

Partnerships to facilitate implementation of AfCFTA

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and TradeMark East Africa have partnered towards the implementation of Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). AfCFTA promises to provide the African continent with greater leverage in its negotiations with third-parties.



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In an effort to accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA, Trademark East Africa and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) signed in June 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding, which provides the two parties with the framework to collaborate, with the aim of paving the way for stronger cooperation in helping countries increase their levels of intra-regional trade and investments.

To cement that partnership, the two institutions successfully collaborated in an event organised by TradeMark East Africa under the topic: *Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): Women and Youth are Crucial to Africa's Economic Transformation*. The session was held during the 2019 European Development Days meeting on the 18th-19th June in Brussels.

During the meeting, Andrew Mold, acting director of ECA in Eastern Africa, explained the ambitious nature of the AfCFTA, saying that AfCFTA is not, as its name denotes, simply a 'free trade area'. "It encompasses ambitions to proceed to a single unified continental market."

Mold stressed that the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers and harmonisation of standards called for under the AfCFTA represent a unique opportunity to boost intra-regional trade and investment, allowing companies and farmers to tap into rapidly growing markets of Africa. "Sectors that are set to benefit the most are the labour-intensive manufacturing and services industries where women and youth are well represented," he emphasised.

The chief technical officer of TradeMark East Africa, Allen Asimwe, told the participants at the meeting that: 'Policymakers should start looking at the collective power of women so that they can aggregate economies of scale. "This can also be done through development of cross-border markets and through better information on logistics."

Mold said that AfCFTA promises to provide the African continent with greater leverage in its negotiations with third-parties, calling for African trade negotiators to have a spirit of generosity in liberalizing markets as integration is a two-way street. "For every additional dollar of exports you are going to do in a neighbouring country, you should also expect some increased imports," he explained.

An existing fruitful cooperation

To ensure that women are not left out of this historic process of AfCFTA implementation, ECA and TradeMark had previously organized a high-level roundtable dinner on 'Harnessing the AfCFTA for Gender equality' at the Kigali 22nd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) for Eastern Africa in November 2018. The aim of the discussion was about how Eastern Africa could harness the AfCFTA for greater gender equality. Eastern Africa's performance on gender equality is mixed. In the political sphere, there has been a lot of progress as shown by Ethiopia, Rwanda and Seychelles. But in the economic sphere progress is lagging.

Background

TradeMark East Africa is an East African not-for-profit company established in 2010 to support the growth of trade - both regional and international - in East Africa. TradeMark East Africa is focused on ensuring gains from trade result in tangible gains for East Africans.,

ECA is one of the United Nations' five regional commissions and the regional development arm of the United Nations in Africa. ECA's mission is to deliver ideas and actions for an empowered and transformed Africa; informed by the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The work of ECA is centred on the Commission's three core functions, namely, its convening function, its function as a think tank and its operational function.

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