Harnessing the potential of AfCFTA’s Women and Youth Protocol:
Lessons from new data, evidence and analysis to support continental value chains

27 May 2024 (09:00-15:30)
Sarova Stanley Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

Programme

08:30 Registration (tea/coffee)

09:00 – 09:30 Welcome: Opening Remarks
Kathryn Toure, Regional Director, IDRC
Trudi Hartzenberg, tralac

09:30 – 10:30 Session 1: African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Update
Negotiating and implementing the AfCFTA to support women entrepreneurs to take up new trade and value chain opportunities; specific contribution of the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade to addressing systemic challenges faced by women and youth traders.

Lead-in presentation: Trudi Hartzenberg, tralac

10:30 – 10:45 Tea/coffee

10:45 – 11:45 Session 2: Gendered analysis of value chains in the AfCFTA
Presentation of analytical methodology and preliminary findings (including key impediments that women-led businesses face).

Lead-in presentation: John Stuart, tralac, Emily Pender, tralac

11:45 – 13:00 Session 3: Industrialisation through the AfCFTA
Trade-led industrialisation opportunities – focusing on key value chains (e.g. autos, health and personal care products, pharmaceuticals, clothing and textiles). Where are the opportunities for women? Role of services in value chains.

Lead-in presentation: tralac and ATPC

Panel: Themba Khumalo, AfCFTA Secretariat, Dominique Njinkeu, African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) – past Interim Executive Director, John Stuart, tralac, Laura Naliaka, ATPC

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 Session 4: Making the AfCFTA work for women entrepreneurs
Supporting SME cross-border trade and value chains.

Panel: Ms. Gemma Mbegabolawe, AfCFTA Secretariat, Ms. Sandzisile Nozibuso Madonsela, African Union Commission, Women’s Business Association (OWIT), Laura Naliaka, ATPC

Closing Remarks – Martha Melesse, IDRC
Background

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Protocol on Women and Youth that was negotiated during 2023 is an important milestone and provides an opportunity to address some of the systemic challenges women entrepreneurs face in the Continent. This historic Protocol has been adopted by the African Union Assembly in February 2024, and implementation will now begin.

The AfCFTA is an ambitious initiative to create a single continental market for goods and services, supported by freer movement of persons and capital. While the AfCFTA is expected to support trade-led industrialisation for many African countries, the AfCFTA Secretariat, together with partners including the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Afreximbank and the African Development Bank, have supported the adoption of the AfCFTA as a Framework for Africa’s industrialisation, through cross-border value chain development, with a potential for benefiting women traders.

With support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), tralac has carried out a gendered analysis of value chains in the AfCFTA drawing on existing data on trade and value chains and conducting a survey of over 500 small, medium and micro enterprises covering 21 countries in East, West, and Southern Africa. Complementing existing World Bank and other enterprise surveys which focus, for example, on non-tariff barriers, transport costs and the business environment, the tralac survey included questions on value chain participation, ambition to upgrade through value chain participation and specific barriers to value chain participation, position in the value chain (raw material, intermediate, final product/service phase), and utilisation of trade preferences (in, for example, SADC, COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS). This data offers a unique opportunity to explore how the Women and Youth protocol can support an inclusive trade regime as State Parties begin to implement the AfCFTA and as the AfCFTA Secretariat and other organisations such as Afreximbank and UNECA implement value chain support programmes.

An important finding from the tralac study is that substantially women-owned businesses are more likely to focus on intra-Africa trade than male-owned enterprises, which this workshop will unpack. The workshop will also profile insights from surveys of informal cross-border traders, notably in West Africa, carried out by the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) at UNECA as the findings are also pertinent to the involvement of women-owned SMEs in cross-border value chains and complement the work of tralac.

Anchored on the tralac and ATPC findings, the workshop will stimulate evidence-informed discussion leading toward a practical implementation agenda for the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, and focusing on opportunities to address the specific challenges that women- and youth-owned businesses face to access new preferential trade opportunities – in trade in goods, trade in services, and participation in continental value chains.