



# Women and Private Sector Engagement in Inclusive AfCFTA Implementation: Views from SADC

Webinar convened by the African Trade Policy Centre at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC)-Women in Business and the SADC Business Council

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## REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

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## Executive Summary

Trading under the historic Agreement Establishing under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will commence on 1 January 2021. Coinciding with this historic occasion is the start of the new Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion. The 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) adopted the "New African Women's Decade" (2020-2030), as the decade of "Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion." The year 2021 will be pivotal for both milestones in so far as it provides the opportunity for AfCFTA State Parties to drive creative and bold interventions that link women's financial and economic empowerment goals to inclusive AfCFTA implementation. It was against this backdrop that the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC)-Women in Business and the SADC Business Council convened a webinar on **"Women and private sector engagement in inclusive AfCFTA implementation: Views from SADC"**. Over the course of the webinar, a rich discussion ensued over how to strengthen national and regional policy responses to advance gender equality objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement and women's economic empowerment in inclusive AfCFTA implementation. The recurrent refrain was the need to move beyond the rhetoric on policy, towards the identification of gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures that advance women's financial and economic empowerment goals in inclusive AfCFTA implementation.

Some of the practical recommendations that emerged during the course of the webinar, included:

### **Close the gender gap in access to finance**

- Prioritise access to finance start-ups to scale up operations to take advantage of opportunities in new export markets.
- Offer collateral-free loans and financial management to help micro-finance institutions and women micro-entrepreneurs to manage and grow their businesses.

### **Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA**

- Leverage capacity building, technical assistance and training provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement to build the capacity and expertise of women entrepreneurs, including micro-entrepreneurs to export and participate in new AfCFTA trading and economic opportunities.
- Facilitate dialogue, share good practices, regional approaches and experiences on removing trade-related barriers and increasing the participation of women in trade, particularly in the context of the AfCFTA.
- Capacity strengthening in strategic areas of entrepreneurship development.

### **Empower women in the export sector**

- Create market access opportunities: empower women entrepreneurs to take advantage of AfCFTA export opportunities through increased knowledge of regional export market access.



- Promote the emergence of women exporters in traditional and non-traditional sectors.
- Foster linkages and partnerships with new buyers and provide support for trade portals, sector studies and market entry strategies, to identify promising continental markets for women-business owners to export in the AfCFTA.
- Prioritise financial support for women in export businesses, to foster access to African markets.
- Support women at grassroots level to enhance the quality of their products for an integrated continental market.

#### **Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement**

- Increase opportunities for women grassroot producers in value addition manufacturing and equipment.
- Explore regional value chain opportunities for women in transport and other male-dominated industries.
- Explore private sector partnerships to assist women-owned SMEs reach regional markets by being part of corporate supply chains.
- African Governments to design gender-responsive public procurement policies that advantage women-owned businesses in the AfCFTA.

#### **Empower women's participation in e-commerce and digital trade solutions**

- Support women's participation in e-commerce which boosts intra-African trade through bridging the gender digital divide and putting in place the required ICT infrastructure.
- Recognising that poor digital literacy and a lack of digital skills is one of the main drivers of the gender digital divide, and a particular constraint to women's participation in e-commerce, incorporate digital literacy and digital skills for women in national digital and e-commerce strategies.
- Identify capacity development, digital literacy and training needs for women to participate more effectively in digital trade and digital platforms.
- Remove barriers, including access to data and devices to enable all women - including small-scale cross-border traders - to leverage digital trade solutions in the context of the AfCFTA.

#### **AfCFTA sensitization and inclusion of women's voices in AfCFTA national implementation efforts**

- Ensure that women in their various economic roles, in urban and rural areas, as well as youth and people with disabilities benefit from information on AfCFTA opportunities.
- Share information on how women can access and contribute to AfCFTA national policy processes. Further consideration to be given to the establishment of national Sub-Committees to drive an AfCFTA agenda for women.
- Deliberate efforts should be made to include women-led organisations, women's cooperatives and cross-border trader associations in National AfCFTA Committees.



## Background and context

Trading under the historic Agreement Establishing under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will commence on 1 January 2021. Coinciding with this historic occasion is the start of the new Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion. The 33rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) adopted the "New African Women's Decade" (2020-2030), as the decade of "Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion." The AfCFTA has the potential to accelerate the economic empowerment of women as a fundamental component of gender equality, by expanding women's economic opportunities and outcomes in the world of work. Notwithstanding this potential, gains will not be automatic. Maximising the AfCFTA's benefits will require an inclusive approach to the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement. Entrenched poverty and growing gender inequalities in employment, labour force participation and working conditions during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 makes it increasingly unlikely that African Governments will achieve national, regional and global objectives to end poverty in all its forms, or any related goals or associated targets. These realities provide a compelling rationale for advancing women's full and equal participation in AfCFTA implementation and as part of the solution to post-Covid-19 recovery efforts. Gender-responsive policies that explicitly consider gender-specific effects of the crisis and support women's decent employment creation must be prioritised. It was against this backdrop that the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC)-Women in Business and the SADC Business Council convened a webinar on **"Women and private sector engagement in inclusive AfCFTA implementation: Views from SADC"**.

Over the course of the webinar, a rich discussion ensued over how to strengthen national and regional policy responses to advance gender equality objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement and women's economic empowerment in inclusive AfCFTA implementation. Emphasis was placed on the generation of concrete proposals to inform the design of gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures to build back better in longer-term post-COVID 19 economic recovery efforts. Recognising the critical role that women's business associations play, the webinar provided a platform to identify and convey the priority needs and concerns of women entrepreneurs, small-scale and informal cross-border traders that should be addressed as part of inclusive AfCFTA implementation. In his inaugural speech on as the AU Chairperson on 9 February 2020, President Ramaphosa underscored the need for the continent to find more practical and sustainable ways of empowering African women in ways that go 'beyond the clichés and pronouncements made from podiums'. The overall objective of the webinar was to provide a platform for deliberations on concrete actions that promote financial and economic inclusion for African women as part of inclusive AfCFTA implementation. In so doing, the webinar sought to support President Ramaphosa's goal of empowering African women in the 2020-2030 decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion. The following report of proceedings summarizes the presentations of speakers at the webinar. An overview of some of the practical recommendations that emerged during the course of the webinar, is included at the end of the report.



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*Session I – Opening*

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**Nadira Bayat: Gender and Trade Expert: ATPC-ECA**



We convene today for the first regional dialogue on "Women and private sector engagement in inclusive AfCFTA implementation during these extraordinary times to discuss the AfCFTA - a historic Pan-African initiative that breaks down arbitrary barriers and artificial boundaries and brings us together in our common vision and goal of a united Africa. By this larger imperative I mean ensuring that inclusiveness under the AfCFTA creates opportunities for all segments of society, especially the most disadvantaged, while paying close attention

to various forms of inequalities, including gender inequality. Your participation in today's webinar informs a larger global discourse that recognises the potential for gender-blind trade policy to perpetuate and even exacerbate existing disparities and gender inequalities, and the need for deliberate efforts to formulate trade policy that is gender sensitive or gender responsive. In the context of the AfCFTA, this would require AU Member States to firstly, to acknowledge that COVID-19 will impact the most vulnerable and marginalized populations—among which women are disproportionately represented—the hardest, and the need to manage the gender-impact of intra-African trade liberalization. This means particularly ensuring that AfCFTA implementation does not entrench existing disparities and gender inequalities in an integrated continental market. Secondly, it would require SADC Governments - all African Governments - to formulate gender-responsive policy and complementary measures that address gender-related trade barriers that tend to disproportionately affect women in their various roles, while promoting equality of opportunities in the labour market, especially for female workers and building the capacity and expertise of women to trade in the AfCFTA. We know that the extent to which women will be able to take advantage of AfCFTA opportunities, including in the priority economic sectors agriculture, manufacturing, services, digital trade/e-commerce and regional value chains, is not dependent on trade policy alone. Gender responsive policies and complementary measures that improve women's access to skills development, technical training, digital technologies, finance and trade-related information, as well as infrastructure will be critical to enhancing the capacity of women to leverage new trade and economic opportunities created for women under the AfCFTA.

This panel of experts brings together representation from Government, private sector, civil society and development partners with the common objective of strengthening inclusive AfCFTA implementation. While the AfCFTA provides considerable opportunities for economic development in Africa, there should not be an assumption that trade gains arising from AfCFTA implementation will be equitably distributed, nor that it will automatically translate into higher levels of employment. Equally, we need to recognise, notwithstanding the tremendous potential, benefits to women under the AfCFTA will not be automatic. AfCFTA State Parties will need to adopt



a deliberate and targeted approach to supporting gender equality objectives under the AfCFTA Agreement and advancing economic empowerment outcomes for women. What makes the composition of this panel special is that it reflects the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA. It is a reflection in that it acknowledges that while responsibility for the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement lies ultimately with all African Governments, inclusive implementation can be best achieved through partnerships. Given the unprecedented nature of the crisis caused by the pandemic, an ecosystem of partners, including the private sector, civil society and development partners must come together as part of a ‘business *unusual*’ to support a truly inclusive approach to AfCFTA implementation, which may be best achieved through a gender-sensitive approach. Although responsibility for implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement remains with African Governments, women’s business organisations play a critical role in providing constructive input and informing Governments of the on-the-ground constraints that impede daily trade-related operations of their members and other women. This information in turn highlights regulatory reform required and appropriate labour, education, capacity building, skills development and training policies as well as legal and social reforms to support women workers, producers, entrepreneurs, small-scale and cross-border traders leverage the benefits of the AfCFTA.

The AfCFTA marks another firm step in the Pan-African imperative of a united Africa. When reflecting on the writings of Dr Kwame Nkrumah- one of the architects of Pan-Africanism, we are often reminded of Dr Nkrumah’s desire to translate Pan-Africanism from an ideal of solidarity to something concrete and real. Keeping with the intention of translating the aspirational into something tangible, African leaders declared 2020 to 2030 the new Decade of Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion. In his inaugural speech as the AU Chairperson, President Ramaphosa underscored the need for the continent to find more practical and sustainable ways of empowering African women in ways that go ‘beyond the clichés and pronouncements made from podiums’. As Africa enters the African Union 2020-2030 Decade of African Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion, and in the lead-up to the 1 January 2021 start of trade under the AfCFTA, we have the opportunity to contribute to creative and bold interventions that link women’s financial and economic empowerment goals to inclusive AfCFTA implementation.

Participation in this webinar thus carries an important responsibility. Whatever your capacity – as Government or policy makers, private sector, civil society, development partners – and most importantly as African citizens and as equal custodians of the AfCFTA – We ALL play a critical role in supporting meaningful and inclusive AfCFTA implementation. Indeed, our collective efforts today in examining opportunities, understanding the diverse trade-relevant constraints and challenges confronting women in their roles as workers, producers, entrepreneurs, small-scale and cross-border traders can inform pro-active programmes and the design of gender-responsive AfCFTA policies and context-specific complementary measures that ensure equality of opportunities for women and men in the AfCFTA. In so doing, we support President Ramaphosa’s goal of identifying practical and sustainable means of empowering African women in ways that go ‘beyond the clichés and pronouncements made from podiums’.



**Pinky Kekana: Deputy Minister of Communication and Digital Technology; Secretary General and Patron of the Pan African Business Women's Association (PABWA)**



The historic African Continental Free Trade Area is scheduled to become effective on 1 January 2021. It is being hailed as a game-changer, creating the world’s largest free trade area, 2nd only to the WTO, with the potential to boost Africa’s socio-economic transformation, bringing together 1.2 billion people, and for the very first time uniting all 55 countries, across Mother Africa. At the 33rd summit of Heads of State at the African Union earlier this year, 2020-2030 was declared as the African Women’s Decade of Economic and Financial Inclusion. This is in the context of Agenda 2063, and the

traders. The SADC region mirrors this number. The AfCFTA comes at a time when gender responsive trade facilitation measures require much focus and many solutions. The challenges of women traders need to be more than just prioritised in policy and legislation, they need to be activated, measured and monitored, with a continuous cycle of improvement and growth. As we face the new normal and the role technology plays in our current and future lives, digitalisation is at the forefront of a digital economy. Closing the gender digital divide is critical to the growth and development of a digital economy, and in less than 60 days we will have created a historical moment for Africa’s future economic growth, with the AfCFTA coming into effect. Africa Industrialisation Day is observed annually on the 20th of November. This year the African Union has declared Africa Industrialisation Week from the 16th to the 20th of November under the theme “Inclusive and sustainable industrialisation in the AfCFTA era”. This makes it clear that inclusivity and sustainability are the leading factors for the African Union as we begin trading under the AfCFTA, come 1 January 2021. Industrialisation of Africa serves a dual purpose in the context of the AfCFTA – it is an outcome and it is a tool for delivery and investment. Referencing Agenda 2063, and the “Africa we Want”, we cannot leave anyone behind, most definitely women. But, also why would we want to? Adding 50 percent of the population working towards economic growth makes sense for any country, so before we look at the participation of women under the AfCFTA, we have to take a step back and look at the status of women in Africa.

Historically, African women have been differentially integrated into the African economic system, compared to men, serving primarily as a labour reserve and became the embodiment of the low-income subsistence and reproductive sectors. In 1997, SADC Member States adopted the ‘Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children’ was adopted in 1998. The Declaration called upon Member States to increase women’s participation in politics and decision making to at least 30 percent by 2005. The SADC Gender Policy subsequently stated, “SADC Member States shall increase and improve the representation of women in all structures of governance and all levels of decision making in public, private and social spheres to at least 50 percent by 2015.” Since 1997, SADC has seen much progress towards achieving integration of women at all levels and into all sectors of society, business, and economic development, and while some countries have met and exceeded the 2015 goal, some countries have not. The SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2020 has given us some insight into the gaps and the areas of weakness and threats. For a comprehensive view, we



await the 'State of Women in SADC' Report, to be published in November 2020, which weighs indicators across all these sectors and ranks countries on the basis thereof. Emphasis must be on quality rather than the quantity of female participation, and authenticity of commitment, because it is a reality that women can participate in the labour force but as exploited wage labourers or unsupported informal traders. We know that approximately 70 percent of informal traders are women, creating an opportunity to transform. Without this informal sector transformation or formalisation, it is certain that it will negatively impact economic development in the country and mean incomplete formalisation across Africa. This all not only emphasizes a lack of commitment to SDG 5 of gender equality, but a lack of inclusivity of all types, whether this be women, youth, digitalisation, or the private sector, will delay progress towards industrialisation and economic growth. In terms of sensitivity under the AfCFTA, in summary, it is critical to actually look inward, before focussing on external trade. Development plans by governments, government entities and the private sector must proliferate internal economic development programmes, create infrastructure, develop skills, and very importantly – digital transformation of the country, including a focus on developing a digital economy.

The private sector in the SADC region plays a critical role in mobilising this focus, towards investment, economic growth, external trade and benefitting from the AfCFTA. If a country is active in industrialisation – it stands to reason that it is strong in its capacity to trade with the rest of Africa and the world. One of the examples of this internal development, is that the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, whom I represent as Deputy Minister, is working on finalising the country's Digital Economy Masterplan, which traverses into the broader strategy of driving South Africa's economic growth. According to Accenture, a comprehensive digital economy in South Africa could boost our total GDP by 3 percent, equating to approximately 12 billion dollars. Evidence that digitalisation catapults industrialisation and puts part of the power of economic development and growth, into the hands of our people. Look at how a simple smartphone and cost-effective data can change the world of trading for women in rural areas. Connectivity can obliterate border barriers, allowing women to trade, buy, and bank regardless of where they are in the world. Connectivity can level all playing fields, changing the face of trade forever. We need to see tangible gender results in the economic statistics of our region, and in the financial inclusion of our women and girls through education, business, employment and closing of the wage gap. The private sector partnering with governments is critical, while the digitalisation of our economies, not just the trade sector, will result in optimised AfCFTA participation.



## Emmanuel Mwamba: Ambassador of Zambia to Ethiopia, Permanent Representative to the AU



The start of trading under the AfCFTA is underway in less than two months-time. The Heads of State and Government of the African Union have resolved that implementation of the AfCFTA cannot be delayed any further but will commence on 1 January 2021. Our leaders have provided the highest political support to the AfCFTA processes, in view of their commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2063, towards the realization of the Africa we want. This means that the year 2021 is going to be a more promising and exciting year for Africa. African countries can't wait to seize the many opportunities associated with the implementation.

The AfCFTA will be huge market of 1.3 billion people across 55 African countries with a combined GDP of 3.4 trillion dollars, providing opportunities for intra African trade and investments. However, it is important to note that despite the studies showing a net increase in trade and welfare as a result of the AfCFTA, the distribution of benefits will differ by country. It will also have product – specific and sector specific implications. It is also a known fact that despite the AfCFTA being negotiated at the continental level, much of the gains from the implementation of the AfCFTA, will be at country or national levels. Therefore, towards a gender - sensitive approach to AfCFTA Implementation, implies the need for Member States to develop and mainstream gender in National AfCFTA Strategies to implement the AfCFTA Agreement in a manner which will ensure that women are able to leverage new opportunities and benefits from the AfCFTA. In order to mainstream gender in National AfCFTA Strategies, it will be important to identify key sectors which are more female dominated through which specific interventions could be targeted. The phrase gender-sensitive approach, generally implies putting in place deliberate policies and programmes that consider the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources. In this case, we are looking at the interests of women vis-à-vis the AfCFTA implementation. Literature reveals that African trade is dominated by agricultural and mining products, and it is therefore not surprising that most studies reveal that agriculture and food products are likely to gain most from intra-regional liberalization with a possible increase in total industrial exports as well as in intra-African trade in services. However, it is anticipated that benefits from implementation of the AfCFTA will accrue more to the players who will reposition their business well to take advantage of the huge market.

### Impact of the AfCFTA

According to the World Bank, the AfCFTA has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty and 68 million people from moderate poverty. Further, implementation of the AfCFTA would increase employment opportunities and wages for unskilled workers and help to close the gender gap. Policy makers will need to carefully monitor AfCFTA's distributional impacts, particularly on female and male workers in order to provide effective safety nets where they are needed most.



### Marginalization of Women

Across Africa, women face high levels of marginalisation and discrimination: many women are employed in low-skilled and low-income generating sectors or are invisible given their role in unpaid domestic housework. Gender, informal work and poverty often co-exist, and the informal economy remains an important source of employment and income for women throughout the developing world. Women typically comprise up to 70 percent of informal cross border traders across Africa and are frequently the primary breadwinners of their families, despite the precarious nature of informal trade and threats to their personal safety. In the agricultural sector, women are often lowly skilled or subsistence farmers that have little access to formal markets and quality inputs. The African Development Bank (AfDB), indicates that women are responsible for up to two-thirds of the agricultural labour force and most of the food on the continent. However, women farmers have less access to essential inputs such as land, credit, fertilisers, new technologies and extension services. As a result, their yields tend to be significantly lower than men's. They also lack the opportunity to integrate into value chains and to improve their production levels and food quality standards. Similarly, low-skilled manufacturing is often characterised by women employees that face little opportunity to upskill and face the risk of job redundancy upon the factory's relocation to cheaper production sites in other countries. While the AfCFTA has the potential to generate direct and indirect employment, in particular for women and young Africans, while advancing food security, agriculture and infrastructure development goals, however, intra-African trade liberalization could escalate the existing gender gaps if the necessary steps are not taken to prevent or alleviate potential adverse effects arising from AfCFTA market liberalization.

Ensuring a gender-sensitive approach to AfCFTA implementation requires:

- African Governments to deliberately design strategies for mainstreaming gender in National AfCFTA Strategies.
- Deliberate measures which promote and accelerate the growth of women-led and women-owned businesses on the continent.
- Domesticating the AfCFTA at the national level, which can assist in redressing existing gender economic empowerment challenges.
- Identifying opportunities and gender-specific barriers confronting women in strategic economic sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing and services.
- Providing AfCFTA capacity building training to women-owned business, small-scale and informal cross-border traders to be able to understand the implications of the AfCFTA on their businesses.
- Providing women with easy access to finance through simpler banking requirements/via cooperatives.
- Empowering and supporting women with industrial skills training opportunities, to make it easy for women to move into medium and higher-skilled manufacturing jobs, and not to be trapped in lowly skilled factory work only.
- Implementing policies on informal cross border trade which enables women to formalise and ultimately expand their businesses, with easy.



- Support for women to be easily integrated into agricultural regional value chains by partnering with larger companies and simple value-added agro-processing
- Technical assistance and capacity building to women entrepreneurs to be able to enhance understanding of cross-border trade regulations.
- Mechanisms which enable women to successfully operate SMEs through access to finance and appropriate business development support based on their respective needs and industry-specific requirements.
- Providing equal employment opportunities to women, as a means for raising capital while addressing wage inequalities which exist.

*Session II – Advancing gender equality and economic empowerment of women outcomes in AfCFTA implementation:  
Moderated panel discussion*

Session II was a moderated panel discussion on “advancing gender equality and economic empowerment of women outcomes in AfCFTA implementation”. By inviting panelists to respond to targeted questions, the dialogue aimed to highlight good practices, creative approaches, lessons learned, and to identify gender-specific challenges that must be addressed for women in their various economic roles to harness the opportunities of the AfCFTA in the “New African Women’s Decade” (2020-2030). The session commenced with opening remarks from Ms Bayat that illustrated how a truly inclusive approach to AfCFTA implementation could be best achieved through a gender-sensitive approach; and specifically, through the process of gender mainstreaming in National Strategies to implement the AfCFTA Agreement.

**Nadira Bayat: Gender and Trade Expert: ATPC-ECA**



Women are not a homogenous group. They make a strong contribution to trade and play multiple roles in African economies as:

- Owners/entrepreneurs of micro and small enterprises (MSMEs)
- Informal cross-border traders
- Small-scale traders and vendors
- Workers, producers and entrepreneurs in strategic economic sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing and services
- Formal sector entrepreneurs of large-scale enterprises/importers and exporters

The AfCFTA has the potential to accelerate the economic empowerment of women as a fundamental component of gender equality by increasing opportunities for women in their various roles and across the key sectors of agriculture, manufacturing and services. In particular, the



AfCFTA expands entrepreneurship and economic opportunities for increased intra-African trade through exports of goods and services by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Women-owned businesses benefit from economies of scale and increased access to new regional export markets. Boosting the demand for manufactured goods also creates the opportunity for larger export-oriented industries to source suppliers from smaller women-owned businesses across borders, while opening the borders to trade increases opportunities for women to participate in trade through reconfigured regional value chains. While trade integration creates opportunities for businesses to grow, challenges of access to finance, market information, digital technology, as well as traditional gender roles and socio-cultural barriers means that women entrepreneurs are often unable to scale up operations and take advantage of new opportunities in exports markets.

In order to understand the broader legislative framework underpinning gender equality and economic outcomes for women in the context of the AfCFTA, it is necessary to examine how these priorities are reflected in the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA. The AfCFTA Agreement does not contain a separate chapter on gender and trade, with corresponding gender-explicit provisions that promote gender equality in specific areas or require AfCFTA State Parties to facilitate women's participation in trade through the formulation of 'positive commitments' (affirmative action to redress past discrimination) or 'negative prescriptions' (making use of exemptions). Gender equality considerations are, however, recognised in the AfCFTA Agreement as follows:

- The Preamble of the Agreement includes a reference to the importance of gender equality for the development of international trade and economic cooperation.
- Article 3 (e) emphasizes the need to promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties, as one of the general objectives of the AfCFTA.
- Article 27 (2) (d) of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services refers to improving the export capacity of formal and informal service suppliers, with particular attention to micro, small and medium-sized operators and "women and youth service suppliers".

There are a number of provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement - although not gender-specific - that are of consequence to women in their roles as workers, entrepreneurs (owners of informal and formal enterprises), small-scale and informal cross-border traders. While not targeted at women directly, these provisions could be leveraged to empower and expand new trade and economic opportunities generated by AfCFTA for women in their roles as workers, producers, entrepreneurs, small-scale and informal cross-border traders. For example, **customs cooperation, trade facilitation and transit** provisions simplify and harmonize customs and border procedures that would benefit women entrepreneurs and informal cross-border traders, who tend to be disproportionately affected by trade documentation and other technical regulations and procedures at the border. Trade facilitation measures in particular can make it easier for women to trade. Trade facilitation address non-tariff barriers that can burden businesses even more than traditional tariffs and are particularly obstructive for women entrepreneurs. Being predominantly small in scale, women-led businesses are disproportionately affected by burdensome non-tariff barriers to trade. The **AfCFTA Online Portal for Non-tariff barrier Monitoring, Reporting and Elimination**, created under Annex 5 of the Protocol on Trade in Goods, provides an opportunity



for women-owned businesses that confront particularly acute non-tariff barrier-related challenges to submit trade barrier complaints.<sup>1</sup> **Technical barriers to trade; sanitary and phytosanitary measures**<sup>2</sup> cover mutual recognition of standards, licensing and certification of service suppliers across the continent, making it easier for small-scale traders and smallholder farmers to meet export standards and satisfy regulatory requirements. These provisions can help to address trade obstacles that remain particularly burdensome for female entrepreneurs, producers and traders. Included among the many obstacles for women are the costs of complying with technical or sanitary standards, obtaining certificates of origin and other trade documentation to expedite the movement of goods across borders. **Technical assistance, capacity building and training provisions**<sup>3</sup> could help to improve the export capacity and build the technical expertise, skills and trading capacity of micro, small and medium-sized businesses and women entrepreneurs; empowering them to take advantage of new export opportunities arising from AfCFTA implementation. Training and capacity building for trade participation could further assist small-scale female entrepreneurs to formalize their businesses to become small or medium export businesses. These provisions could strengthen the quality of products while assisting entrepreneurs to form market links with regional and potentially international buyers at a later stage. Beyond these provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement, it is important to acknowledge **sensitive products and exclusion list provisions** that allow African countries to select a specified number of tariff lines to be temporarily excluded from tariff liberalization, enabling them to protect specific products and sectors that are critical for food security, employ a high number of women and considered essential for women's needs.

Notwithstanding the potential, AfCFTA gains will not be automatic. The Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA is a continental Agreement, but implementation will take place at the national level. AfCFTA National Strategies have been identified as a means through which to ensure a coherent and strategic approach towards maximising the AfCFTA Agreement's potential benefits while preparing for potential risks. Leveraging these provisions, however, would require a truly inclusive approach to AfCFTA implementation, that could be best achieved through a gender-sensitive approach; and specifically through the process of gender mainstreaming in National Strategies to implement the AfCFTA Agreement. As AfCFTA State Parties will need to effect substantial domestic policy reforms and align national legislation with the AfCFTA Agreement in order to reduce the barriers to intra-African trade, advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment outcomes in AfCFTA implementation can only be realized through deliberate and targeted actions. To ensure that AfCFTA objectives on gender equality are

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<sup>1</sup> These complaints are in turn forwarded by an administrator to nominated focal points in the reporting and offending countries, as well as to relevant regional economic communities and the AfCFTA Secretariat for oversight and intervention. See in this regard: [www.tradebarriers.africa](http://www.tradebarriers.africa).

<sup>2</sup> Technical barriers to trade; sanitary and phytosanitary measures are elaborated upon in Trade in Goods Annexes 6 and 7 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> See Article 27 (2) (d) of the Protocol on Trade in Services, requiring State Parties, where possible, to mobilise resources in collaboration with development partners to implement measures in support of domestic efforts of State Parties, with a view *inter alia* to improving the export capacity of both formal and informal service suppliers, with particular attention to micro, small and medium size, women and youth service suppliers. Also see, Protocol on Trade in Goods Annex 7 on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures, requiring State Parties to cooperate on capacity building for public and private stakeholders, including through information sharing and training on SPS measures (Article 14 (e) on Cooperation and Technical Assistance).



realised, there needs to be a special effort to mainstream gender in AfCFTA National Strategies. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in AfCFTA National Strategies requires assessing and responding to differentiated implications for women and men arising from AfCFTA market liberalization. This process highlights gender-specific barriers and structural differences in the economic participation of women and men. It examines opportunities, as well as potential AfCFTA-related risks and gender-specific constraints for women who tend to be disproportionately affected by trade barriers and inequalities in key economic sectors. Mainstreaming can further inform a trade facilitation agenda that acts as a catalyst for trade, particularly for women entrepreneurs and small-scale traders, while helping to identify technical education, skills development and training required to ensure that women and men benefit equally in an integrated continental market. A targeted strategy that seeks to address and remove gender-related trade constraints and existing inequalities through gender-responsive policies and complementary measures can support women who tend to be disproportionately affected by multiple forms of discrimination and economic barriers, to access higher-skilled jobs, upgrade into higher-productivity activities and leverage new opportunities created through the AfCFTA.

Key findings emanating from the process of gender mainstreaming could improve economic empowerment outcomes for women; advancing gender equality objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement and contributing to shared and inclusive growth in African countries. The start of trading under the AfCFTA Agreement that was set to commence on 1 July 2020 has been postponed to January 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Africa enters the New African Women's Decade (2020-2030) of Financial and Economic Inclusion that also coincides with AfCFTA implementation, AfCFTA State Parties will be required to take appropriate action to effectively implement commitments to advance the welfare of women and girls on the continent. The year 2021 will be pivotal for both milestones in so far as it provides the opportunity for State Parties to drive creative and bold interventions that link women's financial and economic empowerment goals to inclusive AfCFTA implementation. Through targeted questions, the next segment will seek to identify priority issues for consideration in the design of government policies, complementary measures and other targeted interventions that seek to enhance economic empowerment outcomes for women; advancing gender equality objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement in the 2020–2030 Decade of African Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion.

With that, I turn to Deputy Minister Kekana with the following two questions:

#### **Deputy Minister Kekana: Deputy Minister of Communication and Digital Technology**

We know that digitalization offers significant opportunities, including for e-commerce which boosts intra - African trade, accelerating progress towards the realization of the objectives of the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA. As a rapidly growing force in global trade, e-commerce can provide equality of opportunities for women as entrepreneurs and traders. While e-commerce can advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment, the benefits do not accrue automatically and will be dependent on SADC countries to adapt to the digital economy. Advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment through e-commerce requires bridging the gender digital divide as a matter of priority



and addressing poor digital literacy and a lack of digital skills as one of the main drivers of the gender digital divide, and as a particular constraint to women’s participation in e-commerce.

**Q1: What policy interventions should SADC Governments put in place to ensure that drivers of the gender digital divide are addressed as part of inclusive AfCFTA implementation?**

Countries across the continent are examining how best to use ICT to improve efficiency in trade. Some of the digital trade solutions proposed include improving efficiency in cross-border trade through development of online payment solutions, mobile apps for small-scale cross-border traders, e-logistics, and e-legislation, which will allow countries in the region to carry out e-transactions and e-payments.

**Q2: What opportunities are there for building upon and advancing these and other digital trade solutions in the context of the AfCFTA?**



**Q1:** From a continental perspective, we only need reference Agenda 2063 and the African Women’s Decade of Economic and Financial Inclusion. In South Africa, we have our National Development Plan 2030 that says amongst other things, to “reduce inequality and unemployment through inclusive economic growth”. I could name many others, but the essence of listing these is that policy creation is never an issue for governments anywhere in the world – it’s the effort and commitment we place in rolling out, measuring and monitoring, that requires the work and focus. If we take any of the policies I have mentioned – they exist! They have all gone through much deliberation

and want the AfCFTA to become a success – not just for women, but for Africa as a whole. In terms of eCommerce, the Fourth Industrial Revolution presents many opportunities for women especially. Where women could not leave their homes to work for either cultural, traditional, location or many other reasons – with advancing technology and adaptability being built into norms, women can now have businesses, work remotely, sell, buy, trade, and even access finance – no matter where they are in the world. It is up to every government now to connect the dots from policy to delivery and business cultural norms. The interventions you ask about, are linking and aligning projects, programmes and funding to these policies to ensure they happen and that they tangibly become a reality.

Approximately 70 percent of informal cross border traders in Africa are women. These women are mostly single mothers who are breadwinners, but they are in a situation of low-skill, low-income, and mainly in agriculture. Digitalisation of trade needs to be pervasive and meaningful to this market, specifically, more than any other type of trader or business woman. The items listed in your question must be available and accessible to these women, in order for this to be a true solution, and definitive digitalisation of trade in Africa to become a reality. Remember the barriers to these solutions come down to access to data and devices, digital literacy, digital skills, and other things, before we even get to things like mobile payments and apps becoming the norm for this trader. Technology works best and is the most successful when it is created and innovated for the person that is at the furthest point from it. Opportunities come from weaknesses, and therein lies



the answer – focus on the informal traders and how to digitalize their world of trade. Everything else will fall into place.

### Ambassador Mwamba: Ambassador of Zambia to Ethiopia, Permanent Representative to the AU

The AU has declared the 2020 to 2030 as the new Decade of Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion; recommitting efforts to scale up actions for progressive gender inclusion towards sustainable development at the national, regional and continental levels.

**Q1: What opportunities do you see for promoting women's financial and economic empowerment through inclusive AfCFTA implementation and as part of the AU 2020–2030 Decade of African Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion. How could Member States best support the operationalisation of these opportunities?**



There are several opportunities for women’s financial and economic empowerment in the context of the AfCFTA and as part of the AU 2020–2030 Decade of African Women’s Financial and Economic Inclusion. Procurement processes, for example, can benefit women-led businesses. Likewise, there are various opportunities for women small-scale producers in the agricultural sector. Female farmers, however, will have to be provided with the required support that includes access to land, capital, mechanization and technology and training. Providing women in the agricultural sector

with this support opens new opportunities for them to graduate from subsistence to commercial farming and in so doing, to leverage new opportunities created through the AfCFTA in agriculture. The AfCFTA Agreement will be implemented at the level of Member States. Thus, Governments and policy makers must implement proactive policies that will advance economic empowerment outcomes for women. In addition to the AfCFTA, the AUC is promoting a number of programmes that will remove barriers to intra-African trade. This includes the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063 to create a single unified air transport market in Africa and various other infrastructure projects to connect African states. In addition, there is the African Passport and Free Movement of People Protocol, that seeks to remove restrictions on the ability of Africans to work and travel. initiatives to increase mobility through an African passport. There is no single approach to enhancing intra-African trade; there are a number of interventions. Of paramount importance is the need to ensure that all AU interventions are gender sensitive and that women are not left behind.

### Peter Varndell, Head SADC Business Council

**Q 1. What are SADC Business Council’s main regulatory and procedural barriers confronting Women in Business?**

**Q 2. How does SADC Business Council advance a women’s inclusivity agenda?**



**Q1:** SADC Business Council's (BC) current focus as an apex body for SADC private sector is on trade related issues, with the following key areas:

- Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade: SADC BC works jointly with the SADC Secretariat and GIZ to understand and resolve trade challenges faced by businesses in the region.
  - SADC BC is also working on a COVID-19 response on movement of essential goods and services across SADC.
- Industrial Value Chains: SADC BC has a strong focus on the development of Industrial Value Chains, that include agro-processing; mineral beneficiation; and pharmaceuticals as sectors identified by the SADC Secretariat.
  - SADC BC co-organises the annual SADC Industrialisation Week (SIW), the outcomes of which are presented at the Annual SADC Heads of State and Government Summit. During the 2019 SIW, there were specific sessions held on Trade and Gender that also addressed the issue of regulatory and procedural barriers confronting women in business. Key points from the opening statement included:
    - Measures to improve women's participation in trade and overcoming obstacles to women participating in regional value chains and trade.
    - Importance of including women in policy formulation and governance processes. Strategies to address identified challenges.
    - Under-representation of women in trade as well as professionals in policy development and research.
    - Ensuring the participation of women, youth and other marginalized communities in trade policies and governance processes.

Recommendations and call for action taken to Member States included the following:

- Prioritization and promotion of youth, women and SMMEs in regional value chains and industrialization.
- Capacity building of women and integration into Regional Value Chains.
- Facilitation of women's financial inclusion and the creation of gender-based targeted incentives.
- Reviewing of laws and financial regulations that provide loans to women entrepreneurs.
- Increased enrolment of girls in STEM that benefits women in various industries, including food and innovation.
- Creation of a conducive environment for women and youth entrepreneurs.

**Q 2:** SADC BC advances the women's inclusivity agenda in various ways: by targeting Local Economic Development (LED) in infrastructure which by virtue of having major capital investment involved, presents major opportunities for local economic economies whose main beneficiaries are women and youth. How do we optimize the role of Women in LED, SME's in participating in these projects? Included among the lessons learned from our recent LED study in Tanzania is the



need for a conducive policy environment. A guidance framework needs to be developed and Centres of Excellence established. These components are key drivers of the agenda to develop policies and provide recommendations to policymakers, project developers and traders that are active in this area. Stakeholders must work together to encourage those that are creating opportunities to think at an early stage of what opportunities should be created for women in value chains and work towards optimising identified opportunities. There may be a high cost for the project at the onset, but if done well, it can create opportunities in the long term for sustainability and growth. As SADC BC remains the overarching body that reports back to the regional structures, and national governments, it would like to continue with these discussions to deepen its knowledge, as well as identify champions within SADC BC Structures. It has the ability to learn from others across the region on how they are developing on this agenda. We look forward to working together to deepen our position and knowledge; while adding value.

**Phelisa Nkomo, South African Women in Dialogue (SAWiD) Development Commission**

**Q1: What would be some of the most effective and promising opportunities to consolidate such a government and women led organizations ecosystem to better inform gender responsive policies and to advance gender inclusive economic growth as the cornerstone of sustainable development?**

**Q.2: What are some of the other key considerations to be considered in inclusive AfCFTA implementation, particularly in the context of COVID-19?**



**Q 1:** Trade can substantially improve economic outcomes of women. However, must be recognized that the trade liberalisation does not guarantee economic benefits to women under the AfCFTA . Therefore, it is vital to localise its execution to domestic realties, while creating an environment with rigorous determination to ensure that the economic empowerment of women as a fundamental component of gender equality, becomes central to the design of national trade strategies

and implementation of AfCFTA Agreement. Unlike other African countries, South Africa has a sufficient gender responsive economic policy regime at the national level; however there are lessons that could be shared going forward. The AfCFTA presents a window of opportunity for countries to establish national gender machinery which either develops or strengthens women’s economic empowerment and gender responsive trade policy regimes. In the past, regional free trade areas in Sub-Saharan Africa have either nose-dived or existed on paper with slight progress towards the realisation of their objectives. Thus, there exists critical pre-conditions for the success of a gender responsive AfCFTA to ensure that women reap the desired economic benefits through trade.

There are a number of issues for consideration. African countries must attempt to apply economic stability policies for the purpose of aligning their economies by establishing a sound macroeconomic policy, trade policy and labour market policy to reduce or eliminate commercial



barriers in intra-regional transactions, as well as the adoption of a unified commercial policy. Homogeneous economic growth models within Member States are designed to mitigate discrepancies in income levels and the quality of life of citizens of different Member States. This argument is consistent with economic theory on regional economic integration, principally to discharge economic losses and distortions that transpire when countries decide to apply traditional free trade barriers in international economic relations, (Piggot 2006). With this approach and in order to correct distortions that are generally derived from the use of restrictive commercial policies, countries that are part of a regional economic integration zone are obliged to adhere to different models of international trade contracts, thereby allowing more opportunities to emerge through regional economic integration. African countries must therefore pay attention to different stages of development paradigms, through which the integration of women in the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement becomes a reality. Therefore, there needs to be an acknowledgment of varying levels of development in countries to avoid a one-size-fits all approach in implementation. Building a vibrant economic eco-system is a prerequisite to ensure that at national level, countries understand the complexities that drives productivity, inclusion and gender responsive policies, as well as competitiveness and industrial development. Investment in education and skills development is a strong consideration, as is women's access to primary health care in order to allow for a reproductive life as the cornerstone of economic and social progress. The economic and trade ecosystem must embody a value chain system that provides practical solutions for women entrepreneurs. As such, African Governments should focus on key economic sectors where women are economically active as low hanging fruit while facilitating structural reforms which will allow women to participate without hinderance.

One of those sectors is food production and retail in informal trading. Therefore, a convergence strategy at the national level is necessary to support the informal sector, so as to ensure that women are able to produce a finished product in order to take advantage of expanded market. Structural reforms should include, amongst other interventions, access to factors of production as a primary comparative advantage (land, finance, energy ) and other support mechanisms which are critical to building a productive economy. Other resources that make women's businesses competitive with tangible impact include access to infrastructure, i.e. roads and transport as well as the information infrastructure (cheaper data), with the latter allowing women to communicate; and therefore benefiting from digital transformation where there is absolute access to information and trading platforms. Evidence further suggests that non-tariff barriers often creates an economic burden to women's businesses due to lack of technical capacity and limited market knowledge. As stated by other gender trade justice analysts, the AfCFTA is silent on issues of a gender responsive approach. Among policy instruments to be considered as a mitigation strategy by the AfCFTA is the establishment of a Gender Trade Framework. This Framework should articulate a gender equity trade agenda or intervention in Africa. It must recognize that without a safety net or buffers for women within AfCFTA is equal to economic exclusion.



As part of a Gender Trade Framework, consideration should be given to the following:

- Effectiveness of the AfCFTA Agreement lies in its distributional effects to society and specifically women.
- African Governments should introduce economic structural reforms that lead equitable outcomes for women.
- Trade liberalization does not guarantee automatic economic integration, countries must create support mechanism for women, like Industrial financing that had been de-risked by state financial guarantees with low interest rates.
- An inherent comparative advantage of industrial development is the ability of citizens to participate producers' market so that each country can build resilient private sector. Literature suggests that a small percentage of women participate in manufacturing by producing products, the framework should compel countries to adequately invest in productive capacity of women's businesses.
- Access to income through labour market participation contributes to reduction of poverty. The AfCFTA should protect women's businesses from external shocks and price adjustments.
- To increase cross border trading amongst women businesses there must be deliberate effort to create inter-dependent value chains with high value add product manufacturing across regional economic integration zones.
- Firms which undermine equitable labour market policies should not be allowed to trade within the AfCFTA.
- Firms that perpetuate a gender wage gap and condone gender-based violence or sexual harassment in the workplace should not be allowed to trade in the AfCFTA.

For the above to be achieved, African Governments must allocate resources through a gender budgeting framework, while actively promoting cross-border economic or trade collaborations. The strength of the AfCFTA lies in the implementation of existing Southern Africa regional economic zones which includes:

- Macroeconomic Convergence
- Increased domestic production
- Creation of regional value chains
- Greater business opportunities
- Access to cheaper inputs and consumer goods
- Higher regional imports and exports

The AfCFTA Agreement remains a crucial yardstick to measure the development impact of trade because there is an inter-dependence that can be utilized to assess economic integration, including through the application of gender-sensitive policies. To support the AfCFTA Agreement as a critical policy lever, national Governments should use the public sector demand programme to ensure that state spending allows the participation of women. Government must have higher appetite for risk and create a space for women entrepreneurs to learn by doing. This can be learnt from industrialized countries which have gone through the learning-by-doing approach through



exposure and practice. Developing countries tend to be risk averse with no appetite to support women and to allow their businesses to grow from micro level to small and medium. For example, in South Africa President Ramaphosa recently announced that 40 percent of public procurement would be allocated to women-owned businesses. It must be acknowledged that because women would generally require capital for to undertake cross-border trading, the State must demonstrate commitment to risk by ensuring that women have access not only to finance, but also to business opportunities as well as to active regional value chains. Economic literature shows that most women are actively participating in agricultural sector retail. Therefore, it stands to reason this sector has massive multiplier effects. For instance, primary input for textile industry starts in the agricultural sector through cotton farming so countries in the region could collaborate. This regional economic collaboration could activate a vibrant co-operative economy Echoing the views of Ambassador Mwamba, a cooperative economy should be allowed to thrive to make sure that women do not only have a voice but strengthen the distributional and multiplier effect of the AfCFTA. For these and other initiatives to be realised, Governments must commit to industrial financing to support product development. In other words, the agenda of the AfCFTA must acknowledge that a vibrant industrial economy where women participate freely will not be possible without adequate financial support. What is the importance of COVID-19 caregiving and the link

**Q2:** Covid 19 caregiving is an important and essential function in the economy. As an economist, it is evident that society has not been able to properly evaluate the caregiving economy. There is a need for investments in health care. Middle-class women, for example, had to give up their domestic health care due to lack of access to income. Therefore, caregiving infrastructure will be important at the national level to make sure that the trade agenda is able to recognise this reality and factor the contribution of women who are able to lead a productive life, while not constrained by caregiving responsibilities. Translating the reproductive issue to the marketplace must be addressed. Amongst others, is the need for companies to declare their employment equity. Consider the number of women in decision making, and women who are employed; in that way, companies can be held accountable. At the heart of building a resilient African economy is the need to ensure that the continent builds a healthy and bigger private sector, with a higher market demand and supported through industrial financing and substantive macro-economic intervention. While there are significant opportunities associated with the AfCFTA, there is a need to be cautiously optimistic. It is clear that most women are not even aware of how the AfCFTA Agreement was developed. This begs the question of whether continent pushed for the AfCFTA Agreement prematurely, without realising the ability and the need to measure its progress at a regional level. With regard to one basic issue of macroeconomic convergence in SADC, it is a fact that some countries are not even able to meet some of their own targets. In the case of the AfCFTA, the risk is that only strong economies, including South Africa will benefit. While South Africa has its own social inequality challenges, this could mean that only organized or oligopolistic companies in South Africa will benefit from the AfCFTA. This issue is something that needs to be carefully watched.



Yavi Mudurai, Executive Director, Pan African Business Women’s Association

**Q 1: What are some of the most significant gender-specific business and trade barriers confronting members of the Pan African Business Women Association; and how would members like to see these barriers being effectively addressed in gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures?**

**Q 2: What would members of the Pan African Business Women Association bring to the attention of policy makers in terms of leveraging these provisions to address their priority needs and concerns?**



**Q 1:** As much as we can reference any and all of the NTBs here, and some gender specific ones like harassment or access to finance as gender-specific business and trade barriers, gender as it relates to the AfCFTA is much more pervasive and all-encompassing. We are aware that gender is mentioned once in a very general way in Article 3(e), but it is not just about the documenting either. It is about various factors before we even get to the AfCFTA. Only 37 percent of women across Africa have bank accounts and only 50-60 percent are literate. Turing to this scenario in relation to

border documentation, etc all require funds and literacy. This means that women can’t even enter into this scenario, let alone be an active part of it. They are therefore excluded, not just by the AfCFTA Agreement, but by prevailing circumstance. Women who are literate with bank accounts must contend with cultural, legal, and gender bias when doing business in Africa. SADC may be one of the more formalised regions of the RECs; however, it is still vulnerable to these and other issues.

Capacity development, technical assistance and training provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement must be effectively leveraged to support women-owned businesses take advantage of new export and other opportunities created by the AfCFTA. We are not, however, seeing African countries doing this. As far as I know its only women organisations. We need to create agendas and initiatives that drive grassroot communications, knowledge, and skills building on intra-Africa trade. Peripheral issues need to be tackled; the more we hold hands as organisations like SADC-WIB and do this with one voice, the more we create shifts. No one organisation can do anything on its own, we must all work together to achieve the ‘almost’ impossible. But it can be done. The AfCFTA Secretary-General and the Secretariat have a strong gender and youth focus and I quote the AfCFTA Secretary-General when I say “the AfCFTA is not mine or ours, it is for Africans to create jobs and employment and grow the economy”. We need to ensure that gender conversations happen not only in gender empowerment organisations – they need to happen in the cross-hairs of all sectors. Gender must be on the agenda of every meeting on policy, regulation and legislation, until gender becomes part of mainstream conversations.

As part of gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures, consideration should be given to the following:

- AfCFTA- specific fund that focuses on gender and youth funding for these gaps to be closed.



- PPPs to be normalised on almost every project, so that inclusion is tangible.
- Private sector to look at using small women-owned businesses as suppliers for their trade agenda so that women can be included in a network.
- Support for women-owned businesses with respect to access to finance, market share, as well as promoting a better understanding how to do business in Africa.

**Q 2:** In reflecting on what must be brought to the attention of policy makers, it is important to understand the AfCFTA as a catalyst for change and leveraging the AfCFTA as a tool to achieve the 2020-2030 African Women's Decade of Economic & Financial Inclusion. It is about referencing the AfCFTA to apply gender mainstreaming to policies and regulation regarding access to finance, infrastructure of cross border trade, safety of women when travelling, trading, etc. We will still have to deal with cultural norms and traditions, but if policy, legislation and regulations are in place, everything else will follow in due course. You need only to look at the US to know that it may take a while to reach, but it can. PABWA launched a hashtag on social media on 3 February 2020 that said #AfCFTAisOurs. This means that we will do whatever it takes to ensure that women are trained, their skills developed as well as provided support on a range of issues, relating to increased access to finance, addressing NTBs, lack of gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming, among others. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka challenged us to create opportunities, break down barriers, and open up the doors once locked to women on the continent. That is exactly what we need to do, but we need to use the tools of training, skills development and communications to create awareness and understanding of the AfCFTA, and to provide information on how to confront the challenges I mentioned. My area of specialisation is Digital Transformation, and technology is my passion. The digitalisation of trade is critical so that women can enter this world, not with traditional reading and writing, but rather clarity of speech for Artificial Intelligence (AI), creative abilities for digital marketing, and empathetic people skills for relationship management across borders. My belief has always been that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is both a skills revolution and the revolution for women. It is not an education revolution and a men's revolution, that was the 2nd revolution. Skills trump knowledge and women's empathy trumps ego in the new normal.

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### *Session III: Questions and Answers*

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#### **Ms Prisca Soko, Chairperson SADC Women in Business**



Prior to moderating the Q&A session, Ms Soko reflected briefly on the objectives focus areas of SADC Women in Business (SADC-WIB). In this regard, Ms Soko pointed out that SADC-WIB was founded in June 2019 as a unifying voice of women-owned businesses in SADC countries, representing the fastest growing segment of the economy in Africa. SADC-WIB represents the interests of all women entrepreneurs across all industries; with chapters across SADC nations. SADC-WIB has a number of objectives, the most significant of which includes strengthening the wealth creating capacity of members and promoting economic development within the entrepreneurial community.



Other key objectives include: creating innovative and effective change in the business culture; building strategic alliances and coalitions; transforming public policy and influencing policy opinion. 2020 highlights of SADC-WIB, include *inter alia*:

- Offices in 10 of 16 Nations in the SADC region, with Chapter Heads in each country to guide any company that wishes to do business in SADC.
- Google Partnership that is providing a business tool “Google My Business” and digital training to assist women in setting up their businesses online.
- Acquisition of a Financial Business Trading Platform “eCOBbA Africa” to enable women to market their businesses and trade with each other regardless of the country they come from. “Business without Borders”.
- eCOBbA Africa financial trading platform to allow women to access funds, e’wallets, loans via the Digital Banking Platform. A partnership with an international bank is being currently negotiated.
- Macrocomm Partnership provides SMMEs funding for businesses based in South Africa.
- Mentee platform “TWAA” which allows members to network with each other and to obtain guidance on how to grow their business.
- 1st DRAFT Public Prospectus for SADC WIB Investment Ltd is available and from 1 December women will be allowed to buy shares in the Public Company.
- Current Investment Project pipeline is covering Health, Infrastructure, Mining AND ICT – TOTAL VALUE US\$62 million.

SADC-WIB Investment Focus areas include

- Infrastructure
- Health
- Energy and renewable energy
- Mining and beneficiation
- Transport and logistics
- Agriculture
- Information and Communications Technology
- Manufacturing and processing

### **Advancing women’s financial and economic empowerment goals in inclusive AfCFTA implementation: from rhetoric to action**

Ms Soko reflected on questions posed by participants over the course of the webinar. While there was much anticipation of the tremendous potential inherent in the AfCFTA, there were also concerns that most women entrepreneurs would not likely benefit from AfCFTA gains. Challenges of access to finance, market information, digital technology, as well as traditional gender roles and socio-cultural barriers meant that women entrepreneurs would not be able to scale up operations to take advantage of continental export opportunities. Discussions centered on what was required to bring businesses to productivity levels, to improve competitiveness and



to grow beyond borders in order to grasp new export, business and other economic opportunities created by an integrated continental market. The recurrent refrain was the need to move beyond the rhetoric on policy, towards the identification of gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures that advance women's financial and economic empowerment goals in inclusive AfCFTA implementation. It is only practical and concrete solutions that will deliver on the transformative promise of the AfCFTA and drive lasting change for African women in the 2020–2030 Decade of African Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion.

The section below offers an overview of some of the practical recommendations that emerged during the course of the webinar.

### **Close the gender gap in access to finance**

- Prioritise access to finance start-ups to scale up operations to take advantage of opportunities in new export markets.
- Offer collateral-free loans and financial management to help micro-finance institutions and women micro-entrepreneurs to manage and grow their businesses.

### **Build the export and trading capacity of women-led business in the AfCFTA**

- Leverage capacity building, technical assistance and training provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement to build the capacity and expertise of women entrepreneurs, including micro-entrepreneurs to export and participate in new AfCFTA trading and economic opportunities.
- Facilitate dialogue, share good practices, regional approaches and experiences on removing trade-related barriers and increasing the participation of women in trade, particularly in the context of the AfCFTA.
- Capacity strengthening in strategic areas of entrepreneurship development.

### **Empower women in the export sector**

- Create market access opportunities: empower women entrepreneurs to take advantage of AfCFTA export opportunities through increased knowledge of regional export market access.
- Promote the emergence of women exporters in traditional and non-traditional sectors.
- Foster linkages and partnerships with new buyers and provide support for trade portals, sector studies and market entry strategies, to identify promising continental markets for women-business owners to export in the AfCFTA.
- Prioritise financial support for women in export businesses, to foster access to African markets.
- Support women at grassroots level to enhance the quality of their products for an integrated continental market.



### **Empower women in regional value chains, corporate supply chains and public procurement**

- Increase opportunities for women grassroots producers in value addition manufacturing and equipment.
- Explore regional value chain opportunities for women in transport and other male-dominated industries.
- Explore private sector partnerships to assist women-owned SMEs reach regional markets by being part of corporate supply chains.
- African Governments to design gender-responsive public procurement policies that advantage women-owned businesses in the AfCFTA.

### **Empower women's participation in e-commerce and digital trade solutions**

- Support women's participation in e-commerce which boosts intra-African trade through bridging the gender digital divide and putting in place the required ICT infrastructure.
- Recognising that poor digital literacy and a lack of digital skills is one of the main drivers of the gender digital divide, and a particular constraint to women's participation in e-commerce, incorporate digital literacy and digital skills for women in national digital and e-commerce strategies.
- Identify capacity development, digital literacy and training needs for women to participate more effectively in digital trade and digital platforms.
- Remove barriers, including access to data and devices to enable all women - including small-scale cross-border traders - to leverage digital trade solutions in the context of the AfCFTA.

### **AfCFTA sensitization and inclusion of women's voices in AfCFTA national implementation efforts**

- Ensure that women in their various economic roles, in urban and rural areas, as well as youth and people with disabilities benefit from information on AfCFTA opportunities.
- Share information on how women can access and contribute to AfCFTA national policy processes. Further consideration to be given to the establishment of national Sub-Committees to drive an AfCFTA agenda for women.
- Deliberate efforts should be made to include women-led organisations, women's cooperatives and cross-border trader associations in National AfCFTA Committees.

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### *In closing*

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#### **Ms Shiphra Chisha, President SADC Women in Business**



From local spazas and tiny tin-roofed shops to uncountable kiosks and donkey-drawn carts littering small communities and big cities across Africa, women in the continent have demonstrated incredible resilience as they strive to feed their families and contribute meaningfully to the GDP of various nations. While many of these transactions are not scientifically measurable or recorded in formal ledgers, there is no doubting the fact that these resourceful women are some of the most critical backbones sustaining the continent.



The verdict is clear, then, that if millions of women can successfully trade among themselves, albeit in a rudimentary improvised manner, only our imagination can limit how far they can go when they are eventually supported with the right financial and technological tools to trade across borders, thereby scaling up their enterprises. The AfCFTA is the perfect mechanism to get women doing business in Africa's informal private sector to the next level. From local women trading in Baobab seed and fruit in Zimbabwe to industrious female-led entrepreneurs transforming animal hide to beautiful leather products all over East Africa, and millions more across the continent, the prospect of empowering a new generation of savvy businesswomen has never been this promising. Given that the governments of various countries do not have the capacity to absorb all women into their respective workforce, it is incumbent on policymakers and executive decision-makers at all levels of public administration to encourage and support the empowerment of women in the private sector.

Fortunately, the tools to achieve such feats are within grasp. From mobile banking to social media networking, e-business listings, and free digital business administrative tools to take their businesses to the next level, African businesswomen have never had such a combination of possibilities ready at the taking. Relatedly, the adoption of the AfCFTA by leaders of various countries in Africa has been a watershed moment not just to integrate the continent only, but to also draw from the power of women entrepreneurs locally, regionally, inter-regionally, and at the continental level. Coalesced, available digital technology and trade liberalisation will, if implemented correctly, unshackle the potential of hundreds of millions of women who hitherto could not trade beyond their neighbourhoods, or at best city-centres in their respective countries. With the right training, affordable access to a myriad of technological tools, and improved ease of doing business across borders, Awusi from Kumasi, Ghana will be able to sell her consignment of brilliantly designed kente dresses to Thokozile in Durban, Ancha from Mozambique will be able to connect with, and sell tons of shrimp and other seafood products to buyers across the continent at the click of a button. Africa's future is looking bright. These happy days we all aspire to witness are closely tied to the inclusion of women in mainstream private sector entrepreneurship. To kickstart things, the various AfCFTA policy implementation teams must, as a matter of urgency, make the training of women in the use of technology (for banking, trade, networking, marketing, etc.) a priority. Budget planners and executive decision-makers must also do their bit. They must allocate generous funding to train women and then support their local businesses such that these women will have the financial, technological, legal, and administrative understanding to engage in trans-national trade.

The time is now for African women to rise and take their place in the broader private sector, to transform their spazas and donkey-pulling carts into formidable businesses that can compete favourably, bring in meaningful income, and then contribute positively to the broader economy while at it. Reducing the gender digital divide to promote e-commerce is the key; implementation of the AfCFTA is the vehicle. When tied together and accessible to women in Africa, things will never remain the same again. The future is now!