



POLICY BRIEF:

TRADE FACILITATION IN THE AGRIFOOD SECTOR

Making the African Continental Free Trade Area work for women

Policy recommendations

- 01** Ensure that the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade contains a gender-responsive implementation plan clarifying how its commitments will be implemented, budgeted for and monitored through a clear accountability mechanism.
- 02** Ensure that trade liberalization strategies implemented under the AfCFTA for the agrifood sector engage women agripreneurs and traders, women-led cooperatives and women business associations in the development of national and regional value chains.
- 03** Establish a continental simplified trade regime (STR). Continuously review the STR to meet the needs and interests of women agripreneurs and traders and further harmonize across the continent and all Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa. The list of agrifood products featured in tariff schedules must also be gender-responsive.
- 04** Empower women to enable National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) to better champion gender-responsiveness in intra-African trade through policy design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Empowerment involves promoting the participation of women business associations in decision-making processes within NTFCs; including gendered considerations into the organizational design of NTFCs; and gender mainstreaming trade facilitation issues by a gender focal point within these committees.
- 05** Translate and disseminate step-by-step AfCFTA user guides into local languages using easy-to-understand pamphlets to build awareness and share information about the AfCFTA with women agripreneurs and traders.
- 06** Make infrastructure at border crossings gender-responsive to meet the needs of women small-scale cross-border traders.

Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers African governments an opportunity to ensure that gender-responsive trade facilitation mechanisms are part of its implementation strategies. Specific reference to gender equality

and the inclusion of women and youth in the economic growth is envisaged under the AfCFTA in the following Articles and protocols:

- Article 3(e): “promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties”;

- Protocol on Trade in Services, Article 27 (2)(d): “improving the export capacity of both formal and informal service suppliers, with particular attention to micro, small and medium size; women and youth service suppliers”; and
- Phase II of negotiations: provision for a Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade.

This policy brief examines the role of the AfCFTA in addressing gender-related challenges in trade facilitation faced by women agripreneurs and traders¹ across sub-Saharan Africa. The brief provides an overview of the following issues:

- gender dimensions underpinning trade, cross-border trade and agripreneurial activities for women;
- trade facilitation provisions under the AfCFTA and how they can support and improve trade regimes for women in the agrifood sector; and
- policy recommendations to promote and strengthen gender-responsive negotiation and implementation of trade facilitation under the AfCFTA to meet the needs of – and boost opportunities for – African women in the agrifood sector.

Gender dimensions of trade facilitation in the agrifood sector and the AfCFTA

The AfCFTA offers improved trading opportunities for farmers, processors, entrepreneurs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, traders and informal cross-border traders across urban, peri-urban, rural and border areas. The simplified requirements under the agreement provides the possibility of moving beyond informality into the formal economy. The AfCFTA can open up opportunities for women agripreneurs and traders to tap into new markets and move up the value chain for trading in agrifood goods (FAO, 2021). However, gains can only be achieved if trade facilitation is improved for both women and men across the continent. The main objective of trade facilitation is to eliminate red tape and reduce the time and associated costs that constrain trade activities. The creation of specific gender-responsive trading conditions requires



An overview of trade facilitation principles and key areas of intervention

Four principles of trade facilitation

Transparency

Harmonization

Simplification

Standardization



Five key areas of trade facilitation

Publication and administration of policies related to trade issues

Rules and procedures for import and export

Product standards and conformance

Trade-related infrastructure and services

Goods in transit

SOURCE: Asian Development Bank. 2017. *Trade facilitation for a more inclusive and connected Asia and Pacific region: progress and way forward*. Manila, Asian Development Bank.

1. In this policy brief, the terms women agripreneurs and traders are inclusive of women producers, processors, traders (including cross-border traders) and entrepreneurs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the agrifood sector. These terminologies encompass multiple groups and reflect the heterogeneity of women's productive and business activities in the agrifood sector. Women often perform multiple roles along the nodes of the agrifood value chains – small-scale traders are often processors, and entrepreneurs of micro and small enterprises also frequently engage in intraregional trade.

policy measures that make doing business easier and more transparent and promote women's participation in trade activities. Examples include simplified trade procedures, reduced tariff and non-tariff barriers, and improvements in hard and soft infrastructure that are responsive to the needs and challenges faced by women and men.

The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods (Annex 4, Article 1(i)) defines trade facilitation as:

...the simplification and harmonisation of international trade procedures, including activities, practices, and formalities involved in collecting, presenting, communicating, and processing data required for the movement of goods in international trade;

Trade, cross-border trade and entrepreneurship in the agrifood sector: a gender perspective

Across the world, the agricultural sector is heavily dominated by women. Women perform numerous roles in the production, processing, distribution and trade of agrifood goods and are active as small business owners, agripreneurs and traders (FAO, 2021; FAO, 2023). Agricultural work and small-scale, cross-border trade activities (informal and formal) are among the two primary income-earning activities for women in Africa. Women constitute up to 70 percent of all informal small-scale traders in the continent (FAO, 2021). Much of this work is informal, insecure and lacks any form of social protection (Koroma *et al.*, 2017). Restrictive regulatory environments, the absence of skills and the lack of capital and resources push many women into self-employment (Koroma *et al.*, 2017).

Among sub-Saharan African countries, the agricultural sector is of critical economic importance and accounts for approximately 23 percent of gross domestic product (Goedde *et al.*, 2019).

The AfCFTA offers African Union member countries the opportunity to increase the scale, scope and diversity of intraregional agricultural trade. African countries currently import only 15 percent of their food produce from other African countries (Oxford Business Group, 2021). The AfCFTA could potentially increase intra-African trade in agricultural products by as much as USD 10 billion to USD 17 billion – an increase of 20–35 percent

compared to existing trade levels on the continent (Oxford Business Group, 2021).

Women agripreneurs and traders in sub-Saharan Africa trade in agricultural produce, food supplies, manufactured goods and re-exported goods that include value-added agroprocessed foods and play a critical role in meeting the food security and livelihood needs of households. For example, during the Zimbabwean economic crisis in the mid-2000s, women small-scale traders procured manufactured goods and food supplies from South Africa to resell in Zimbabwe. Despite women's key contribution to local and national economies and food security, existing trade facilitation mechanisms are not necessarily supportive of women agripreneurs and traders.

Women agripreneurs and traders face a myriad of challenges when engaging in trade activities: limited



Understanding the profile of women traders in sub-Saharan Africa: an example from the Abidjan-Lagos corridor

- 01** Women are overrepresented among informal cross-border traders and carry out 61 percent of all informal transactions.
- 02** Twice as many women as men trade in food items.
- 03** Women were far more likely to transport goods on foot.
- 04** Men were more likely to use motorcycles, buses or other forms of transport.

SOURCE: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. 2021. *Enhancing the quality of informal cross-border trade in the economic community of West African States*. Addis Ababa, Economic Commission for Africa.

access to markets and finance; misinformation and insufficient knowledge of customs procedures; gender-based violence, harassment and bribery at border crossings; and the need to balance household and care responsibilities with time for their business activities. The multiple constraints that women experience in their economic and trading activities present serious implications.

Market access for agricultural goods and agrifood products represents one of the main obstacles for women agripreneurs and traders. Many such products – particularly perishable goods – are unable to withstand long transportation times. This could be due to poor handling, processing and food safety practices, poor packaging and labelling or lack of storage and cooling facilities and transport. If products spoil and are not suitable for markets, women then suffer a loss in profits. In view of these challenges, border markets (and locations close to border crossings) play a particularly crucial role in ensuring that agricultural goods are sold quickly. These markets also serve an important function as logistics platforms that allow for the consolidation and transportation of products. This lessens the need for women small-scale traders to travel long distances and risk exposure to gender-based violence, harassment and threats to their personal safety (World Bank, 2015).

Limited access to finance also has a significant impact on women entrepreneurs and traders in sub-Saharan Africa. Women need financing to either formalize or expand their enterprises (such as accessing new markets, improving business services or diversifying products or services). Financial products and services often require collateral in the form of savings, assets or land. However, many women agripreneurs and traders are disadvantaged and sidelined vis-à-vis formal banking institutions – mostly due to social and gender discriminatory norms influencing inheritance and the ability to provide collateral (UNCTAD, 2019). Deficiencies in the formal banking sector and inflated exchange rates by informal money changers at border sites result in the erosion of profit margins for small-scale traders (Koroma *et al.*, 2017). Supporting women traders to form cooperatives and business associations and access funding/credit as a group could circumvent barriers in access to finance (APRM, 2022).

Trade facilitation measures (procedural, regulatory and infrastructural) are often not gender inclusive and do not address the constraints and

challenges facing either formal or informal women agripreneurs and traders. Specific challenges for women in trade facilitation include:

- **Barriers related to the availability and accessibility of trade information and regulations:** Women are often unable to benefit from trade facilitation schemes. Women traders may have relatively low literacy levels and often do not know or are misinformed about customs and other requirements. They may be unaware that mechanisms – such as STRs or designated trade lanes – exist for their benefit. Many women traders may be unsure of the customs, duties and other taxes payable at borders, which exposes them to bribery and/or forces them into informal trading routes (APRM, 2022). Women agripreneurs also face similar knowledge gaps, including a limited understanding of customs, excise and value-added tax. As a result, they often continue to pay tariffs even when intraregional trade is duty free (UNCTAD, 2019).
- **Gender-based violence, harassment and threats to personal safety:** Many women traders rely on informal trading routes and the invisibility that these options present. This dependence – in addition to a lack of knowledge on border processes – renders women traders more vulnerable to harassment, requests for bribes and, in more extreme instances, physical and sexual abuse from middlemen and border officials (Brenton *et al.*, 2013).
- **Gender-blind customs environment:** Many border crossings do not have adequate information-sharing mechanisms or trade information desks available to assist women with queries about taxes and procedures. Similarly, women traders are often unaware of the processes involved in dispute resolution mechanisms and/or flagging non-compliance of customs officials at border posts.
- **Gender-blind infrastructure:** The infrastructure at border crossings neglects the needs of women traders that use the facilities daily. Gender-sensitive infrastructure could include appropriate sanitation and rest facilities for women, the availability of street lighting at night, designated pedestrian lanes for women traders and the presence of baby changing stations and childcare facilities. This would contribute to better and safer working and trading conditions and quality of life for women cross-border traders. For

women agripreneurs dealing with perishable agricultural produce, speedier clearance and designated transportation lanes would ensure that they are not burdened with high inventory costs resulting from clearance delays and goods perishing at the borders.

Gender and trade facilitation under the AfCFTA: making trade work equally for women

The AfCFTA draws on established frameworks present within RECs in Africa. It is also rooted in existing agreements – such as the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the World Trade Organization – as the cornerstones for provisions on trade facilitation (Chidede, 2018).

Within the AfCFTA, two key annexures under the Protocol on Trade in Goods provide guidance on trade facilitation issues:

- Annex 3 focuses on customs cooperation and mutual administrative assistance, covering the cooperation of state parties in all areas of customs administration.
- Annex 4 focuses on trade facilitation and covers issues pertaining to transparency, charges and formalities, import, export and transit and institutional arrangements, among others. Annex 4 also encourages member states to adopt single window systems and provides for the use of electronic processing and payment systems.

Requirements under Annex 4 to strengthen transparency will assist agripreneurs and traders, particularly women, to better understand procedures and processes for trade. These include rules and regulations, the mandatory publication of customs procedures, documentation required for import and export, and information regarding penalties and appeal processes. Transparency measures should also extend to regularly updated lists for sensitive products and agricultural goods excluded from tariff liberalization by AfCFTA member states.² These measures need to be included in domestic AfCFTA implementation strategies and accompanied by appropriate

gender-responsive sensitization plans to ensure that last mile recipients – such as women agripreneurs and traders – are identified as clear beneficiaries and targets for domestic AfCFTA implementation.

Provisions in Annex 4 on pre-arrival processing and clearance will also play an important role in governing how agricultural products and agrifood goods are handled by customs clearance officials. This will be a strong determinant of the level of ease for women agripreneurs and traders to do business under the AfCFTA. Article 15 of Annex 4 provides that border agencies must release perishable goods within the shortest possible time. This will play a crucial role in getting agrifood goods swiftly to market and reducing potential losses in profits and value. The Article also requires that the inspection of perishables is prioritized when scheduling examinations.

Article 7 of Annex 4 also makes provision for state parties to facilitate the submission of import documents prior to the arrival of goods, preferably in electronic form to eliminate manual processing as part of pre-arrival processes. Digitizing customs clearance processes will go a long way towards reducing human contact and clearance time (the importance of which was particularly evident at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic). Digitization will also allow for the electronic collection of gender and sex-disaggregated data on agricultural export baskets (goods, quantity and value). All such efforts will improve both efficiency and transparency of procedures at border crossings, while also supporting the collection of gender-specific data to inform evidence-based policymaking at national levels.

As part of its efforts to improve transparency and promote access to information, the AfCFTA also includes the African Trade Observatory, which businesses and policymakers can utilize to monitor the pace of trade and economic integration in Africa. The observatory allows entrepreneurs to compare markets for their products and provides businesses with key trade intelligence on trends, opportunities and market access conditions (African Trade Observatory, 2022). It is important to ensure that women entrepreneurs are not only aware of the observatory but also have the

2. Under the AfCFTA, a total of 90 percent of tariffs on trade in goods will be eliminated. Of the remaining 10 percent, 7 percent may be designated as sensitive and 3 percent of the tariff lines can be excluded from liberalization. Sensitive products must be liberalized over 10 years (13 years for least developed countries). Criteria for the designation of sensitive or excluded products include matters of food security, national security, fiscal revenue, livelihood and industrialization.

capacity to access, analyse and make use of the information available to their businesses. At the same time, there is significant scope for the observatory to introduce and build a repository of gender analyses to be readily accessible to policymakers.

The recent launch of the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System offers concrete solutions to help agripreneurs and traders to access simple, low-cost payment options for clearing and settling invoices to facilitate cross-border payments in local currencies (Bayat, 2022). If successfully implemented and affordable, this system can play a critical role in promoting both transparency in customs payments and the uptake of digital finance technologies among women agripreneurs and traders.

Trade facilitation mechanisms under the AfCFTA can be utilized to improve the daily trading realities of women traders. The AfCFTA contains several gender-specific interventions that aim to support women's full engagement with economic opportunities. These interventions and gender considerations need to be integrated into domestic policies of signatory countries for AfCFTA implementation to ensure that women across all facets of the economy can fully participate in – and benefit from – the economic opportunities under the AfCFTA.

Policy recommendations to promote and strengthen gender-responsiveness in trade facilitation for the agrifood sector under the AfCFTA

Although the operational phase of the AfCFTA has been launched,³ a number of protocols for Phase II still need to be negotiated, including the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade. This presents an opportunity to further investigate and identify mechanisms to make the AfCFTA gender-responsive and to tailor ongoing initiatives to meet the specific and diverse needs of women and men agripreneurs and traders and boost business opportunities. Initiatives include capacity development activities and digitization processes under the Common Market for Southern and Eastern Africa (COMESA) as well as ongoing implementation of support programmes by the

AfCFTA Secretariat and other African RECs. For the AfCFTA to be successful, policymakers need to account for the intersections of gender, agriculture and trade facilitation to ensure inclusive and gender-responsive implementation.

This section identifies important AfCFTA developments, the current status and the implications for women traders and agripreneurs. Policy recommendations are provided across six key areas relevant for women agripreneurs and traders:

- AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade;
- potential role of AfCFTA national implementation strategies in integrating gender;
- a gender-responsive continental STR;
- women's engagement and gender mainstreaming in NTFCs;
- training and capacity-building initiatives for women agripreneurs and traders; and
- collection, analysis and monitoring of gender data within trade facilitation.

AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade

The Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade is yet to be negotiated and developed. However, the protocol should be used in conjunction with the Protocol on Trade in Goods to guide African Union member states on customs processes that are gender-responsive, transparent and automated to reduce the time and cost for women to trade. The protocol should include provisions for encouraging women entrepreneurs and traders towards formalization and speak to their specific needs. Harmonized systems and reduced fees – coupled with increased profits – can act as incentives for women to move out of informal trade towards formalization. During negotiations, it is recommended that the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade include binding commitments vis-à-vis domestic implementation. The protocol should include an action plan detailing how gender-responsive provisions and commitments will be implemented, budgeted for and monitored through a clear accountability mechanism. This

3. For more information on AfCFTA operationalization, see <https://au.int/en/articles/operational-phase-african-continental-free-trade-area-launched>.

mechanism could be administered by the AfCFTA Secretariat in consultation with national AfCFTA implementation committees and women business associations.

Potential role of AfCFTA national implementation strategies in integrating gender

National implementation strategies provide the ideal opportunity for African Union member states to identify priority sectors and industries that can help advance the growth and participation of women in increased intra-African trade. The AfCFTA national implementation strategies are designed to further highlight existing barriers to entry, identify challenges to women's participation in the formal and informal economy and propose context-specific interventions to mitigate structural inequalities (Parshotam, 2019).

Within the context of trade facilitation, national implementation strategies should account for the following interventions:

- Conduct gender analyses that support the integration of gender concerns in national strategies and identify targeted trade facilitation measures that reduce the barriers and cost of trading for women-owned businesses in the formal and informal sector and for women small-scale traders.
- Include provisions for public-private partnerships that include development partners and civil society to assist women traders with formalizing their business activities (e.g. the Charter for Cross-Border Traders in Malawi and Zambia – a joint initiative to address issues faced in informal cross-border trade [APRM, 2022]).

Within the context of agriculture, national implementation strategies can better support the integration of smallholders and agripreneurs into national and regional value chains through the following strategies:

- Upgrade post-harvest handling and processing and implementing mechanisms that encourage business-to-business linkages between women producers, women-led cooperatives and larger companies to form part of their supply chains (i.e. outgrower schemes) and enable access to quality inputs, technology and skills

development (Parshotam, 2019).

- Designate support programmes and allocate funding to empower women agripreneurs and traders to form cooperatives to achieve economies of scale and improve their access to financing and logistics support.

A gender-responsive continental simplified trade regime

A continental STR should be recognized and developed as a critical and instrumental pillar to improve the daily trading realities for women agripreneurs and traders (both formal and informal), and to support harmonized regional trade operations. For example, the proposed AfCFTA certificate of origin will play an important role in reducing customs paperwork for informal traders and encourage their compliance – and hopefully formalization of trading practices – in the longer term (APRM, 2022).

As part of longer-term initiatives under the AfCFTA, it is important that a continental STR is designed with the following considerations in mind:

- Harmonize customs requirements and unify tax regimes to reduce costs for economic operators.
- Ensure that a continental STR resolves regional STR challenges. For example, rules will need to be harmonized across all RECs and STR implementation must be uniformly applied. This includes the threshold values per consignment and the common lists that identify goods eligible for clearance under the STR (Bayat, 2022). The list of agroproducts featured in tariff schedules must be gender-responsive and include commodities that have the potential to boost intraregional export of women-led businesses and those already commonly traded by women cross-border traders. The common lists of agreed goods for duty-free trade should be more extensive than those in the STRs of the East African Community and COMESA to include more manufactured agro-industrial goods.
- Digitize customs procedures for the benefit of small-scale traders, especially women. Trade information desk officers should be trained to use the digital systems effectively and to provide guidance and assistance to women agripreneurs and traders on digital systems,



An overview of simplified trade regimes in sub-Saharan Africa

The East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) have implemented a simplified trade regime (STR) – a policy instrument directed at simplifying cross-border trade for traders that largely benefits small-scale women traders in particular in its implementation. Under the STR, small-scale traders operating in COMESA and EAC member states can benefit from preferential market access without obtaining a certificate of origin for low-value consignments of less than USD 2000. The STR consists of the following documents: a simplified customs document, a simplified certificate of origin, a common list of products and a threshold for the value of the consignment

(Mafurutu, 2022). Other mechanisms available to improve trade facilitation within the context of the STR include the presence of trade information desks, which support cross-border traders to navigate the border environment and provide real-time trade information on regulations and customs clearance. In COMESA, for example, trade information desk officers are tasked with specifically assisting cross-border traders with border clearance procedures and solving disputes with border authorities (Parshotam and Balongo, 2020).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) does not have an operational STR despite ongoing discussions (Karkare *et*

al., 2021).^{*} However, ECOWAS has implemented an information trade regulation support programme, which provides information to policymakers on informal trade and supports the implementation of reforms that support formalization of trading activities in the region.

Work commenced in 2017 to develop a Southern African Development Community (SADC) STR. However, negotiations among SADC member states are ongoing and the STR is yet to be finalized and implemented (Mafurutu, 2022).

^{*} There are discussions within the joint ECOWAS–West African Economic and Monetary Union–Trade Facilitation West Africa programme on introducing an STR.

procedures and requirements. Electronic certificates of origin are under development in COMESA (Gichuki and Msiska, 2021). However, these efforts need to integrate gender-specific considerations to ensure they are beneficial and address the needs of women small-scale traders and agripreneurs. Given the existing digital gender gap in Africa, it is important that member states work on removing structural barriers to digitization for women and collaborate with cross-border traders associations and their members as well as border officials in training women on how to use these tools.

Women’s engagement and gender mainstreaming in National Trade Facilitation Committees

To date, a total of 44 African countries have NTFCs as part of their obligations to the Trade Facilitation Agreement (World Trade Organization, 2022). These existing NTFCs could be utilized to implement AfCFTA customs and trade facilitation provisions and to promote women’s participation and engagement. Strong representation on NTFCs of women traders, cross-border traders associations and women business associations from a comprehensive range of sectors (including the agrifood sector) is crucial as an important feedback mechanism to policymakers (ITC, 2019). However, efforts must go beyond representation and NTFCs should be gender-responsive in their organization and operations. Considerations include ensuring the following:

- The needs and interests of women are adequately catered for in outcomes and activities at the NTFC level and gender mainstreaming in all trade facilitation measures is subsequently implemented at the domestic

level (Brodsky, Lim and Reinsch, 2021).

- Each NTFC has at least one gender focal point tasked with gender mainstreaming and trade facilitation issues so that there is a synergized approach to implementing trade facilitation measures under both the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the AfCFTA.

Training and capacity building for women agripreneurs and traders

Trade facilitation information campaigns need to be targeted towards rural, urban, peri-urban and border communities and rightsholders operating in agrifood intraregional trade. To ensure successful implementation of training and capacity-building activities for women agripreneurs and traders, recommendations for policymakers include:

- Design step-by-step AfCFTA user guides available in local languages that use simplified, easy-to-understand terms. These guides can be shared at all venues where trade is undertaken and with women-managed trade information desks for women traders with lower literacy levels. This would ensure equal access to relevant information to traders, particularly women, who may be illiterate or have poor access to mobile phones and digital media.
- Include information that covers a range of provisions and rules (especially on agricultural products from all state parties that are on the excluded list) and streamlined AfCFTA documentation requirements from customs bodies.
- Offer gender sensitization training to customs officials for dealing with women traders and agripreneurs.

The same approach could be used to raise awareness of transparency of trade facilitation proceedings and requirements that can be disseminated through trade information desk officers and other means (such as rural radio or women's organizations) in local languages.

Collection, analysis and monitoring of gender data within trade facilitation

The collection of gender data and sex- and age-

disaggregated data is a critical step towards evidence-based policymaking. Data play a vital role in informing the allocation of gender-responsive budgeting for support programmes and the implementation of sensitization and capacity building for women. Consistent and widespread efforts at collecting gender data is lacking across the continent. However, collecting gender data can help policymakers identify important regional trading partners and understand the disaggregated breakdowns in trade flow. Collecting gender data can help policymakers better understand gender-based differences related to (i) type of goods/services being imported or exported; (ii) the value of goods being transported; (iii) origin, transit and destination countries; (iv) modes of transport; and (v) points of entry and departure.

The following recommendations should be taken into account by policymakers to promote the collection, analysis and use of data disaggregated by gender, sex and age:

- Amend customs paperwork to collect data disaggregated by gender, sex and age.
- Capture data electronically where possible. In instances where one-stop border posts and single window systems are used, electronic data capture will support widespread data sharing across customs systems. Sharing data will play an important role in encouraging different government departments across countries to work together and identify how trade facilitation mechanisms can be improved to meet the needs of women in trade.
- Institutionalize mandatory data collection and management frameworks for all gender data under the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade and introduce a reporting requirement for all state parties (AfCFTA Secretariat, *et. al*).
- Designate NTFCs as the appropriate body to implement policies that support the collection, analysis and reporting of gender data. This will provide much-needed data to support evidence-based policymaking and ensure that changes to trade facilitation policies and support programmes meet the needs of women rightsholders. ●

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About the FAO-ITC Empowering women and boosting livelihoods through agricultural trade: Leveraging the AfCFTA (EWAT) Programme

Co-implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC), the EWAT programme aims to support formal and informal women producers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, women's cooperatives, and associations to seize opportunities created by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in agriculture and agro-processing value chains.

The first phase (Dec 2021 – Dec 2022) of the programme delivered capacity building to 160 women producers, processors, traders, women's cooperatives, and associations; organized policy dialogues involving government institutions, the AfCFTA Secretariat, women's business associations, etc; and produced a number of policy briefs and value chain analyses on both the

fisheries and soybean-to-poultry value chains in Southern and West Africa.

During its second phase (Jan 2023 – Dec 2023), the programme will build on the successes achieved in the first phase, expand its analytical and capacity building work to Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania, and introduce a pilot component on gender-responsive access to finance for women entrepreneurs in the agrifood sector.

For more information about the programme, please contact raf-gender@fao.org or womenandtrade@intracen.org.

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