



## POLICY BRIEF

# SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

### Making the African Continental Free Trade Area work for women

#### Policy recommendations

- 01** Incorporate gender-responsive factors in the design of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures<sup>1</sup> for national implementation plans under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) through good regulatory practices. Gender specialists should work alongside technical experts to ensure that measures meet the needs of women traders and agripreneurs.<sup>2</sup>
- 02** Ensure gender-responsive data collection and analysis related to SPS measures to help identify gender-specific challenges, opportunities and impacts, and enable evidence-based policy formulation and targeted interventions for women traders and agripreneurs.
- 03** Identify and develop relevant policy instruments, support programmes, technical assistance and information-sharing measures that address the specific needs and circumstances of women traders and agripreneurs and that promote the uptake of SPS measures. Programmes should be well funded and designed to address potential barriers to participation for women traders and farmers.
- 04** Increase access to financial resources and credit facilities for women traders and agripreneurs to support compliance with SPS measures through specialized financing programmes or initiatives that consider the specific needs and circumstances of women-owned or women-led agribusinesses.
- 05** Simplify documents to support compliance with SPS measures for women traders and agripreneurs, to promote regional harmonization and to ensure that women traders move through formal trade channels and meet health safety standards for agrigoods.
- 06** Promote the uptake of e-certification to support more transparent and simplified cross-border trade in agrigoods. Digitalize certificates and establish shared databases to support

1. For a more in-depth analysis of how non-tariff measures affect women participating in the agrisector, please refer to the separate FAO-ITC policy brief on this topic. The brief is available at <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/cc6265en>.

2. In this policy brief, the terms women traders and agripreneurs 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.

authorities with accurate and easily accessible food safety databases across the region.

- 07 Encourage the uptake and utilization of free tools such as the [African Trade Observatory](#) and [ePingalert](#) that can help women traders and agripreneurs to navigate and better understand SPS requirements and provide facilities for women traders to access timely and accurate information on SPS measures (domestic or cross-border requirements) in local languages.
- 08 Provide gender-responsive SPS capacity building and awareness/information dissemination initiatives that specifically target women in areas relevant to SPS measures along priority agrifood value chains through

targeted outreach programmes, workshops and educational campaigns. Make relevant SPS information available through easily accessible platforms and locations, use simple formats accessible through low-technology mobile phones, print media, illustrations and in various local languages.

- 09 Increase the participation of women in the development and harmonization of agrifood standards. Provide technical and financial support to enhance effective participation of women in technical committee meetings locally, regionally and internationally and to build technical capacity of national technical committees to develop gender-responsive standards.

## Introduction

Ensuring the safety of agricultural goods and agrifood products and preventing foodborne illnesses is a goal of governments across the world. To make this a reality, all countries have domestic legislation and regulations governing the conditions under which food can be manufactured and how plant and animal-based products are treated. Although all countries apply food safety measures, the specific nature and scope of these measures differ greatly depending on the level of economic development and the risks a particular country may face (Henson, 2018). Nevertheless, coherent regulatory and operational systems are crucial for the overall performance of the agricultural sector to allow for better harvests, safety assurance for consumers and ultimately more predictable and safe trade in agrifoods (Kolié, 2020).

Given that trade in agricultural goods is critical for the African continent and accounts for 75 percent of goods currently traded across the regions (European Union Delegation to the African Union, 2021), systems and measures around food safety are crucial. SPS measures – which fall under non-tariff measures (NTMs)<sup>3</sup> – are technical measures put in place to protect human, animal and plant life or health; to promote food safety; and to

3. NTMs are identified as policy measures – other than customs tariffs – that have an economic effect on international trade in goods by either changing quantities traded, prices, or both (FAO and ITC, 2023a).



### Box 1: Typical scope of SPS measures

- additives, contaminants, poisonous substances, or residues of veterinary drugs or pesticides in food or drinks
- certification: food safety, animal or plant health
- processing methods with implications for food safety
- labelling requirements directly related to food safety
- plant/animal quarantine
- declaring areas free from pests or disease
- preventing disease or pests spreading to a country
- other sanitary requirements for imports (e.g. imported pallets used to transport animals)

**SOURCE:** STDF, 2021. *Good regulatory practices to improve SPS measures: A practical guide*. Geneva.

protect against risks from cross-border spread of contaminants, diseases and pests. These measures typically deal with a range of aspects in processes and procedures directly related to food safety (see Box 1). SPS measures that are transparent and internationally aligned are fundamental for improving intra-African trade, particularly under the auspices of the AfCFTA.

This policy brief examines how SPS measures may facilitate or limit women's participation in the agrifood sector in Africa and how the AfCFTA provides an opportunity for African policymakers to make the SPS framework gender-responsive. The brief presents the specific SPS challenges facing women traders and agripreneurs, identifies how SPS measures under the AfCFTA can be made more gender-responsive, and provides recommendations on how SPS measures can be implemented to promote understanding and compliance among women traders and agripreneurs.

## General status of SPS systems management in Africa

A key transformation outcome under the African Union Agenda 2063 is advancing intra-African trade in agrifood products.<sup>4</sup> Food safety and quality are essential to trade, food security, public health and economic development and the implementation of SPS measures for effective food safety control is crucial to the successful implementation of the AfCFTA.

Across Africa, individual countries and the different regional economic communities (RECs) all apply SPS measures. However, the lack of harmonization on SPS requirements and successful monitoring and enforcement of SPS measures have presented challenges for both formal and informal trade in goods.

At institutional levels, many sub-Saharan African countries face several challenges including deficits in skilled personnel in government; low-level technology used for inspection; lack of information available to exporters and producers; and inadequate conformity infrastructure such as laboratory facilities (Kolié, 2020). These

inefficiencies translate to lost economic activity, higher transaction costs and increased time in efforts to access export markets (Van Rompaey, 2017). Challenges also manifest in risks to consumer health. Africa has the world's highest per capita incidences of foodborne diseases, seeing 91 million cases of foodborne illnesses and claiming 137 000 lives per year (WHO, 2015).

SPS measures are more regularly applied to goods that are traditionally traded informally across Africa's borders such as animal products, fruits and vegetables, and oils (FAO, 2017).<sup>5</sup> The multiple challenges around implementation and compliance with SPS measures have reinforced informal trade of agrifood commodities, which may result in a number of adverse effects for cross-border traders. Poor implementation of proper food safety measures can lead to losses in food and income, affecting livelihoods and food security at the household level. Traders and buyers are also exposed to health risks such as foodborne illnesses being undetected at border crossings.

Failure to implement appropriate and well-designed food safety measures has the potential to increase the disease burden in Africa and jeopardize the projected gains under the AfCFTA in agrifood trade. Promoting intra-African trade in agrifoods and animal and plant-based products under the AfCFTA will require policymakers to harmonize requirements for cross-border trade, design conducive policies and regulatory frameworks for infrastructure and have RECs establish coordinating mechanisms – via their SPS Committees – to ensure standards across the continent align with international standards-setting bodies.

## Gendered dimensions of SPS measures for women traders and agripreneurs in the agrifood sector

SPS measures – and trade policies more broadly – are most often gender-blind. When designed and implemented without considering the lived experiences and gender-based constraints of women and men in the agrifood sector, SPS

4. For more information on the African Union Agenda 2063, see <https://au.int/agenda2063/outcomes>.

5. For more information on NTM business surveys that have been conducted by ITC in 22 African countries, see <https://ntmsurvey.org/publications/itc-series-on-ntms/>

measures can take the form of non-trade barriers (NTBs).<sup>6</sup> Women’s underrepresentation in decision-making processes, coupled with an assumption of homogeneity in agricultural systems, have led to SPS measures and trade policies that have often failed to recognize the diversity of actors involved. Limited gender-disaggregated data and a focus on formalized agricultural sectors further contribute to gender-blind SPS measures. Implicit biases in societal norms may also influence a gender-neutral stance in policy design and overlook the specific impacts on women in the agrifood sector.

Compliance with SPS standards and requirements is very often a challenge for women, especially in industries and value chains where women represent a large share of the workforce – such as cross-border traders and entrepreneurs in the agrifood sector. Trade barriers may take the form of prolonged formalities and requirements to obtain multiple clearances and related certifications from different agencies. This poses both logistical and financial constraints for women traders and agripreneurs because the agencies are often spread across different cities or in the capital (far from where women traders might be based) and generally charge a fee for the service.<sup>7</sup> Procedural obstacles present the greatest difficulties for companies led by women to comply with NTMs (see Figure 2).

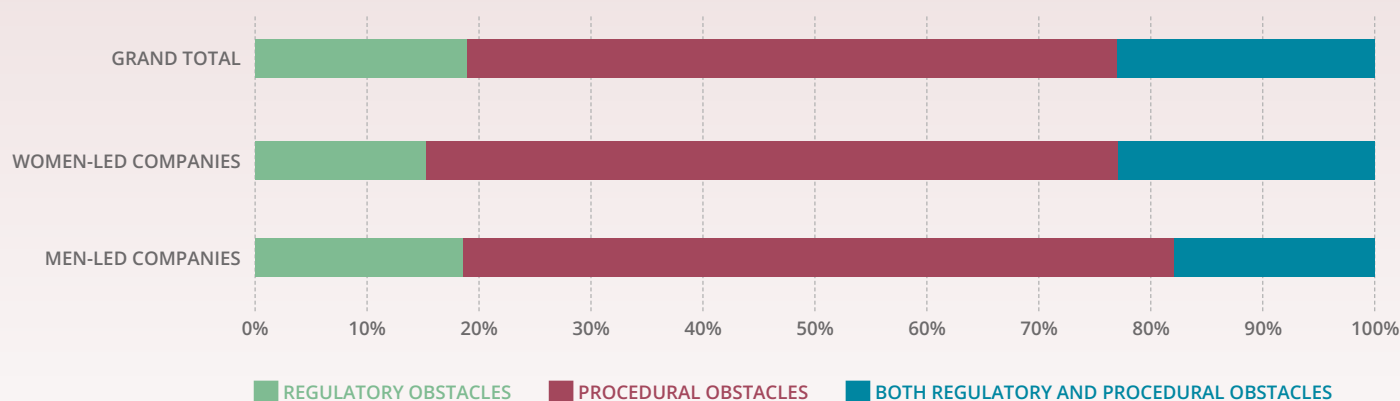
**Findings from business surveys conducted by ITC show that only 18 percent of trading firms across the continent are either owned or managed by women** (ITC, 2022). Women traders find it difficult to transition from informal trade to formal trade because of challenges complying with SPS requirements. Low levels of participation in formal trade mean that women are also more likely to remain entrenched in small-scale trade, unable to move towards formalization of their business enterprises and ultimately into formal import-export trade channels. The majority of small-scale traders are women who trade in agricultural goods and agrifood products, and gender-specific disadvantages mean that they face even greater challenges in complying with trade-related SPS measures. Multiple factors contribute to lower levels of SPS compliance for women traders and agripreneurs:

- **Women small-scale traders and agripreneurs lack financing options to meet costs associated with compliance.** It is well documented that women in low- and middle-income countries experience difficulties meeting the costs associated with complying with regulations (UNECE, 2019). The upfront costs of compliance with SPS measures often prevent women traders and small business owners from accessing formal markets and

6. NTBs are considered a subset of NTMs that have a “protectionist or discriminatory intent” and are widely understood to (i) raise the cost of doing business; and (ii) be more difficult to remove than tariffs (see Molapo, K. 2021. *Strengthening effectiveness in tackling non-tariff barriers (NTBs): the role of the private sector*. Geneva, ITC & UNCTAD). For more information, refer to the FAO-ITC brief on NTMs (see note 1).

7. The standards are not provided for free (for example, the EAC harmonized standard on food hygiene EAS 39:2002 costs approximately USD11 in Uganda) and women in informal cross-border trade often cannot afford these costs.

**Figure 1: Obstacles for companies to comply with non-tariff measures**



SOURCE: ITC. 2023. *NTM Survey data*.



exploiting potentially lucrative opportunities to export high-value agrifood products. The cost implications may even exclude women traders and agripreneurs from participating in the export economy at any level (Henson, 2018).

- **Low literacy levels among women act as a barrier to understanding and accessing food safety regulations.** Women processors and traders with limited literacy face challenges in understanding the documents, certifications and requirements they need to adhere to when engaging in agrifood production, processing, marketing and trade. Food safety requirements are often published in official languages, and official documents are mostly provided only in written form with very technical language. The Lomé-Ouagadougou Corridor survey in West Africa found that 65 percent of women cross-border traders have no formal education compared to 45 percent for male counterparts (World Bank, 2021). This low level of literacy affects the ability of women traders to understand and comply with SPS requirements to ensure food safety of their agricultural products and agrifood goods traded, ultimately disempowering them in their daily economic activities (STDF, 2021). Low literacy also means that women traders and agripreneurs might not be able to access training and capacity-building programmes on offer or may not be aware of these opportunities (FAO, 2021). Similarly, literacy levels affect awareness of and access to tools such as the African Trade Observatory and the WTO ePing alert system that provide up-to-date information on SPS requirements.
- **Women traders are more likely to trade in perishable agrifood products compared to their male counterparts and are more exposed to greater health risks through traded agrifoods** (World Bank, 2021). Such products include fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and fish, which have a higher risk of food safety hazards such as salmonella and pesticide residue. Traditional methods of food handling and value addition often use low technology, and food handlers have limited knowledge on how to effectively control the hazards associated with agrifood products. Because women are more likely to engage in traditional methods of food handling, women traders tend to experience more post-harvest and product spoilage losses than their male counterparts. Agrifoods sold on the open market that have not been correctly handled to ensure their food



**Case studies reflecting the disproportionate effects of NTMs on women estimated that women-led businesses were subject to trade costs that were 13 percent higher than for businesses led by men.**

**SOURCE:** World Bank and WTO. 2020. *Women and trade: The role of trade in promoting gender equality*. Washington, DC.

safety ultimately pose a potential health risk to the communities that consume these goods sold by women traders and agripreneurs.

- **Women traders have limited access to factors of production and gender-responsive infrastructure to support SPS compliance.** Effective implementation of SPS measures largely depends on the availability and quality of the physical infrastructure and the technical capacity of human resources – including inspectors, analysts, certification personnel and standards officers. Women small-scale traders and agripreneurs have limited access to many factors of production including quality infrastructure (such as cold storage facilities); finance required to purchase inputs (such as fertilizers and machinery); and advisory or technical services. These limitations contribute to low levels of compliance with SPS requirements and lack of access to these necessary mechanisms for trade in agrifoods keeps women traders and agripreneurs trapped in informality. This can result in poor quality products not suitable for export markets or that can only be traded in local markets, which may not be as strictly regulated.
- **Cumbersome SPS certification procedures and inconsistencies in SPS regulations at the regional level create additional hurdles**

**for women in trade.** African countries typically enforce SPS measures through different government agencies using separate regulations. The roles of these agencies sometimes overlap, and the lack of inter-agency collaboration may lead to a multiplicity of documentation required from different offices, multiple inspection fees and ultimately delays in trade. Compliance with these different standards therefore increases the costs and complexities for women small-scale traders participating in cross-border trade. In addition, some government agencies do not apply risk-based inspections that would fast-track and avoid delays. Trade in selected commodities can often entail long processes and involve several bureaucratic steps and interactions with various institutions before each product is cleared for release (see Box 2). This leads to a loss of time and compromises the shelf life of perishable goods (African Union, 2019).

- **Lack of frameworks for mutual recognition between countries leads to double testing and certification procedures that result in high cost of business.** The prevalence of practices within RECs that require multiple documents, inspections and certifications remains a challenge for women small-scale cross-border traders. This will have implications for the implementation of the AfCFTA, especially from the perspective of supporting greater levels of intra-African trade and implementing

harmonization requirements and equivalence standards. If harmonization is not implemented, the AfCFTA risks further exacerbating multiple certification procedures by adding another layer of required documentation and certification for entrepreneurs and traders who want to enter the intraregional market.

- **Women are underrepresented in the development of SPS regulations and standards.** It is acknowledged that representation of women in standards development is below par (UNECE, 2022). Women are generally poorly represented in standardization at national, regional and international levels. Only 30 percent of experts in technical committees under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) are women. Regional statistics indicate that women represent 38.2 percent of experts in ISO technical committees in African and Arab states (ISO, 2020). Representation and participation of women in the development of SPS measures and related policy decisions is essential for ensuring that women's perspectives and needs are adequately addressed. The lack of gender-responsive approaches and inclusivity in decision-making processes can lead to SPS measures that overlook or disproportionately affect women. While representation in standards-setting bodies is important, it is equally important to ensure that women in these bodies are in leadership positions and that all staff are able to champion the SPS needs of women traders and small business owners. Women business leaders must ensure that their organizations adopt a gender-responsive approach in standards design and implementation and offer training and compliance assistance to women through national SPS authorities.

## Box 2: Import procedure through Busia One Stop Border Post (OSBP) for unmilled maize

Importation of unmilled maize to Kenya from within the East African Community will require the trader to interact with up to five different competent authorities involved in SPS measures: Kenya Bureau of Standards; Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services; National Biosafety Authority; Port Health Services Kenya; and Kenya Revenue Authority. A total of 26 different documents need to be presented through 22 steps and a minimum of two visits to each institution before the product is cleared for release.

**SOURCE:** InfoTrade Kenya Portal. 2023. *Maize (unmilled) import procedure through Busia One Stop Border Post (OSBP)*. In: InfoTrade Kenya Portal. Cited 12 October 2023. <https://infotradekenya.go.ke/procedure/507/step/2513?l=en>, Kenya.

## Moving the needle: recent changes to SPS measures under the AfCFTA

Annex 7 to the Protocol on Trade in Goods addresses SPS measures and conforms with international best practices and standards through alignment with the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (WTO SPS Agreement). These provisions underscore the significance of international standards and guidelines developed for safe trade by the three standards-setting

**Figure 2: Objectives of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Policy Framework for Africa 2019**



**SOURCE:** African Union. 2019. *Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Policy Framework for Africa*.

institutions: Codex Alimentarius Commission, World Organisation for Animal Health, and the International Plant Protection Convention.<sup>8</sup>

The African Union supports operationalization of Annex 7 to the Protocol on Trade in Goods in the implementation of food safety measures through the **Sanitary and Phytosanitary Policy Framework for Africa 2019**. The framework has four key pillars for the development of a harmonized continental approach towards food safety that aligns with international standards and allows for measures to be taken to safeguard the public health of consumers (see Figure 2). In addition, the framework recognizes the importance of creating an enabling environment for women traders and farmers to better meet SPS requirements (African Union, 2019). To this end, the AfCFTA SPS Protocol and the African Union SPS Policy Framework for Africa are critical for (i) implementing harmonized SPS requirements and standards across the continent; (ii) supporting more productive and sustainable food systems; and (iii) strengthening prevention and surveillance systems for food safety hazards (Bahigwa, 2021).

The AfCFTA fully recognizes the legitimate responsibility of each member state to adopt or enforce measures necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health, so long as they are scientifically justifiable and not enforced with the

objective to discriminate between States. Annex 7 to the Protocol on Trade in Goods emphasizes cooperation and enhanced transparency among AfCFTA signatory countries and promotes harmonization and equivalence of standards to ensure that SPS requirements do not become NTBs during the course of AfCFTA implementation (FAO and AUC, 2021). The AfCFTA also provides for mutual recognition, which is an important step in ensuring that, as different member states build their capacity, standards and requirements do not become barriers to trade for businesses looking to expand their ventures into new regions across the continent (Kuhlmann, 2022). To attain the same standard for compliance and ensure global harmonization of SPS measures, Annex 7 of the AfCFTA encourages the application of the following principles under the WTO SPS Agreement:

**Risk assessment:** Article 5(1) obliges members to adopt internationally accepted risk assessment techniques to assess food safety risks to determine the appropriate level of protection. The associated measures must be the least restrictive means of achieving the protection. Article 5(3) provides that risk assessments to determine the level of protection must also account for relevant economic factors.

**Recognition of regional conditions:** Article 6(1) obliges members to recognize regional

8. Specifically, under Annex 7 to the Protocol on Trade in Goods, Article 7 provides for equivalence; Article 8 provides for harmonization; Article 11 provides for transparency; and Article 14 provides for cooperation and technical assistance.



conditions of the place of origin and destination of the product. Considerations include the level of prevalence of pests or diseases and the existence of control programmes. SPS measures need to be adapted according to the risks faced by the country or the level of economic development.

**Equivalence:** Article 4(1) obliges members to recognize the equivalence of SPS measures based on reference to international standards and risk assessment procedures. Where an exporting member can objectively demonstrate that the measures it applies provide the same level of health protection as the importing member, these should be accepted as equivalent. Such recognition minimizes the need for multiple inspections and reduces certification costs and time which have been cited as NTBs to trade that disproportionately affect women.

**Harmonization:** Article 3(1) obliges members to cooperate in the development and harmonization of SPS measures based on international standards, guidelines and recommendations. In Africa, efforts to strengthen and harmonize SPS systems among regional trading blocs and member states are ongoing. RECs are responsible for implementing harmonized procedures for their member states and continue to undertake efforts to establish coordinating mechanisms. Efforts to date include the Standards and Trade Secretariat for Animal Health and Food Safety established in 2012, the East African Standards Committee, and the Southern African Development Community SPS Coordinating Committee. Further demonstration of the efforts in harmonization of SPS standards and guidelines is Africa's participation in the work

of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the WTO SPS Committee for the promotion of compliance with animal health and food safety standards in African Union member states (African Union, 2019). In addition, increased collaboration among the three standards-setting bodies has helped raise awareness on food safety issues, contributing to updated legislation to reflect current changes (Kolié, 2020).

## Policy recommendations for gender-responsive SPS measures in AfCFTA implementation

The AfCFTA is explicit in its commitments to inclusive socioeconomic development through gender equality (FAO and ITC, 2023b). With specific reference to SPS measures, Annex 7 to the Protocol on Trade in Goods already makes good progress through its provisions on harmonization, equivalence and adopting science-based measures for risk assessment – all of which are aligned with international best practices. However, accounting for the diverse needs, constraints, interests and opportunities of women traders and agripreneurs requires adopting a gender lens in the implementation of the AfCFTA. Consultations undertaken as part of preparations for the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade confirm the difficulties that women traders experience in meeting many SPS and SPS-adjacent requirements (AfCFTA Secretariat *et al.*, 2022). AfCFTA national implementation strategies must





incorporate gender-responsive commitments and domestication of AfCFTA provisions must transform SPS measures to be gender-responsive.

To ensure that SPS measures under the AfCFTA are appropriately domesticated and that contexts specific to both women and men are included in national implementation strategies, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers to consider:

**01 Incorporate gender-responsive factors in designing SPS measures under AfCFTA national implementation plans.** This can be supported in two ways: (i) through the uptake of **good regulatory practices** that incorporate gender-specific questions in the design of SPS regulations and policies to ensure that women's specific needs are supported (STDF, 2021); and (ii) through the **inclusion of gender specialists to work alongside technical experts** in the design of SPS measures to ensure that they meet the needs of women traders, farmers and agripreneurs (Henson, 2018). The close collaboration between such gender experts and national technical committees will go a long way towards long-term development of gender-responsive standards and building the technical capacity of national technical committees.

**02 Ensure gender-responsive data collection and analysis.** Data collection efforts related to SPS measures must capture gender-disaggregated information. For example, this could include indicators that track the number of women that utilize SPS certifications; the number of women agripreneurs that are able to undertake necessary laboratory tests to certify their products for third country export markets; and the extent to which women agripreneurs are able to comply with relevant SPS standards. The data can help identify gender-specific challenges, opportunities and impacts, and enable evidence-based policy formulation and targeted interventions. In addition, undertaking gender impact analyses and assessments of SPS measures can shed light on how such measures can affect women traders in the sector.

**03 Identify and develop relevant policy instruments, support programmes, technical assistance and information-sharing measures that would promote the uptake of SPS measures among women traders.** Technical support programmes are critical for ensuring that women traders and agripreneurs are able to comply with



SPS measures. Programmes should be well funded and designed to account for family care responsibilities and other potential barriers to participation for women traders and farmers (UNECE, 2019).

- 04 Increase access to financial resources and credit facilities for women to support compliance with SPS measures.** This can involve creating specialized financing programmes or initiatives that consider the specific needs and circumstances of women-owned or women-led businesses.
- 05 Simplify documents to promote compliance with SPS measures for women traders and agripreneurs and to promote regional harmonization.** As part of domesticating the AfCFTA, SPS measures could focus on the provision of simplified SPS documents and procedures to (i) encourage compliance among women small-scale traders and agripreneurs and (ii) ensure that women traders move through formal trade channels and meet health protection and compliance for their agrigoods (STDF, 2015). Such measures include simplifying licensing procedures and requirements to obtain certificates of origin and implementing e-certification – all of which will contribute to reducing the barriers associated with lengthy and costly official clearance processes for SPS authentication and certification.
- 06 Promote the uptake of e-certification to support more transparent and simplified cross-border trade in agrigoods.** E-certification – coupled with digitalizing certificates and establishing shared databases – will help provide authorities with accurate and easily accessible food safety databases that can

be shared within the region. Shared databases will promote harmonization and transparency in the implementation of requirements by border officials (FAO and AUC, 2021). Ensuring harmonization within and among different RECs and their members will help to support and promote intra-African trade and enhance the benefits of compliance by facilitating access to multiple country markets (Henson, 2018).

**07 Encourage the uptake and utilization of free tools that can help women to navigate and better understand SPS requirements.**

For women traders requesting assistance from trained trade information desk officers, tools such as the African Trade Observatory, ITC market access maps and the WTO ePing alert could support compliance with SPS and food safety requirements. Ensure that border points are supported with necessary resources such as internet connectivity and telephones to enable women traders to consult government departments where necessary. Provide facilities for women traders to access timely and accurate information on SPS measures (domestic or cross-border requirements) in local languages.

**08 Provide gender-responsive SPS capacity building and awareness/information dissemination.** Develop and implement training and capacity-building programmes that specifically target women in areas relevant to SPS measures. This can include providing technical training on food safety practices, quality control and compliance procedures, as well as entrepreneurship and business management skills. It is essential to raise awareness among women entrepreneurs on SPS measures, implications and compliance requirements through targeted outreach programmes, workshops and educational campaigns. Clear and accessible information will enable women to better understand and effectively navigate SPS regulations.

**09 Increase the participation of women in the development and harmonization of agrifood standards.** Provide technical and financial support targeted at enhancing effective participation of women in technical committee meetings locally, regionally and internationally. Build technical capacity of national technical committees to develop gender-responsive standards. ●

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

Jointly 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 and entrepreneurs, and women's cooperatives and associations to seize opportunities created by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in agriculture and agroprocessing value chains.

The objective of the programme is to promote women's readiness to engage in agrifood-related negotiations around the AfCFTA and increase access to capacity building and higher-productivity activities, capitalizing on new opportunities in regional trade created by the agreement. The programme works closely with women producers, processors, traders and agripreneurs across the Africa region as well as policymakers, financial institutions and technical partners to create an enabling environment for women to thrive in regional agrifood commerce.

In the first two years of programme implementation, a total of 247 women across five countries (Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania) benefited from the skills enhancement component on trade facilitation. Under the programme component

on facilitating access to finance, two roundtables were organized on gender lens investing, where financial institutions, decision-makers and technical experts gathered from across the region to understand gender gaps in access to finance for advancing national and regional trade. An investment readiness bootcamp was conducted for 70 women from Ghana and Nigeria (selected from 700 applicants), who had the opportunity to network with financiers and national financial institutions. EWAT also supports the establishment of inclusive policy processes related to the AfCFTA through knowledge generation, awareness-raising and improved capacity and participation of women's groups in decision-making processes. The programme hosted policy dialogues involving government institutions, the AfCFTA Secretariat and women's business associations to explore challenges for women in trade operations, and how these could potentially be compounded by the AfCFTA if not rolled out in an inclusive way. Technical policy briefs were produced on gender and non-tariff measures, trade facilitation, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and non-tariff barriers to trade (forthcoming). Value chain analyses were also conducted on both the fisheries and soybean-to-poultry value chains in Southern and Western Africa.

For more information about the EWAT programme, please contact [raf-gender@fao.org](mailto:raf-gender@fao.org) or [womenandtrade@intracen.org](mailto:womenandtrade@intracen.org).

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