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# Empowering women and boosting livelihoods through agricultural trade: Leveraging the AfCFTA

A joint initiative between  
FAO and the International Trade Centre

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The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement is a powerful programme which promises to boost the livelihoods of African people. However, if gender equality is not a central component of its implementation, the agreement may worsen the gender gap and exacerbate the challenges faced by women producers, processors and traders due to the existing inequalities that disadvantage them.

It is vital that the AfCFTA agreement roll-out ensures that trade policies, practices and regulations are gender-responsive and create the conditions for African women and girls to benefit. We must enable women to seize the new opportunities created by the AfCFTA in the agrifood sector and empower them to be economic actors and agents of change.

## The AfCFTA can only fulfill its economic and social purposes if no one is left behind











In low-income countries, women make up **48 percent** of the rural agricultural workforce. Globally, they represent close to **50 percent** of the world's **600 million** small-scale livestock managers and about half of the labour force in small-scale fisheries (FAO, 2020).

In addition, they account for **70 percent** of informal cross-border traders in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2021) and are prevalent among owners of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

As producers, processors and traders, they play a critical role in agrifood systems. Nevertheless, they face multiple challenges, including those related to working primarily in the informal sector, accessing market information and training, and complying with trade and food standards. To ensure that the implementation of the AfCFTA is fair and inclusive, women must have an active voice in decision-making processes. Implementing entities and governments must prioritize their needs and challenges, facilitating their transition to and engagement in increasingly formal markets and value chains. This can be done, for example, through the effective implementation of the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, which is expected to address the specific constraints and barriers women face when trading on the continent.

Some of the challenges faced by women in agrifood value chains include:

-  Limited access to productive resources
-  Unpaid, competing domestic chores
-  Informal, insecure and unsafe working conditions with no social protection
-  Exclusion from local and national decision-making processes
-  Lower literacy and education levels
-  Higher risk of exposure to gender-based violence
-  Limited or no access to information and technical trainings
-  Lack or limited access to finance

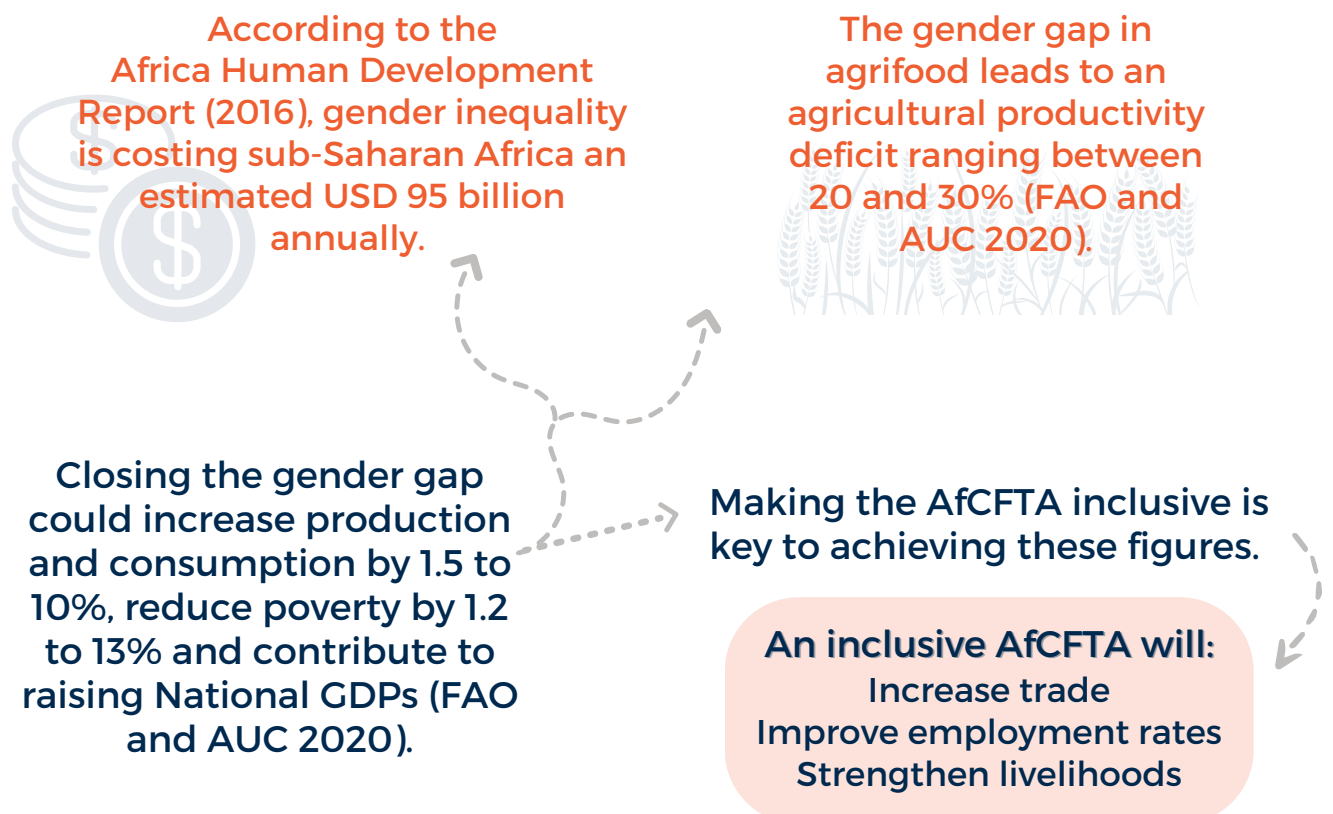
# Walking the talk



**We know that achieving gender equality in agriculture is critical for economic development and to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and poverty.**

FAO is strongly committed to working with governments, private sector, civil society and development partners to accelerate transformative and fair changes in African agrifood systems.

In 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) joined efforts with the International Trade Centre (ITC) SheTrades Initiative to enable women in the agrifood sector to overcome gender-based constraints and leverage new trade opportunities in the context of the AfCFTA.



# The AfCFTA agreement in numbers

 54 countries

 1.3 billion people

 Combined income: USD 3.4 trillion

 30 million people to be potentially lifted above the poverty line

 Projection: USD 450 billion income boost in Africa by 2035

Source: [AfCFTA Secretariat factsheet](#)

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

### Phase I: Dec 2021 - Dec 2022



Target: Ensure that women and men can benefit equally from the economic boost promised by the AfCFTA



4 Countries covered:

- Malawi
- Ghana
- South Africa
- Nigeria



Contribution to 5 SDGs:



Budget: USD 400 000



Beneficiaries:

- Women's business associations
- Women's cooperatives
- Formal and informal processors, entrepreneurs and traders in the agrifood sector



3 work areas:

- Capacity building
- Knowledge generation
- Awareness-raising and increased dialogue

## A three-way approach

Phase I of the joint programme promoted women's readiness to engage in agriculture-related negotiations around the AfCFTA, as well as their access to capacity building and higher-productivity activities, capitalizing on the new opportunities in regional trade created by the agreement.

### Capacity building

FAO and ITC hosted online capacity building sessions for women's business associations and cooperatives. The sessions included the training of trainers to ensure long-term sustainability of the learning processes. Physical in-country trainings for women processors and traders in the selected value chains were also conducted to increase their access to market intelligence and improved business development.



### Knowledge generation

Value chains with a high potential for women producers and traders to flourish were analysed in depth to identify women's current roles, barriers and opportunities, and potential opportunities for upgrades. Policy briefs were also drafted based on in-depth studies on trade facilitation and non-tariff measures, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade.



### Awareness-raising and increased dialogue

Through private-public sector dialogues and webinars engaging a variety of stakeholders, FAO and ITC presented opportunities and recommendations for making the AfCFTA implementation gender-responsive. The dialogues enabled women's groups to articulate their needs and priorities in trade so that policymakers can design appropriate measures to improve the business environment for women.



### Ultimate goal

African women agricultural producers, processors, and traders increase their benefits from trade and improve their livelihoods through the AfCFTA.

# Partnerships



## Partnerships: joining efforts for an inclusive AfCFTA

The EWAT programme network has been growing exponentially over the past few months. The strength of our network is essential to achieve significant impact through dialogues and exchanges.

The programme is implemented in collaboration with:



Throughout Phase I, we have collaborated with:





# Phase I: Results

## Capacity building

4 priority topics



Sanitary and phytosanitary measures

Trade facilitation

Financial services

Non-tariff barriers to trade



Throughout Phase 1, 4 online and 3 in-person trainings were delivered, reaching formal and informal women processors, entrepreneurs and traders in the agrifood sector. The trainings covered topics ranging from trade facilitation measures and barriers to trade to food safety and packaging.

The in-person trainings, hosted in Malawi, Nigeria and Ghana, also provided a chance for the women present to strengthen their local networks and form business alliances.

Most participants owned micro and small enterprises with less than 15 employees, of which nearly half are female.








**Budget: 123 750 USD**



**Results**



**Women's associations and cooperatives engaged online**  
**200 women traders trained in person:**

-  Malawi: 102 participants
-  Ghana: 56 participants
-  Nigeria: 42 participants

**In Ghana, there was a reported:**

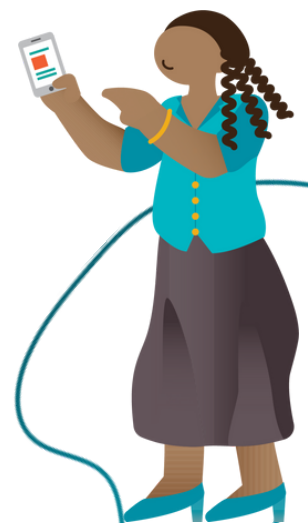
- **45 percent** increase in awareness of the benefits of the AfCFTA for one's enterprise
- **69 percent** increase in knowledge on company registration for export among the participants
- **55 percent** increase in knowledge on food safety

**By the end of the training:**

- **93 percent** reported having a clear idea of the potential business opportunities that can be created by the AfCFTA
- **95 percent** reported having sufficient knowledge to comply with the standards and procedures that will allow them to seize the opportunities created by the AfCFTA

**Overall increase in knowledge about:**

- Women's rights and remedies in harassment situations
- Border crossing procedures and rules




# Knowledge generation

> Budget: 140 750 USD

✓ Results

## 4 policy briefs, 4 value chain studies

 For 12 months, the programme conducted extensive research in Malawi, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria for the drafting of 4 policy briefs and 4 value chain studies.

### Policy briefs:

- Trade facilitation
- Non-tariff measures
- Sanitary and phytosanitary measures
- Technical barriers to trade



### Value chain mapping

#### 5 selection criteria for 6 value chains



Impact on gender equality



Contribution to food security



Export potential



Value-adding potential



Impact on least-developed countries



Fish and soybean-to-poultry value chains selected



Malawi and South Africa



Ghana and Nigeria

4 value chain studies were drafted and presented to relevant stakeholders on the participation of women agripreneurs and traders in the selected value chains, as well as recommendations on how to make them more inclusive. One quantitative and one qualitative study were conducted per value chain.

# Awareness-raising and increased dialogue



➤ Budget: 21 400 USD

✓ Results

The programme conducted two private-public sector dialogues to discuss the priorities for women producers, processors and traders in the agrifood sector to be included in the AfCFTA implementation, and in the negotiations and roll out of its Protocol on women and youth in trade:

- Making trade facilitation and non-tariff measures gender-responsive in the agrifood sector
- Gender dimensions of sanitary measures and technical barriers to trade in the agrifood sector

These dialogues involved key stakeholders, such as women's cooperatives, women's business associations, business support organizations, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the African Union Commission (AUC), and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), as well as policymakers from relevant ministries.

## ● Stakeholders engaged in 2 dialogues.



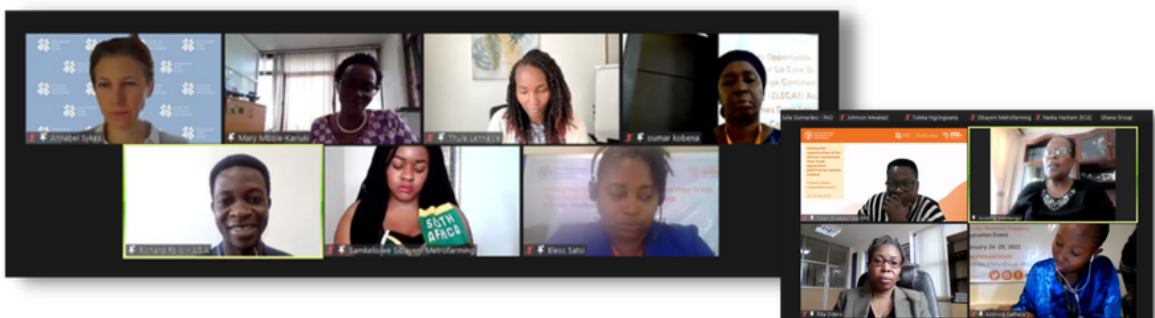
Target: support policymakers to better integrate gender provisions in agricultural trade policies and budgets.

In addition, two webinars were held for the dissemination of results of the value chain mapping studies.

## ● Stakeholders engaged in 2 roundtables to analyze and provide feedback to the studies.

## ● Two-day South-South and Triangular Cooperation dialogue in collaboration with the African Women Agribusiness Network

[Click here to learn more!](#)



## Phase II: Jan 2023 - Dec 2023

> Budget: 800 000 USD

100% growth  
compared to Phase I

✓ Expected results



Geographic expansion

+2 Countries



Senegal  
Tanzania

+1 Additional component

Gender responsive  
access to finance



### Outputs



1: The **inclusiveness** of **policy processes** related to the AfCFTA is strengthened through **knowledge generation**, awareness-raising and enhanced capacity and participation of women's groups.



2: **Women's participation** in **regional agricultural value chains** and expansion into continental value chains is facilitated.



3: Women-led **MSMEs** in the agrifood sector are more **competitive** through upgraded business models, improved investment readiness and increased access to finance.



Inclusivity and fairness are key to achieving sustainable development in agriculture. This objective cannot be obtained without accounting for the central role played by women in the sector, including in agriculture markets, trade and value-chain development.

### **Abebe Haile-Gabriel**

FAO Assistant Director-General and  
Regional Representative for Africa



## How can I be a part of this?

**Become a resource partner:** Support the FAO-ITC EWAT programme. Contact [RAF-gender@fao.org](mailto:RAF-gender@fao.org) to learn more.

**Spread the word:** Follow and interact with us on Twitter! We will be happy to connect with you @FAOAfrica.

**Strengthen the knowledge network:** Learn more about gender in the context of the AfCFTA in our resources section and spread the knowledge with your networks.



# Additional resources:



Policy brief: Seizing the opportunities of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the economic empowerment of women in agriculture



Press release I: Boosting women's engagement in trade and promoting inclusive economic development in Africa

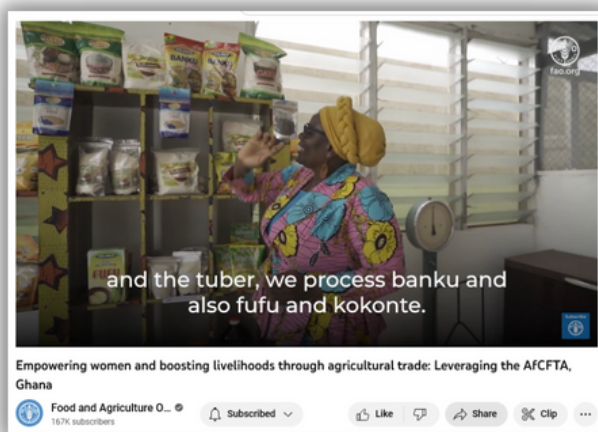


Press release II: Boosting women's engagement in trade and promoting inclusive economic development in Africa



OpEd by Abebe Haile-Gabriel: Seizing the opportunities of the African Continental Free Trade Area for Africa's women

# Additional resources:



Video: EWAT programme training in Ghana

For additional information,  
contact [RAF-gender@fao.org](mailto:RAF-gender@fao.org)





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