



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



Concept Note

Virtual Conference on Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to Boost Women's Economic Empowerment

Tuesday, 23 February 2021, 10:00 SAST

1. Background

As Chairperson of the African Union (AU), and as part of his opening statement at the 13th Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) on 5 December 2020, President Ramaphosa underscored the importance of empowering African women in the AfCFTA. To give effect to this intention, the President highlighted the need for an AU Protocol on Women in Trade. Rapid developments at the continental and global level on the women and trade agenda are of strategic importance for Business Unity South Africa (BUSA). In particular, these developments create the opportunity for BUSA to fulfil its mandate by ensuring that organised business plays a constructive role in policy, while promoting inclusive economic growth, development and economic transformation of the South African economy. More recently, BUSA has approved an internal Women in Trade Working Group to promote policy dialogue and response, towards the more meaningful participation of women in the South African economy. The AfCFTA promotes entrepreneurship and economic empowerment opportunities for women-owned businesses through increased access to new regional export markets; and expanded opportunities across key sectors. Notwithstanding the potential, AfCFTA gains will not be automatic.

As Africa marks the first year anniversary of the New African Women's Decade of Financial and Economic Inclusion, that also coincides with the 1 January 2021 start of trading under the AfCFTA Agreement, AfCFTA State Parties will be required to effectively implement commitments that advance the welfare of women. The year 2021 will be pivotal for both milestones in so far as it provides an opportunity for South Africa to drive creative and bold interventions that link women's financial and economic empowerment goals to inclusive AfCFTA implementation. It is against this backdrop that, BUSA is pleased to collaborate with the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on a virtual conference entitled **Leveraging the AfCFTA to Boost Women's Economic Empowerment**

2. Objectives of the conference

The conference will provide a platform for panellists and participants to discuss opportunities the AfCFTA will bring, particularly in creating gender-inclusive growth as a cornerstone of sustainable development. The overall objective of the conference is to provide a platform for deliberations and the exchange of innovative and forward-looking ideas that align gender equality and women's economic empowerment priorities with inclusive AfCFTA implementation.

Specifically, the conference aims to create a better understanding of the following:

- Private sector contribution to policies and programmes that advance economic empowerment outcomes for women in inclusive AfCFTA implementation.
- Considerations for decent and productive employment for women in trade in services liberalization.
- Gender dimension of investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights and how gender-specific challenges should be addressed in gender-responsive AfCFTA policy and complementary measures.
- Considerations for a gender-responsive trade facilitation agenda.

3. Expected output

Key messages and recommendations from the conference will inform a Conference Outcome Report to support a better understanding of the gender dimension of the AfCFTA. In addition, these messages and recommendations will feed into related policy processes in 2021, and will assist the AU as they seek to develop an AU Protocol on Women in Trade, as well as other implementation modalities and a roadmap to advance women’s financial inclusion and economic empowerment in the New African Women’s Decade of Financial and Economic Inclusion.

4. Structure and proposed programme for the conference

10:00- 10:30	<p>Opening ceremony</p> <p>Welcoming remarks: Cas Coovadia, CEO Business Unity South Africa (BUSA)</p> <p>Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ David Luke, Coordinator, African Trade Policy Centre of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) ▪ Minister Maite-Nkoana Mashabane, Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities ▪ Busi Mabuza, Chairperson, Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) ▪ Thokozile Ruzvidzo, Director, Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, (UNECA) ▪ Niki Kruger, Chief Director of Trade Negotiations: Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)
10:30 – 11:30	<p>Towards inclusive AfCFTA implementation</p> <p>Moderator: Thokozile Ruzvidzo: Director: Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, UNECA</p> <p>Intra-African trade under the AfCFTA is widely anticipated to address urgent socio-economic challenges and contribute to broad-based prosperity in African countries. Recognised as an enabler of inclusive economic growth and sustainable development, the AfCFTA can play a critical role in addressing the drivers of insecurity such as poverty, growing inequalities and the marginalization of vulnerable groups, including women. The AfCFTA has the potential to accelerate the economic empowerment of women as a fundamental component of gender equality, by expanding opportunities for women’s employment. Notwithstanding this potential, AfCFTA market liberalization will impact women and men differently.</p>

	<p>It is clear that gaps will continue to persist in the absence of AfCFTA and related trade policy design that is inclusive and pays specific attention to women - particularly to ensuring that certain vulnerable segments of women are not left behind. Ensuring that intra-African trade liberalization is inclusive, particularly in creating equal opportunities for African women contributes to inclusive socio-economic development and must be prioritised in the era of the AfCFTA.</p> <p>Key issues for consideration will include:</p> <p>What are the linkages between trade policy and gender? What are the main challenges in building inclusive trade? How can the AfCFTA be used as a vehicle to overcome these challenges? What risks exist that could instead make the AfCFTA exacerbate poverty and inequalities for women in their different roles? What are the acute challenges that may limit women-led businesses and small-scale traders from benefiting from the AfCFTA? How could these challenges be addressed in gender-responsive policies and complementary measures that support women’s economic empowerment in post COVID-19 recovery efforts and through the AfCFTA?</p> <p>Panellists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ David Luke, Coordinator, ATPC (UNECA) ▪ Bongiwe Kunene, Managing Director Banking Association South Africa (BASA) ▪ Namhla Mniki, Africa and Global Lead: Women’s Economic Empowerment, Private Office of the President of South Africa ▪ Emily Mburu-Ndoria, Trade in Services Expert, AfCFTA Secretariat
11:30 – 12:30	<p>AfCFTA Phase II Negotiations: Understanding the Gender Dimension</p> <p>Moderator: Beatrice Chaytor: African Union Commission Trade in Services Expert</p> <p>While significant progress has been made across numerous fronts, significant gaps between men and women’s opportunities remain a major challenge and a severe impediment to inclusive socio-economic development, as one of the general objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement. The relationship between gender and AfCFTA Phase II issues of investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights remains largely unexplored. This panel will explore a number of potential areas where gender might be relevant for Phase II negotiations. In the lead-up to the negotiations, there will be a need to better understand whether the challenges identified are particularly acute for women, and whether more effective policies can advance gender equality as the cornerstone of inclusive socio-economic development.</p> <p>Key issues for consideration will include:</p> <p>What is the gender dimension and impact of investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights and digitalization? Are challenges identified in these areas particularly acute for women? If so, how can these challenges be addressed in gender-responsive AfCFTA policies and complementary measures?</p> <p>Panellists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Niki Kruger, Chief Director of Trade Negotiations: Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) ▪ Michael Lawrence: Executive Director, National Clothing Retail Federation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Caroline Ncube, Department of Commercial Law, University of Cape Town ▪ Reena das Nair, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development (CCRED), University of Johannesburg
12:30-13:30	<p>Defining a gender-responsive trade facilitation agenda in the AfCFTA</p> <p>Moderator: Nadira Bayat: Gender and Trade Expert- UNECA</p> <p>There are a number of provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement that could empower women in their roles as workers, producers, entrepreneurs, small-scale and informal cross-border traders to exploit new trade and economic opportunities generated by the AfCFTA. Trade facilitation measures, in particular, can advance gender equality and women’s economic empowerment goals. The design and implementation of effective trade facilitation measures can enhance the export competitiveness for women-owned businesses in the formal and informal sector while addressing specific challenges and barriers faced by informal cross-border traders. A gender-responsive trade facilitation agenda that creates predictable and efficient customs processes, reduces clearance times from trade costs, and increases the involvement of women in trade facilitation decision mechanisms can be a catalyst for inclusive trade and sustainable development. According to ECA et al. (2019), trade facilitation measures can support AfCFTA trade opportunities through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effectively designed AfCFTA non-tariff barrier mechanism ▪ Investments in standards infrastructure and strategically harmonizing standards in sectors with high AfCFTA potential ▪ Introduction of a Continental Simplified Trade Regime, to help small-scale and informal cross-border traders gain from the AfCFTA <p>Key issues for consideration will include:</p> <p>What is the potential of digital solutions for trade facilitation? What are best practice examples of gender-responsive trade facilitation programmes implemented by African Governments and Regional Economic Communities? How can women play a stronger role in national trade facilitation committees? What policies would best support a gender-responsive AfCFTA trade facilitation agenda? How important is gender-sensitive training to customs officials in line with their obligations under the AfCFTA Agreement?</p> <p>Panellists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beatrice Hamusonde, Gender and Social Affairs, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) ▪ Faith Mosongo, Programme Officer, World Customs Organization East and Southern Africa ROCB ▪ Valentina Mintah, Executive Board Member, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) ▪ Louise Wiggett, CEO Global Trade Solution ▪ Ziad Hamoui, National President - Ghana, Borderless Alliance
13:30	Close and Next Steps: BUSA