

Embedding trade and gender in Africa's trade agenda

- Trade policies and practice tend to have different outcomes for men and women, particularly in the African economies, because of the differences in the traditionally qualified roles, responsibilities, rights and opportunities that our societies assign to men and women.
- To address gender inequalities associated with trade, 118 WTO members at the December 2017 World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, joined forces to launch the **Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment**. By signing the Buenos Aires declaration, governments recognized women's contributions to trade and the economy at large. I am honored to have represented Kenya during the deliberations.
- If we are to realize SDG 5: **achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030**, Africa can no longer afford to treat trade in isolation from its gender-related human rights impacts.
- African countries have commenced plans to ensure the continental market becomes more integrated by adopting **The African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA)**. This agreement signals the start of the Africa We Want. In fact both Preamble and the General Objectives of Agreement of the AfCFTA emphasis on the importance of gender equality. *The Preamble recognizes the importance of international security, democracy, human rights, gender equality and the rule of law, for the development of international trade and economic cooperation; while one of the general objectives is to promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties;*
- The **Protocol of Trade in Goods and Protocol on Trade in Services** also recognize the importance of building capacity in women in order to trade better.

- This is a clear indication that the AfCFTA is designed to ensure that regional trade is a reality for women and youth. The full implementation of the Agreement will address challenges faced by women-led and youth-led businesses, notably Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the context of the evolving trading environment.
- The Government of Kenya, for example, has put in place mechanisms to mainstream gender into trade and development such as the legal requirement for women, youth and persons with disabilities to access 30% of Government Procurement opportunities is being implemented within the context of the AGPO program, the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF), a Semi-Autonomous Government Agency in the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs that provides accessible and affordable credit to support women start and/or expand business for wealth and employment creation, the Uwezo Fund and many others.
- The private sector is also a key player in women-led, women-owned and women-run support in trade, organizations such as HEVA Fund have a Young Women in Creative Industries Fund which is designed to support young women in creative enterprises by extending loan facilities and assisting in market access within East African region.
- I have seen women multiply their opportunities in ways that once seemed impossible. In Kenya, women-led, women-owned and women-run businesses are making a significant contribution to the economy. Their businesses account for nearly one-half (48 percent) of all micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which contributes around 20 percent to Kenya's GDP.
- Not long ago, international trade from Kenya was dominated by men and multinationals, however, the number of Kenyan women in international trade started increasing in the mid-1990s, when the country's economy became more liberalized.

- In the year 2000, women entrepreneurs got an additional helping hand with the launch of the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA). Kenya qualifies for duty free access to the US market AGOA. The major products that qualify for export under AGOA include textiles, apparels and handicrafts which are mostly exported by women. Currently, these businesses and exporters from Kenya commonly trade in coffee, tea, fresh produce, clothing and handicrafts, sending them to Kenya's traditional trading partners in Asia, Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East.
- Companies that are fully owned by Kenyan women have been established to challenge the stereotype that women can only trade in the villages. An example is **Exotic EPZ Limited**, a company, which processes macadamia nuts before sending them out to Europe and beyond. This company is owned by three women Jane Maigua, Charity Ndegwa, and Loise Maina.
- Digital platforms play an important role in ensuring greater participation of women in international trade and **Greenbell Communications (GBC)**, a Kenyan women-owned enterprise, GBC worked with International Trade Centre, Google and CI&T to develop and make the **SheTrades** platform a reality. SheTrades is ready to connect women entrepreneurs to markets by reducing the number of barriers needed to get goods across borders.
- **Despite efforts made to ensure participation on African women in trade, they are much less integrated into international trade and can only harness the benefits of global trade by gaining their rightful position and by formalizing their role in economic terms.**
- African countries should therefore ensure that their domestic policies and laws provide for;
 - i. gender-related capacity-building mechanisms (such as entrepreneurship and business training, skill development and access to finance, etc.) These are critical for the successful participation of women in the economy under trade reforms;

- ii. credit and entrepreneurship programs to support gender-equitable land tenure in order to ease women's access to key resources;
 - iii. targeted input subsidies, technological investments and extension and advisory services for expanding production in higher value-added sectors;
 - iv. incentive programs that encourage more domestic firms to open up to international markets and get international certification could also boost women's employment in manufacturing;
 - v. women's associations and cooperatives support to enhance women's access to market information and opportunities.
 - vi. Gender-based value chain analyses need to be conducted to identify areas for intervention;
 - vii. improving digital inclusion will provide women entrepreneurs with easier and less expensive ways to access foreign markets.
- It is my conviction that the inclusion and implementation of the above perspectives will enable African countries to overcome gender norms and stereotypes that impede or limit women's successful participation in the economy under trade reforms requires long-term advocacy campaigns.

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