



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



Gender mainstreaming in African Continental Free Trade Area national implementation strategies

An inclusive and sustainable pathway
towards gender equality in Africa

Working paper





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First printing February 2020

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Designed and printed in Addis Ababa by the ECA Printing and Publishing Unit. ISO 14001:2015 certified. Printed on chlorine free paper

Cover and inside photos: Shutterstock.com

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The objective of the present working paper is to support African Union member States to incorporate gender mainstreaming into African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) national implementation strategies, to ensure that the gains from AfCFTA can advance the objective of gender equality under the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA Agreement), as a pathway to the structural transformation and sustainable development of Africa.

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I. Introduction

On 30 May 2019, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA Agreement) came into force. The AfCFTA Agreement does not incorporate a separate chapter on trade and gender. The preamble, however, contains explicit reference to the importance of gender equality for the development of international trade and economic cooperation, while article 3 (e) emphasizes the promotion of gender equality as one of the general objectives of AfCFTA. Although there are a number of provisions in the AfCFTA Agreement that can expand the capacity of women to participate in economic and trade opportunities, the benefits of AfCFTA for women are not automatic. Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to the potential differential impact of AfCFTA provisions and the implementation of the Agreement in a manner that opens up new opportunities for women, in particular vulnerable women; enhances their economic participation as a whole; and helps them to integrate more fully into high-paid sectors of the economy. A better understanding of what is required in the context of AfCFTA to enhance women's economic opportunities, as an intrinsic component of gender equality and women's empowerment, will help to drive sustainable development, in all its dimensions, towards a more beneficial outcome for all.

This working paper is intended to support member States to incorporate gender mainstreaming into

AfCFTA national implementation strategies. Gender mainstreaming refers to “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. Highlighting priority issues for consideration as part of this process can help to guide member States in the design and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and context-specific complementary measures, to advance the objective of gender equality under the AfCFTA Agreement, as a pathway to the structural transformation and sustainable development of Africa. The working paper is organized as follows: chapter II expands on AfCFTA and the inclusion of gender-related provisions. Chapter III underscores the importance of mainstreaming gender into AfCFTA and explains how this process will unfold in AfCFTA national implementation strategies. Chapter IV examines the opportunities for women as traders, entrepreneurs, producers and wage workers under AfCFTA, and discusses complementary and reinforcing measures that African countries can take to tackle trade facilitation in the context of AfCFTA. Chapter V highlights the potential impact of AfCFTA for women in agriculture, manufacturing and services trade, and identifies complementary gender-sensitive measures to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment in these priority economic sectors. To conclude, chapter VI provides brief policy messages for consideration.

II. African Continental Free Trade Area and gender-related considerations

The AfCFTA Agreement marks another milestone in the pan-African imperative of an economically integrated Africa. Signed by 54 African Union member States,¹ the Agreement is expected to be, by the number of participating countries, the largest trade agreement since the formation of the World Trade Organization. In establishing a market of more than 1.2 billion people, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.5 trillion, AfCFTA has been hailed as a socioeconomic game-changer, with the potential to drive forward the socioeconomic transformation of Africa through industrialization (African Union's Note to Editors, 2018). AfCFTA commits countries to remove tariffs on 90 per cent of goods, progressively liberalize trade in services, and eliminate a variety of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) through the creation of an NTB mechanism. In addition to the strong potential of AfCFTA to promote employment, industrial linkages, economic diversification and structural transformation in Africa, commentators point out that long-term gains are forecast to include a boost to the share of intra-African trade of more than 50 per cent and welfare gains amounting to \$16 billion, with economic benefits estimated to be even larger if trade reforms take place (ECA and others, 2019). The AfCFTA Agreement goes beyond tariff liberalization, to include protocols on investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights.² The operational phase of AfCFTA was launched at the African Union's 12th Extraordinary Summit on AfCFTA, held in Niamey on 7 July 2019. Supporting instruments to facilitate the launch of the operational phase include rules of origin, online negotiating forum, online NTBs monitoring and elimination mechanism, digital payments system, and the African Trade Observatory.

The AfCFTA Agreement does not incorporate a separate chapter on trade and gender. The preamble, however, contains explicit reference to the importance of gender equality for the development of international trade and economic cooperation. AfCFTA will produce new trading and entrepreneurial opportunities for women in the formal and informal economy, and in various economic sectors, including in the traditional female sectors of agriculture, manufacturing and services. Through other key provisions – including on trade facilitation, customs cooperation and transit, NTBs and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, among others – AfCFTA can support trade opportunities for women-owned businesses and informal cross-border traders. AfCFTA provisions under the Protocol on Rules of Origin permit access to cheaper raw materials. Women participating in value chains would therefore be able to produce goods and services with significant African content in terms of raw materials and value addition, in line with the preferential trade regime of AfCFTA (UN Women, 2019). While not directed at women per se, these provisions can empower women as entrepreneurs, traders, producers and workers to exploit new economic opportunities under the AfCFTA Agreement.

Recognizing that some countries may require a buffer to soften the impact that liberalization could have on certain young and sensitive industries, AfCFTA allows Governments to embark on gradual, targeted liberalization. Sensitive products and exclusion list provisions (ECA and African Union Commission, 2018)³ allow member States to select a specified number of tariff lines to be temporarily excluded from tariff liberalization, enabling them to protect specific sectors that are critical for food

1 As of 16 July 2019.

2 The protocols that covered trade in goods, trade in services, rules and procedures on the settlement of disputes were topics of the first phase of AfCFTA negotiations, with negotiations on investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy as part of Phase II, scheduled to commence in the second half of 2019 and conclude by June 2020 (see African Union, 2019). For a more detailed explanation on the structure of the AfCFTA Agreement, see ECA and others (2019).

3 Taken from the decision of the seventh Conference of African Union Ministers of Trade on AfCFTA modalities for tariff liberalization: 90 per cent of tariff lines are to be classified as non-sensitive, 7 per cent as sensitive and 3 per cent as excluded. Developing countries should liberalize sensitive products over 10 years, while least developed countries have 13 years during which to liberalize. If required, countries may take advantage of a transitional five-year period or less before liberalizing sensitive products.

security and employ a high number of women. In addition, liberalizing trade in services may also have a positive impact on female employment, as countries can, in their offers, prioritize the liberalization of services that create more employment opportunities for women. The five priority sectors for negotiations in trade in services under AfCFTA include business services, communications, financial, tourism and transport.

AfCFTA goes beyond a trade agreement, to take into account new economic realities, while placing African interests at the core. The breadth and ambition of the historic AfCFTA Agreement – covering trade in goods, trade in services, investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights – provides a platform to facilitate the structural transformation, economic diversification and de-

velopment of Africa. In acknowledging the importance of gender equality through the incorporation of explicit gender equality provisions, coupled with provisions that can directly benefit women entrepreneurs, producers and traders, the AfCFTA Agreement offers a unique continental opportunity for reforms to meet the challenges of sustained and equitable economic growth. Member States can now advance the economic empowerment of women, as a fundamental component of gender equality, and as part of the implementation of the Agreement. Enhancing the capabilities, choices and opportunities for women under AfCFTA, in particular for vulnerable women, can ensure that women take their rightful place as economic agents, capable of playing a critical role in advancing the structural transformation of Africa.

III. Advancing gender equality and the sustainable economic empowerment of women under the African Continental Free Trade Area: Gender mainstreaming in African Continental Free Trade Area national implementation strategies

A. Case for mainstreaming gender in AfCFTA

Grounded in deep expectation, AfCFTA will only live up to its potential if the benefits from production and trade expansion are inclusive and shared equally. Throughout the continent, women and girls experience multiple forms of discrimination, and are disproportionately among the left behind. Recognizing the significance of gender equality and women's economic empowerment to Africa's development has led to a decision by the African Union member States to identify "full gender equality in all spheres of life" as a priority goal (Goal 17) towards the realization of "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" (African Union, 2015).⁴ Gender equality is a fundamental human right and an enabler for the enjoyment of a range of human rights for women and a pathway to the structural transformation and sustainable development of Africa. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reinforces the current human rights obligations of States to advance gender equality and women's empowerment – in particular Goal 5 (to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girl), which is closely associated with Goal 17 of Agenda 2063 – while the principles of non-discrimination and equality are firmly entrenched in international and regional human rights law.

In addition to this intrinsic value, it is now well established that gender equality has an instrumental value in achieving economic and social development and the eradication of poverty (ILO, 2017), with research underscoring the fact that growth

that exacerbates gender inequality is unsustainable (ECA, 2017). Women constitute the majority of the poor in Africa. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) 2016 Africa Human Development Report, gender inequality is costing sub-Saharan Africa on average \$95 billion annually, peaking at \$105 billion in 2014 (or 6 per cent of the region's GDP) jeopardizing the continent's efforts for inclusive human development and economic growth (UNDP, 2016). Similarly, the African Development Bank (AfDB), points out that gender inequality limits the progress on poverty reduction in Africa: first, the continent forfeits potential growth that could have come from women who are excluded from the growth process; and second, restricting women's access to human capital-enhancing services limits the extent to which growth can impact their poverty status (AfDB, 2016). Situating gender equality into Africa's growth agenda is therefore key to the achievement of a range of sustainable development outcomes, including poverty reduction.

Williams (2004, p. 73) identifies a reciprocal relationship between trade liberalization and gender, noting that "trade liberalization can increase or decrease gender inequality, and gender inequality can prevent trade liberalization from achieving the desired results". Trade and trade liberalization policies are not gender neutral. While offering new jobs for women, trade liberalization can intensify existing gender inequalities – its impact can be double-edged (UNCTAD, 2016a). Women have often been adversely affected by liberalization policies because of gender biases in education and training, inequalities in the distribution of income

⁴ See also, "Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want". Available at <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed on 1 October 2019).

and resources, and having unequal access to credit, land and technology.⁵ Trade liberalization brings about changes in the structure of production of a country, with some sectors expanding (e.g. export-oriented production) and others contracting (e.g. import-competing production). Women may gain as consumers if tariffs are reduced on products that represent an important portion of their consumption basket, but may be penalized when their produce competes with cheap imported goods.

Although trade liberalization offers the opportunity for female entrepreneurs to have access to new export markets and increase their earnings, women-owned enterprises are less likely to have acquired the technical and legal expertise necessary and the ability to market their products effectively. As a result, formal and accumulation-oriented enterprises are more likely to take advantage of export markets (UNCTAD, 2015). In the case of agriculture, research shows that trade liberalization creates export jobs that usually go to men, while women tend to stay in subsistence agriculture. However, female farmers who have successfully switched from staple or subsistence agriculture to cash crops have seen their incomes increase (European Parliament, 2015; UNCTAD, 2009). Adaptation is key to delivering on the benefits of trade liberalization. With the operationalization of AfCFTA, member States will need to be aware of, and take the necessary steps to prevent or alleviate, any adverse effects arising from AfCFTA market liberalization.

AfCFTA offers an unprecedented opportunity to reduce gender inequalities and champion gender and trade issues that are important to the continent's development agenda, but the benefits of AfCFTA for women will not be automatic. In order to advance the objective of gender equality under the AfCFTA Agreement as a potent force for inclusive economic growth and transformative change, there needs to be a concerted effort by member States to mainstream gender into AfCFTA.

B. Gender mainstreaming in African Continental Free Trade Area national implementation strategies

Preparing for potential challenges and harnessing the gains of AfCFTA will require member States to develop national implementation strategies aimed at supporting the effective implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement. These strategies can provide a coherent approach towards measures that complement the Agreement.⁶ To ensure that the gains from AfCFTA support gender equality and the sustainable economic empowerment of women, gender needs to be mainstreamed into AfCFTA national strategies. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women and men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (Economic and Social Council, 1997). Ensuring that women are able to leverage the transformative potential of trade expansion under AfCFTA requires the design and implementation of gender-sensitive trade policies, buttressed with context-specific complementary measures, grounded in evidence. Gender mainstreaming has therefore been adopted as a strategy to inform the formulation of interventions, towards the realization of gender equality under the AfCFTA Agreement.

Mainstreaming gender into AfCFTA national implementation strategies requires an in-depth analysis of the various roles that women play in the economy. This includes analysing the gender dynamics for female traders and entrepreneurs in the informal and formal economy. In addition, it requires a comprehensive understanding of the different sectors in which women are concentrated, including in the traditional female-intensive sectors of agriculture, manufacturing and services; and in non-traditional industrial and trade sectors with the potential to emerge as major growth drivers. Central to this analysis is an examination of gen-

5 See ECA, FES and OHCHR, 2017.

6 For a more detailed explanation of complementary measures to take advantage of AfCFTA, see ARIA IX (ECA and others, 2019).

der-specific constraints that limit the productivity and full inclusion of women, and the identification of new opportunities. Identifying opportunity sectors and products with high export potential, and value chains with positive socioeconomic impact, together with complementary measures that can support new economic opportunities to catalyse women's entrepreneurship and empowerment, are all central to the gender mainstreaming process.

A better understanding of how intra-African trade liberalization under AfCFTA could alter the characteristics of a sector, with discrete implications for women, is key to ensuring that AfCFTA does not exacerbate existing patterns of inequality in women's and men's participation in economic activities. Undertaking a systematic assessment of the different needs and concerns of both women and men can highlight how one gender may be economically or socially (or both) disadvantaged, and can inform targeted interventions that ensure equality of opportunities for men and women in an integrated continental market. Gender-disaggregated data

and statistics should form an essential part of the gender mainstreaming process. Both are critical to informing evidence-based interventions that tackle a range of barriers limiting women's capacity to participate in economic and trade opportunities created under AfCFTA.

The sections below provide a high-level overview of key issues, challenges and opportunities for women-led businesses in the informal and formal sectors, and for female informal cross-border traders and women operating in traditional female-intensive sectors. Highlighting priority issues for consideration can provide member States with a lens through which to distinguish opportunities to be leveraged and gender-specific concerns to be tackled in the design and implementation of gender-sensitive trade policies, buttressed with context-specific complementary measures. In so doing, the process of mainstreaming gender equality into AfCFTA national implementation strategies can translate the transformative promise of AfCFTA into tangible progress for women on the ground.

IV. Advancing gender equality and economic empowerment for women traders and entrepreneurs under the African Continental Free Trade Area

The World Bank notes that female-run enterprises have been growing steadily worldwide, making a significant contribution to household incomes and the growth of national economies. Whether in the formal or informal sector, women entrepreneurs confront time, capital, physical and social constraints that stunt the growth of their businesses (World Bank, 2013). Some of the barriers women face in establishing growth-oriented prosperous enterprises include: limited access to finance; lack of access to business training and skills development in technical areas; weak literacy and numeracy; lack of access to land, property, technology and markets; cumbersome and costly business registration procedures; and gender discriminatory social norms (ILO, 2017). In addition, many women entrepreneurs have no access to business networks, and they shoulder additional household care obligations, which place extra demands on their time and income.

The successful implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement can advance gender equality by increasing economic opportunities and entrepreneurship for women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises in the formal sector, and for microenterprises in the informal sector, including through boosting the demand for manufactured goods. With AfCFTA, these businesses will be better positioned to tap into regional export destinations and use regional markets as a stepping stone for expanding into global markets at a later stage. Through the creation of regional value chains, larger, export-oriented industries can source suppliers from smaller women-owned businesses across borders (ECA and African Union Commission, 2018). In most cases, however, efforts made by women-owned businesses to enter supply chains, upgrade into higher-value activities and expand

their operations to new markets are limited by specific barriers that women face. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women-led businesses in the informal economy are especially disadvantaged by poor trade-related infrastructure for transport and storage, while accessing domestic and export markets poses additional challenges for women-owned microenterprises because of their small scale of operation (FAO, 2010).

It is worth noting that informal employment on the continent is a greater source of employment for women than for men, with significant implications for gender equality. Women are engaging in various activities in the informal sector, including as traders and as home-based micro-entrepreneurs of manufactured items such as handicrafts, soap making, dress making, food processing and pottery. Female entrepreneurs make up the majority of self-employed individuals and own a third of all businesses throughout Africa. The majority, however, are running microenterprises in the informal sector, engaging in low-value added activities that reap marginal returns (AfDB, 2015). AfDB points out that these businesses operated by women are a key source of income for many poorer households. If developed into more productive enterprises, microenterprises could be a driver of inclusive growth. Informal cross-border trade (ICBT) is among the major activities for self-employed women in the informal sector, with women representing up to 70 per cent of ICBT on the continent. They constitute approximately 70 per cent of ICBT in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region and nearly 60 per cent in West and Central Africa (FAO, 2017; UNCTAD, 2019a). The ICBT sector makes a sizeable contribution to the GDP of African economies⁷ and is vital to tackling

⁷ Informal cross-border trade is estimated at \$17.6 billion annually – 30–40 per cent of total regional trade in SADC, and 20 per cent and 75 per cent of GDP in Nigeria and Benin, respectively (UNCTAD and UNDP, 2008).

issues of employment creation, income generation and food security. Research shows that allowing cross-border traders to flourish, grow and gradually integrate into the formal economy would boost trade and the private sector, thereby supporting growth and development, while increasing government revenue and its concomitant ability to provide public goods (UNCTAD, 2019a).

Informal cross-border traders, and women in particular, suffer disproportionately from numerous challenges that prevent women from leveraging the full potential of ICBT. A recent study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on cross-border trade in Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, identified the five most significant challenges encountered by female informal cross-border traders: limited capacity to trade higher value added goods; bribery and corruption at the border; limited capacity to diversify the set of goods traded; limited access to financial resources; and misinformation about customs procedures and regulations. Other major constraints identified include harassment and personal safety, confiscation of goods at the border, restrictions on trade of certain goods, and payment of undue fees (UNCTAD, 2019a). NTBs in particular are obstructive to informal cross-border traders and small businesses. Among the most common NTBs reported on the continent are customs and trade procedures, immigration procedures, transport-related requirements and roadblocks (ECA, African Union Commission and AfDB, 2017). For informal cross-border traders to gain from reduced import duties and taxes, member States will need to tackle the key challenges facing them, while paying special attention to gender-specific vulnerabilities. With its provisions on the elimination of NTBs, customs cooperation, transit and trade facilitation, AfCFTA can help to tackle some of the main challenges faced by female cross-border traders and women-owned businesses in the formal and informal sector. Trade facilitation deals with NTBs that can burden businesses even more than traditional tariffs. It can include modernizing border procedures, improving transparency and predictability, and eliminating procedural inefficiencies, while ensuring that trade complies with legitimate public policy objectives, such as consumer welfare, health and safety standards and environmental sustainability (ECA and others, 2019).

The recently launched AfCFTA NTB online mechanism promotes inclusiveness, especially for women-owned businesses and small traders, by providing entrepreneurs and traders with a voice through which to seek the removal of specific trade obstacles. This mechanism allows for: reporting of barriers of day-to-day operations on an NTB website; submission of complaints using an offline short-messaging-service feature; and receipt of up-to-date information on NTB resolution processes (UNCTAD, 2019b; see also AfCFTA NTB Online Mechanism, available at <https://tradebarriers.africa/home>).

In addition, the implementation of gender-responsive trade facilitation measures that are aimed at simplifying and harmonizing customs and border procedures, and import and export processes, would help to ensure that female cross-border traders and women entrepreneurs have equal access to economic opportunities under AfCFTA. The introduction of a Continental Simplified Trade Regime could further assist small and informal traders to benefit from AfCFTA by providing these traders with simplified customs documents, a common list of goods that qualify for duty free status, and assistance in completing customs procedures (ECA, FES and OHCHR, 2017). Building upon the East African Community and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Simplified Trade Regimes, a Continental Simplified Trade Regime could bring small traders into the formal trading system. The inclusion, especially of female informal traders, into more formal trading arrangements would support their participation in new export opportunities created by AfCFTA, and contribute to unleashing the significant entrepreneurial potential of this vulnerable group.

The ability of female-led enterprises to enter regional value chains, upgrade into higher value activities and take advantage of new markets under AfCFTA is dependent, in large part, on empowering female entrepreneurs. Recognizing that traders and women-led businesses in the informal and formal sector are diverse, targeted policies and programmes should address the gender-specific constraints and respond to the priority needs of various groups. For female traders and entrepreneurs, including micro-entrepreneurs, to participate effectively in expanded intra-African trade,

there is a need to build upon current interventions, with a view to defining new approaches, to ensure that women and men benefit equally in the implementation of AfCFTA. Complementary measures to support this objective may include:

- a) Access to finance/working capital;
- b) Facilitating market links and market information;
- c) Mentorship, buyer and business network opportunities;
- d) Targeted support for strategies to connect and enable female-led enterprises to compete in regional value chains;
- e) Support to include digital skills training as more regional value chain activities go digital;
- f) Capacity-building and expertise training on meeting local content and rules of origin requirements, and other regulations, including complying with AfCFTA certificates of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and other technical requirements, such as packaging, labelling and certification of products that meet AfCFTA trade standards;
- g) Specialized financial literacy, business and financial management training, particularly for female micro-entrepreneurs;
- h) Gender-responsive public procurement policies and programmes for women-owned businesses;
- i) Childcare services⁸ (ITC, 2015; ILO, 2016; and ECE, 2018).⁹

⁸ Women micro-entrepreneurs often cite childcare and family responsibilities as one of the main reasons for not running more profitable businesses or not participating in trainings (UNIDO, 2019, pp. 50–51).

⁹ The Economic Commission for Europe (2018) identifies the following priority areas as part of capacity-building for women entrepreneurs: export and import procedures, drafting export development plans, logistics management, developing international marketing strategies, and conducting export market research.

V. Advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment under the African Continental Free Trade Area: A sectoral approach

A. Agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of the African economy, employing an estimated 70 per cent of the population. This sector remains the leading source of employment for African women, who produce the majority of the continent's food (AfDB, 2015). The increase in intra-African trade for agriculture and food products under AfCFTA is anticipated to range between 20 per cent (\$9.5 billion) and 30 per cent (\$17 billion), depending on the degree of liberalization, in 2040, compared with a situation without AfCFTA. The agricultural sector – which includes sugar, vegetables, fruit, nuts, beverages, tobacco, meat and dairy products – is likely to gain the largest trade expansion (ECA, 2018). AfCFTA can create opportunities for gender equality and women's empowerment in the agricultural sector by providing expanded markets for exports, and opportunities for women to integrate into agricultural regional value chains, value added agro-processing and other upstream and downstream activities in relevant sectors.

While trade liberalization does not have clear-cut positive or negative effects on women in agriculture (UNCTAD, 2016b), its effects may disproportionately impact women. Women are involved in the production of both cash (export) and subsistence crops, but are primarily responsible for household food production in several regions – up to 80 per cent in some parts of Africa (ECA, FES and OHCHR, 2017). Agricultural liberalization often has the effect of increasing the production of export crops, while increasing cheap food imports that compete with and reduce the domestic price of agricultural produce (UNCTAD and UNDP, 2008). As a result of trade liberalization, farmers have been forced to expand and introduce technological improvements to farming techniques in order to compete with import products and in international

markets. Trade expansion is closely associated with a trend towards commercialization and agricultural diversification, implying a shift in farming from low-value staple crops to higher-value commodities. In traditional export cash crops, commercialization and diversification may be linked to a shift towards higher-quality products, which have usually favoured commercially-oriented male farmers over female small-scale producers. These patterns have discernible gender effects (UNCTAD, 2016b).

Women Watch points out that women, who constitute the majority of small-scale food farmers, risk being crowded out by export-oriented operations. Female farmers tend to be disadvantaged by agricultural trade liberalization due to a number of factors, including: limited access to finance, agricultural inputs and land; and lack of marketing knowledge and networks (Women Watch, 2011). In addition, poor literacy levels, limited access to technology and machinery, unpaid care work, trade-related constraints and market access challenges relating to phytosanitary standards and other technical barriers to trade, further reduce the productivity of women in the agriculture sector (ECA and AfDB, 2015; FAO, 2011). A comprehensive approach under AfCFTA that opens up access to productive resources – such as finance, market access opportunities, land, technology and other assets – could increase the yields of female smallholder farmers and facilitate their transition from subsistence agriculture to higher-value crops for export. Such an approach could also support these farmers to take advantage of expanded markets for export.

Most African economies still rely on the export of raw agricultural commodities, often associated with low returns and vulnerability to global price fluctuations. To promote a successful structural transformation with increased income for agricultural workers, value must be added to raw materials (ILO, 2017). The creation of a single market under

AfCFTA will enable significant economies of scale to support the expansion of agro-manufacturing – as a sector with enormous potential to add value to agricultural products and expand opportunities for rural employment. Small-scale agricultural producers can benefit from the opening up of new markets to sell to African agribusinesses. For women to leverage new opportunities, measures need to be put in place to support the development of agricultural value chains and empower the participation of women as part of these value chains. It is worth noting that national and international demand for specialized food is opening up opportunities for women to move to agropacking and processing jobs, and join integrated value chains to supply fresh produce and livestock (ECA, FES and OHCHR, 2017). Training and skills development interventions need to be considered alongside the creation of new opportunities in the agricultural sector. In this regard, UNCTAD (2017a) has shown that, while agro-industries might bring new job opportunities with higher wages and better working conditions than traditional farming, women workers in agroprocessing were typically segregated into labour-intensive tasks such as packaging, with limited opportunities for skills development.

Gender mainstreaming in AfCFTA national implementation strategies provides a useful tool to understand the potential impact of trade liberalization in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity to deal with existing gender-based inequalities in the design of agricultural policies aimed at improving agricultural production, agribusiness and value chain advancement. Sensitive and exclusion list provisions to ensure food security objectives could be used as a policy instrument. These provisions, however, should be considered alongside policies and proactive complementary measures to promote gender-inclusive agricultural trade under AfCFTA. Complementary measures for consideration may include:

- a) Prioritized access for women in their roles as farmers, entrepreneurs and labourers, to market information, rural and agricultural finance, access to land and secured land tenure;
- b) Improved access to knowledge, inputs for farming and markets;

- c) Identification of priority products, crops and other export sectors for female empowerment;
- d) Identification of economic opportunities, particularly for smallholder female farmers, in selected agro-regional value chains, sustainable agro-processing, agricultural clusters and corridors;
- e) Links to input distribution networks and support for female cooperatives, and producer organizations to foster productive capacity and increased market access, in particular for women smallholder farmers;
- f) Marketing skills and expertise training on product standards, labelling and certification requirements, to support female farmers to comply with AfCFTA technical standards for agricultural products;
- g) Access to facilities that include marketing and storage facilities for women's produce. Attention to be paid to issues of location and transport, which may pose additional access challenges for women in remote rural areas;
- h) Access to extension services, particularly training and information on time and labour-saving technologies, as well as training programmes in capital intensive activities in commercial agriculture and other interventions that boost value-added productive activities in the agricultural sector (ECA and AfDB, 2015; ECA, FES and OHCHR, 2017).

B. Manufacturing

Industrialization is a powerful driver of economic and social transformation. To advance, the continent's economies need to undertake a systematic structural transformation from resource-based to more diversified economies, specifically by increasing the shares of manufacturing and agro-related industry in national investment, output and trade (ECA and others, 2018). AfCFTA offers significant potential for catalysing the structural transformation of Africa, as it seeks to spur industrialization, economic diversification and employment. With AfCFTA in place, intra-African trade in industrial products is projected to increase between approximately 25 per cent (\$36 billion) and 30 per cent (\$44 billion), depending on the degree of liberalization,

in 2040, compared with a situation without AfCFTA. The successful implementation of AfCFTA will lead to an increase in demand for goods manufactured by small and medium-sized enterprises. Industrial sectors – including textile, apparel, leather, wood and paper, vehicle and transport equipment, electronics and metals – are expected to benefit the most from AfCFTA reform, in terms of trade expansion (ECA, 2018).

Notwithstanding their strong socioeconomic contribution to African economies, women represent only 38 per cent of the manufacturing workforce in Africa (Yong, 2017). As wage workers, women are concentrated in a few labour-intensive industries in the manufacturing sector, including garments, textiles, toys and electronics, while their share of employment in sectors such as chemicals, wood products and metallurgical industries is much lower. This type of gender segregation or crowding in a few industries, according to UNCTAD (2015), serves to keep women's wages low. Over the years, export processing zones have played a key role in improving the export competitiveness of many developing countries, with women constituting the majority of workers employed in these zones, ranging from 50 per cent up to 90 per cent in some cases (Avsar and Linoci, 2017). Although these zones have been instrumental in integrating women into the formal sector and have contributed to reducing the gender wage gap, a number of factors, which include the clustering of women in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, have cast doubt on the benefits of export processing zones for women's welfare (Tran-Nguyen, 2004). A United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) study (2019) noted that industrial development could reduce gender inequalities when it contributes to quality job creation in sectors which may have previously excluded women. Industrial development can also reinforce gender inequalities when industrial expansion is based on increasing jobs for women, while at the same time maintaining gender-based sectoral segregation and large gender wage gaps.

The association of female workers with specific tasks and industries may be attributed to a number of factors, including women's lower social and economic status, and persistent gender stereotyping (UNIDO, 2019). Based on a study undertaken in 2019, ILO found that cultural norms in Myanmar

were preventing women from accessing future higher-skilled jobs often deemed suitable only for men. In their report, they noted the trend toward automation and the increasing use of artificial intelligence in the global garment industry, and highlighted the importance of proactive measures, which provide women with requisite knowledge and skills training (ILO, 2019). When considering the extent to which female workers were more likely to be impacted by job losses in manufacturing production processes, due to an increased reliance on robot-based automation, UNIDO concluded that gendered effects would result from differences in the set of skills that female and male workers possessed, and the degree of rigidity in norms that defined which occupations were suitable for either women or men – all of which are country- and context-specific. Skills and training are crucial in order to resolve the gender differences in technical skills, as the main cause of persistent gender occupational segregation and wage gaps. In addition to technical education, as an essential requirement for women to diversify into industrial sectors and occupations from which they may have been previously excluded, female workers need to be provided with on-the-job training. Such training would enable women to participate on equal terms as men for promotions to high-tech jobs in different industrial sectors (UNIDO, 2019).

The development of the manufacturing sector brings with it unparalleled opportunities to absorb a large number of women, both as workers and as entrepreneurs. As African countries proceed to develop their manufacturing base and shift to the production of higher value added goods, specific attention must be paid to promoting women's manufacturing employment as part of this process. Countries should move away from industrial strategies in which women are used as a source of cost advantage, to support more equitable strategies that expand women's economic opportunities as an inherent part of a country's industrialization process (UNIDO, 2019). Gender-specific interventions are required to ensure that women benefit in equal measure to men and that the creation of employment opportunities is not accompanied by new patterns of inequality and vulnerability, including poor working conditions and wages. Of vital importance is the promotion of decent jobs for

women – an imperative that lies at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Integrating female workers into new and expanding industries, especially in export-oriented manufacturing industries, which are likely to emerge as significant growth drivers, can lead to direct benefits for women. Through research, UNCTAD (2014) found that the production of differentiated, high value added and processed food products could offer formal employment opportunities for relatively unskilled women, while the creation of forward and backward linkages with existing industries and the development of industrial clusters could generate a new dynamism in manufacturing. To create more wage employment in the manufacturing sector, there is a need to promote industries with potential comparative advantage. Tackling the institutional barriers facing female workers would allow them to advance to value added and more productive occupations within various industries. Given the active engagement of women throughout the fashion value chain, AfDB has identified the fashion sector as one with strong potential for the economic empowerment of women in rural and urban areas. The Bank estimated that up to 600 per cent of value could be created along the cotton value chain: from cotton production, spinning and twisting into yarn, to weaving and knitting into fabric, followed by dyeing, printing and designing (AfDB, 2018).

Realizing the promise of AfCFTA for women in manufacturing requires a concerted move away from the precarious nature of women's jobs in this sector, through the implementation of interventions that go beyond industrial policy. These include women having access to on-the-job training, retraining, information and communications technology (ICT), technical education and skills development. Educational policies and training to deal with skill shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, especially for women and girls, should be encouraged. Consideration may be given to the following complementary measures as part of gender mainstreaming to advance women's employment in manufacturing under AfCFTA:

- a) Supporting the participation of women in industrial and value chain clusters in the

manufacturing sector that offer new export-generating and employment opportunities;

- b) Implementing special schemes for the promotion of industries in which the share of women in the workforce is very high;
- c) Setting up industrial parks to support women's enterprises;
- d) Promoting the participation of women in traditionally male-dominated vocations and in training programmes for higher-skilled activities;
- e) Incentivizing both horizontal and vertical gender mobility, especially in export processing zones, to limit female segregation in low-skilled manufacturing activities (UNIDO, 2019; Avsar and Linoci, 2017; UNCTAD, 2015 and 2016a).

C. Services

As a key driver of economic growth, the services sector can contribute to significant gender equality outcomes in African economies. Through the progressive liberalization of services, service suppliers under AfCFTA will have access to the markets of all African countries, preferably on terms no less favourable than domestic suppliers (ECA and African Union Commission, 2018). The AfCFTA Protocol on Services involves ongoing negotiations to open up designated service sectors to allow for market access and treatment similar to that of local services providers, in the different modes of supplier, including the "commercial presence" of other African countries. In so doing, AfCFTA member States will exchange offers that will allow their investors to have better access to each other's respective sectors. Negotiations on trade in services will proceed on the basis of progressive liberalization that combines General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)-type scheduling of specific commitments of the World Trade Organization, on the one hand, with regulatory cooperation, on the other hand, in a mixed approach (African Union Commission, Department of Trade and Industry, 2018). The five priority sectors for negotiations in trade in services are business services, communications, financial, tourism and transport.

The services sector is the largest part of the economy in most African countries, constituting roughly

60 per cent of the continent's GDP in 2014 (ECA and African Union Commission, 2018). Although agriculture remains the main source of employment for women in Africa,¹⁰ the services sector, globally, employs the highest number of women (ILO, 2016). As a key driver of economic growth, this sector can support the realization of gender equality under AfCFTA. While liberalization of services trade has the potential to generate further employment and income opportunities for women, it does not automatically lead to improved outcomes for women. Concerns have been raised regarding the effect of services trade liberalization, including the magnitude of short-term adjustment costs and the availability of ways and means to deal with them. According to Women Watch (2011), these costs arise from import penetration in both the services sector and the manufacturing sector, which can generate unemployment and the underutilization of factors of production in declining sectors in which women may be employed. Furthermore, the gradual expansion of new competitive activities may not provide immediate employment opportunities, especially for women.

It is worth noting the type of service jobs that women have held over the course of integration processes. An UNCTAD report on trade and gender linkages in the COMESA region provides a review of the opportunities and challenges associated with ICT-enabled services outsourcing and tourism industries, both of which have been prioritized by COMESA because of their potential to contribute to economic growth and development. Despite the

opportunities that tourism offers to advance women's economic empowerment and gender equality, female tourism workers in the region are often concentrated in lower-skilled jobs, with men more likely to occupy higher-paid jobs. When examining the extent to which women have been positioned from the liberalization of ICT services, UNCTAD, in its report, concluded that ICT-enabled trade in services should be examined both for its potential to open up new opportunities for educated, highly-skilled women to engage in the global economy, and its potential to expose patterns of bias or inequalities that may inhibit the ability of women to gain from opportunities relative to men (UNCTAD, 2017b).

Liberalization of services trade has the potential to generate further employment and income opportunities for women, but it could also create risks if gender perspectives are not incorporated as part of the schedules of specific commitments for trade in services. As African Union member States embark on negotiations to open up trade in services, due consideration should be given to advancing productive employment and decent jobs for women in the services trade. Ensuring that women are able to take advantage of higher-skilled service jobs in the five identified priority sectors requires the formulation of gender-sensitive regulatory and policy frameworks, supported by complementary measures. These may include providing access to financial service and technology, business networks, as well as practical skills development and other demand-driven training programmes.

¹⁰ Excluding North Africa.

VI. Conclusion and policy messages

Gender mainstreaming in AfCFTA national implementation strategies is a key strategy to advance the objective of gender equality under the AfCFTA Agreement. A systematic approach to advancing gender-specific outcomes in the design of AfCFTA national strategies can promote the empowerment of women as entrepreneurs, traders, producers and workers, thereby turning the transformative promise of AfCFTA into lasting progress for African women, and shifting the developmental trajectories of African countries onto a more inclusive and sustainable path.

The following key policy messages are put forward for consideration as part of this process:

- a) Mainstreaming gender into AfCFTA national implementation strategies requires an in-depth analysis of the various roles that women play in the economy. This includes analysing the gender dynamics for female traders and entrepreneurs in the informal and formal economy. It also requires a comprehensive understanding of the different sectors in which women are concentrated, including in the traditional female-intensive sectors of agriculture, manufacturing and services, and in non-traditional industrial and trade sectors with the potential to emerge as major growth drivers. Identifying opportunity sectors and products with

high export potential, and value chains with positive socioeconomic impact, together with complementary measures that can support new economic opportunities to catalyse women's entrepreneurship and empowerment, is central to the gender mainstreaming process.

- b) Recognizing that traders and women-led businesses in the informal and formal sectors are diverse, targeted policies and programmes, grounded in evidence, should take into account and respond to the priority needs of both groups.
- c) Gender-disaggregated data and statistics are critical to informing evidence-based interventions that tackle a range of barriers limiting women's capacity to participate in new economic and trade opportunities created under AfCFTA.
- d) For women to reap the full benefit of the AfCFTA Agreement, they must adapt. Ensuring that women have access to ICT, technical education and skills development and training can enhance employment outcomes and enable them to enter new high value work, both in traditional female sectors of the economy and other sectors that may emerge as significant growth drivers, with the potential for female employment creation.

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