

Focus: Young people at the heart of the implementation of the AfCFTA

EDITORIAL:

Let's stay committed and work towards an integrated Africa...p. 3

FOCUS:

Young people at the heart of the implementation of the AfCFTA... p. 4

PANORAMA:

AfCFTA awareness days for women exporters... p. 23

ORI'JIDJI:

Interview with Ms. Diomandé, "Diomy's" fashion entrepreneur... p. 30

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EDITORIAL

Let's remain committed to working towards an integrated Africa

Since its creation in 2018, the AfCFTA National Committee (AfCFTA-NC) has embarked on an ambitious mission: to promote and implement the AfCFTA Agreement at the national level. Exporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been mobilised to prepare the local economic fabric to take full advantage of this continental agreement.

In this context, the past year has been marked by a convergence of efforts to encourage greater involvement of young people. In his New Year's speech, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, paved the way for greater commitment by declaring 2023 to be the “Year of the Youth”.

Fully aligned with this initiative by the President of the Republic, the AfCFTA-NC reached out to young people to promote the Agreement and encourage entrepreneurship through activities organised in several universities. These activities generated palpable enthusiasm among young participants, who expressed their eagerness to seize the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA.

At the same time, significant progress has been made in implementing the AfCFTA in Côte d'Ivoire. In addition to achieving the objectives of the Technical Committee meeting, awareness-raising activities and capacity-building workshops for exporting SMEs were organised to further prepare the local economic fabric to maximise the benefits of this continental agreement.

The AfCFTA-NC also celebrates the commitment of the Ivorian private sector, which has resulted in the development of a joint strategy—a first of its kind in Africa!

The year 2023 has clearly laid the foundations for 2024 to become a pivotal year in the operationalisation of the AfCFTA. To this end, an annual action plan was submitted and validated at the recent meeting of the Technical Committee on Monday, 11 March.

As Africa stands at the threshold of a new economic era, the AfCFTA-NC, in collaboration with national authorities, remains committed to building a stronger and more united continent.

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FOCUS

2023, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE YOUTH-FOCUSED AfCFTA

The year 2023 has been designated "Year of Youth" by His Excellency, Mr. Alassane OUATTARA, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, in order to promote, among other things, young people's entrepreneurship and encourage their integration into the professional world.

Driven by this vision, and as part of the implementation of its 2023 action plan, the African Continental Free Trade Area National Committee (AfCFTA-NC) has organised University Days on the AfCFTA.

The aim of these activities was to raise awareness of the Agreement among students and future young entrepreneurs. Chaired by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the days provided an opportunity to inform participants and highlight the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA.

They also served as a channel for educating, raising awareness and inspiring young people about the continent's economic prospects with regard to the AfCFTA Agreement, while encouraging them to become more involved in entrepreneurship, innovation and intra-African trade. In addition, during these activities, participants were briefed on the theme of "**Youth entrepreneurship to conquer the AfCFTA market**" by teams from the AfCFTA Executive Secretariat, the Youth Employment Agency and Côte d'Ivoire PME.

It was a godsend for these young people to be informed about the institutional mechanisms put in place by the State to support them in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

This initiative was first hosted by the International University of Grand-Bassam (UIGB) on 17 March 2023. Another stage took place at the International Private University of Abidjan (UIPA) on 25 May 2023, then at the University of Man, before ending at the University of San Pedro last November.

These meetings were attended by representatives of the regional prefects and the Regional Trade Directorates of the cities visited.

Based on axis six (6) of the national strategy for implementing the AfCFTA-NC in Côte d'Ivoire, which is to promote the participation of women and young people in trade, the AfCFTA-NC was able to raise awareness among some 1,536 students thanks to these University Days.

PANORAMA

NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON DIGITAL TRADE

At the initiative of the AfCFTA General Secretariat, a protocol on digital trade, currently under negotiation, has been submitted to the member States of the African Union for consideration. It is against this backdrop that the AfCFTA National Committee has taken steps to encourage stakeholders to take ownership of the protocol.

To this end, on Thursday 03 August, 2023, in collaboration with the Directorate of Electronic Commerce, The Committee organized a national consultation on digital trade at the Salle Ebène of the TIAMA hotel in Abidjan's Plateau commune.

This initiative provided an opportunity to consult with key national stakeholders, and to officially launch the process of developing a national strategy, as well as upgrading Côte d'Ivoire's institutional and regulatory framework for e-commerce.

Stakeholders such as the public administration, the private sector and civil society, involved in digital commerce in Côte d'Ivoire, were strongly represented at this meeting.

The event benefited from series of speeches, including that of the Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr. Souleymane DIARRASSOUBA, who expressed his gratitude to the German cooperation through GIZ for its support in strengthening the competitiveness of Ivorian companies. According to him, increased and diversified participation in international trade would make it possible to take advantage of unlimited demand and innovation in the supply chain, establishing an essential condition for Africa's economic transformation.

Other highlights included a presentation by Gaston ESMEL, Director of E-Commerce, on the evolution and advantages of e-commerce in Côte d'Ivoire, and a panel discussion on the theme of “The stakes and challenges of e-commerce in Côte d'Ivoire”. These presentations enabled participants to learn more about e-commerce.

The main challenges raised during the panel were: strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework, monitoring and securing e-commerce transactions, developing digital literacy among the population, professionalizing the trades involved in e-commerce, revitalizing the Côte d'Ivoire Post Office and many others.

The discussions also highlighted the challenges of e-commerce at national level, such as: developing digital confidence, boosting the competitiveness of companies on national, regional and international markets, broadening the tax base, creating jobs for women and young people...

Finally, Dr. GUIBESSONGUI N'datien Séverin, an Ivorian expert in telecommunications and ICT law and a GIZ consultant, presented the draft protocol 2.0 on digital trade and its critical analysis. This was followed by exchanges with participants with a view to improving and validating the critical analysis of the draft protocol's provisions. After their proposals had been taken into account, the participants finally adopted the workshop's observations on the provisions of the AfCFTA draft protocol on digital trade, to be submitted to the AfCFTA General Secretariat on behalf of Côte d'Ivoire.

MADAGASCAR'S PRIVATE SECTOR APPRECIATES CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S POTENTIAL

From 19 to 21 June 2023, Mrs. Eva RAZAFIMANDIMBY, Executive Director of the Association of Free Zone Enterprises and Partners, and former Trade Minister of Madagascar, visited several economic institutions in Côte d'Ivoire during a working and exchange mission. The aim of this benchmarking trip was to enable actors in Madagascar's private sector to draw inspiration from Côte d'Ivoire's best practices in implementing the AfCFTA Agreement.

Visits were made to key actors in the public administration and the private sector. In particular, a visit to the AfCFTA National Committee gave the Madagascan representative an insight into the Committee's institutionalisation model, with information on the situational analysis of AfCFTA implementation in Côte d'Ivoire.

Other visits were made to institutions such as the Directorate of Foreign Trade (DGCE), Côte d'Ivoire Export (CI-Export), the Single Window for Foreign Trade (GUCE), the General Directorate of Customs, and the Centre for Investment Promotion in Côte d'Ivoire (CEPICI). The aim of these visits was to gain a better understanding of the missions of these structures and their implications for export and investment promotion in Côte d'Ivoire. These working sessions also provided an opportunity to highlight Côte d'Ivoire's achievements in foreign trade.

In addition to discussions with the public administration, Mrs. Eva RAZAFIMANDIMBY met the Executive Director of the General Confederation of Enterprises of Côte d'Ivoire (CGECI), Mr. Stéphane AKA-ANGHUI, and his staff. This was an opportunity to explore the role and objectives of this Confederation, as well as the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Furthermore, the Ivorian government's efforts to promote industrialisation and the creation of several industrial zones for the benefit of economic operators were highlighted.

Highly satisfied with the achievements presented and efforts made by the Ivorian government for the development of its economic areas, Madagascar's former Trade Minister expressed her delight at the speed with which these projects have been completed.

The benchmarking trip ended with an audience in the office of the Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr Souleymane DIARRASSOUBA, where Mrs. RAZAFIMANDIMBY expressed her satisfaction with the Ivorian model.

After the discussions, the guest shared her satisfaction. She explained that Madagascar's private sector was eager to learn from Côte d'Ivoire's best practices. In a short amount of time, a National Committee had been set up, along with specific measures to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.

It is worth noting that last year, a delegation from Madagascar's Ministry of Industrialization, Trade, and Consumption visited Côte d'Ivoire to study the measures implemented by the Ivorian Government through the CN-ZLECAf and understand how public administration and private sector stakeholders were contributing to the implementation of the AfCFTA in Madagascar.

Clearly, the Ivorian model is also drawing interest from other African countries, thanks to its inclusive approach, which brings together public institutions, the private sector, and civil society to implement the AfCFTA Agreement.

PREPARATORY CONSULTATIVE MEETING FOR THE AfCFTA MINISTERS' COUNCIL

On Tuesday 07 February 2023, a preparatory consultative meeting was held at the AfCFTA-NC offices in Cocody, Deux-Plateaux Las Palmas. This meeting aimed to prepare for the 11th AfCFTA Council of Ministers (CoM) meeting, to be held on 11 and 12 February 2023, in Gaborone, Botswana.

The primary objective of the meeting was to assess the progress of AfCFTA implementation at the national level. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for experts involved in negotiations on Rules of Origin and the draft regulation on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to review the status of continental negotiations, highlight pending issues, and identify key areas of interest to facilitate the formulation of Côte d'Ivoire's position.

The recommendations from the meeting were instrumental in refining Côte d'Ivoire's position in the negotiations. In this context, key messaging elements were also developed in preparation for the 11th AfCFTA Council of Ministers meeting.

The meeting brought together various member organizations of the AfCFTA-NC Technical Committee. It also served as an opportunity for the new Director General of Foreign Trade, Dr. Kalilou Sylla, to meet the members of the Technical Committee for the first time.

It is worth noting that the Technical Committee serves as the AfCFTA-NC's technical coordination body. Its primary mission is to support Ivorian experts and negotiators in addressing issues related to the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement.

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP

With the goal of developing an operational and strategic plan for the implementation of the AfCFTA support project, the AfCFTA-NC, with technical support from German cooperation through GIZ, organized a workshop from 23 to 24 February 2023, in Abidjan.

The workshop, which brought together all stakeholders, hosted fifty (50) participants. These included representatives from AfCFTA-NC, technical ministries, customs authorities, SME support structures, SME umbrella organizations, civil society, and other professional organizations and associations involved in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

The primary goal was to establish a platform for dialogue with stakeholders to plan activities while aligning with the project's areas of intervention and the national strategy for implementing the AfCFTA.

This workshop provided an opportunity to present participants with an update on the AfCFTA's progress in Côte d'Ivoire, review the support project's activities carried out in 2022, and propose a strategic and operational plan for the project in 2023.

Prior to the workshop, a methodological and participatory approach was adopted. This involved conducting a document analysis and consultations with key stakeholders involved in the project's implementation.

During the workshop, discussions were conducted in plenary sessions and group work. Participants were divided into five (5) working groups, aligned with the project's different areas of intervention.

Together, the participants identified relevant and realistic activities to be implemented in 2023, considering the target groups, stakeholders, and measurable indicators to include in the deployment of each activity.

The planning workshop was attended by Mrs. Konan Clémence, Director of International and Regional Cooperation, representing the Minister of Trade and Industry. She took the opportunity to express gratitude to German cooperation through GIZ for its technical and financial support, which is highly valued by the Ivorian Government.

Mrs. N'GUESSAN Marie Clarence, representing Mrs. Fatoumata Fofana BOUNDY, AfCFTA-NC Executive Secretary, expressed her delight at the ongoing support provided by GIZ to the National Committee, which has made a major contribution to achieving the objectives set.

Mrs. Roseline Fischer, Director of the AfCFTA support project component at the GIZ, stressed the importance of the results from this operational planning workshop for the AfCFTA support project.

With regard to the recommendations made by stakeholders on the implementation of the project, the following should be noted:

- Involvement of key actors.
- Intensifying communication on the results of the project.
- Publicising the agreement among interested parties, in particular public and semi-public services, SMEs, young entrepreneurs and start-ups.

These actions go beyond the umbrella organizations and engage with civil society through the organization of awareness-raising, information, and training activities. They include initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacities of SMEs, SMIs, and micro-enterprises in areas such as governance and business management, product and service quality culture, as well as export mechanisms and foreign trade.

3rd NATIONAL CONSULTATION OF WOMEN IN TRADE

The third national consultation of women in trade took place on Thursday 13 July 2023 in the town of San-Pedro. This activity is part of a series of national consultations initiated by the AfCFTA-NC, in collaboration with the Ministry for Women, the Family and Children, with technical and financial support from German cooperation through GIZ.

Aimed at women exporters, entrepreneurs and processors, this activity is part of the implementation of axis six (6) of the AfCFTA national strategy, aimed at promoting the participation of women and young people in trade.

The aim of the consultation was to carry out a participatory diagnosis of the needs of women in trade, with a view to drawing up proposals for support measures for their cross-border commercial activities.

The objective was particularly to facilitate the understanding of the fundamentals of the AfCFTA Agreement and its implications, to present the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA Agreement, to address the constraints and challenges faced by women exporters in accessing markets, and to formulate relevant proposals for their integration into intra-African trade.

During this consultation, a presentation on the Agreement provided participants with in-depth knowledge of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA. Additionally, the exchanges were enriched by the sharing of experiences.

Subsequently, discussion sessions were held primarily in plenary, enabling the collection of information to identify the needs and interests of women exporters in terms of cross-border trade and financing.

The consultation brought together 87 women exporters, traders and processors from a number of women's organisations in San Pedro.

The consultation day featured introductory speeches by various local authorities, including Mr. Claude Yao Kan, representative of the Prefect, as well as Mr. N'GUESSAN Silvanus and Mr. SAVANE Amadou, representing the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children, respectively.

As a key stakeholder in organizing this activity, the Executive Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area National Committee (AfCFTA-NC) was present at the consultation. On this occasion, Mrs. Matieni BAMBA, representative of the Executive Secretary of the AfCFTA-NC, took the opportunity to raise awareness among women of the need to take ownership of the agreement, while stressing the importance of training and acquiring the necessary knowledge to play an important role in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

CAPACITY-BUILDING SEMINAR ON INVESTMENT

With a view to building the capacity of stakeholders on the AfCFTA protocol on investment, the AfCFTA National Committee held a seminar from 24 to 28 July 2023 in Grand-Bassam.

The objectives of the seminar were to build the capacity of public and private sector officials and stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire and to raise their awareness of the AfCFTA Protocol on Investment. On the other hand, this activity aimed to exchange on the realization of a national study to inform the relevant actors on the treatment of investment issues and, in particular, on the new governance introduced by the AfCFTA Protocol on Investment.

The idea is to provide targeted technical support to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire to ensure better implementation of the new AfCFTA Investment Protocol.

The seminar, organised with technical support from GIZ, enabled the members of the Thematic Working Group on Investment in Côte d'Ivoire to review the explanatory notes on the provisions of the draft AfCFTA Protocol on Investment. They also used their expertise to draw up a table of convergences and divergences between the AfCFTA Protocol and Côte d'Ivoire's texts on investment governance.

AfCFTA YOUTH SYMPOSIUM, AN EXPECTED COLLOQUIUM FOR AFRICAN YOUTH

The inaugural AfCFTA Youth Symposium was held from 21 to 23 August 2023 under the theme “Lighting the Future for Youth in Trade”. With more than 1,000 participants, both face-to-face and virtually, this initiative brought together senior representatives of the Member States of the African Union, youth ministers and young members of parliament.

Organised in partnership with the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, the symposium provided a platform for exchanges between talented young entrepreneurs, political decision-makers and financial institutions. The discussions focused on the development and future of young people in trade, with a view to taking on board all the relevant recommendations for the drafting of the protocol for women and young people in trade.

During this meeting, several key highlights were on the agenda, notably the organization of eight (08) high-level panels on innovative topics and the exhibition of products labeled as "Made in Africa." These panels were led by young African entrepreneurs. The discussions generally focused on topics ranging from the role of the AfCFTA in promoting peace, to the creative industry, and the dynamic "Africa Youth Trade Debate Challenge", where universities across Africa debated the AfCFTA protocol on women and youth, who play a crucial role in implementing this continental tool.

Significantly, at the very first session, the Secretary General of the AfCFTA, H.E. Mr. Wamkele MENE, held an open discussion with participants, during which he shared his comprehensive vision for youth within the framework of the AfCFTA.

The event closed with the creation of a formal framework for young Africans to defend their common interests in the AfCFTA policy-making processes, showing that young people are not only a representation of the future, but also the present, and that they are ready to shape the trajectory of trade in Africa. Importantly, the symposium gave young people a voice in AfCFTA policy-making, providing opportunities to network and share skills and knowledge about the AfCFTA Agreement and its protocols.

Following the example of the AfCFTA-NC Secretariat, Côte d'Ivoire, which has not been left out of the popularisation of AfCFTA opportunities, is implementing, through the activities of the AfCFTA-NC, national consultations of young people and women in trade with a view to refining their knowledge of the AfCFTA Agreement and preparing them to take full advantage of the Agreement. In addition, in 2023, the National Committee also focused on raising awareness of the AfCFTA among young people.

PANORAMA

MEETING OF THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUP (TWG) ON DIGITAL TRADE

The National Committee is made up of three bodies, including the Technical Committee (TC), which is the AfCFTA-NC's technical coordinating body. The TC is supported by Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), tasked with examining issues compared with the various AfCFTA protocols.

The role of these TWGs is to prepare for negotiations, harmonize existing national strategies, exchange views on key issues and define national positions.

Taking into account the number of AfCFTA protocols, the Technical Committee currently has eight (08) TWGs on:

- Trade in goods
- Trade in services
- Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)
- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)
- Competition policies
- Investment
- Digital trade
- Women and youth in trade

With regard to the TWG on Digital Trade, a meeting of its members was held on the evening of 31 August, with the aim of sharing and consolidating observations and proposals on the draft Protocol 2.0 on Digital Trade.

This working session brought together the key players involved in digital trade in Côte d'Ivoire. The meeting included a presentation of reports from previous national and continental meetings.

Participants then critically analyzed the work of the National Consultant on Protocol 2.0 for digital trade. To this end, each article was scrutinized for comments and proposals from TWG members. The comments had to do with proposals on a few articles such as: article 1 on presentation, article 10 on paperless commerce, article 28 on unsolicited electronic commercial communications and many others.

Finally, all the observations deemed relevant and validated by the members of the TWG on digital trade were retained and consolidated with those of the Consultant recruited with the support of the German Cooperation through GIZ.

PANORAMA

AfCFTA IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE: YOUNG EXPORTERS FROM MAN ARE CONSULTED

In the cross-border trade sector, young people, who represent 60% of the African population, are an important lever for development and economic diversification. The AfCFTA establishes an opportunity for young people to expand their market share. This will give them access to new markets in Africa.

With this in mind, the AfCFTA National Committee, with technical support from GIZ, organised the 2nd national consultation of young people in trade in the town of Man on Thursday 14 September 2023.

The aim of the consultation was to gather the needs, concerns and recommendations of young people with a view to promoting their integration into cross-border trade. Putting forward axis six (6) of the national strategy for the implementation of the AfCFTA in Côte d'Ivoire, which focuses on trade, was the main thrust of this second consultation.

This activity follows on from the first consultation held in Abidjan on 18 November 2022. It was aimed at young exporters, cross-border traders, entrepreneurs and processors in Abidjan.

The consultation was attended by 61 young people from organisations (associations, individual companies, etc.) involved in inter-state and domestic trade.

The event was attended by various authorities from the town of Man, including Mr. Yacouba OUATTARA, Secretary General, Representative of the Prefect of the town, and Mr. Koffi Koffi Célestin, Representative of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The meeting was also an opportunity to brief young exporters on the practicalities, measures and implications of the AfCFTA Agreement for market access. These discussions and relevant recommendations will enable them to master their market positioning and facilitate the implementation of the AfCFTA.

During the meeting, a presentation by the AfCFTA-NC team gave participants a clearer picture of the challenges facing the AfCFTA.

Moreover, the exchanges focused on experience sharing and discussion sessions with young entrepreneurs and exporters to identify their specific needs and consider their recommendations.

The consultation was based on a qualitative approach for the collection of primary data, aimed at enabling analysis and the formulation of recommendations. It involved an exchange with participants using a structured interview guide.

Recommendations included developing a mechanism to raise awareness of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA, improving access to information and training, facilitating access to finance, and lobbying all the relevant bodies in Africa to standardise and reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers and simplify customs procedures at national and regional level.

Mr. Ange Boy Zohou, Representative of the Executive Secretary of AfCFTA-NC, Mrs. Fatoumata Fofana BOUNDY, called on young merchants present at the event to reach out to the relevant authorities to obtain relevant information for conducting their activities. He also reassured them that their concerns are taken into account in the continental negotiations for the adoption of the protocol on women and youth in trade.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND THE DRC AIM TO STRENGTHEN THEIR TRADE RELATIONS

As part of the 9th edition of the Makutano Business Forum, Central Africa's leading business network, held on 20 and 21 September 2023 at the Sofitel Hôtel Ivoire in Abidjan, a delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) visited Abidjan, with a view to promoting the economic brand “Invest in the DRC” and creating business opportunities with Côte d'Ivoire.

During the visit, which brought together several Congolese government ministers, the DRC's Minister for Foreign Trade, Mr. Jean-Luc BUSA, was received by the Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr. Souleymane DIARRASSOUBA, and the executives of the AfCFTA National Committee (AfCFTA- NC).

The meeting gave the Congolese delegation a better understanding of the implementation of the AfCFTA in Côte d'Ivoire.

Minister DIARRASSOUBA, who is also Chairman of the AfCFTA-NC Technical Committee, welcomed the visit, which helped to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. He shared with his counterpart Côte d'Ivoire's best practices in terms of institutionalising a National Committee and implementing the AfCFTA Agreement.

The Minister was also briefed on the initiatives taken by the Côte d'Ivoire Government to structurally transform the Ivorian economy. These initiatives are part of the implementation of the policy of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, with his “Solidary Côte d'Ivoire” project and his “Côte d'Ivoire 2030” vision, which involve working to increase per capita income.

This is set out in a strategic plan known as the National Development Plan (NDP), now in its 3rd generation with the NDP 2021-2025, which represents an investment of FCFA 59 trillion, 74% of which is being provided by the private sector.

As for the Congolese Minister, he expressed the willingness of the Prime Ministers of both countries to work closely together in order to boost their trade.

He went on to say that the meeting had been an enriching experience for him, as the DRC wanted to draw inspiration from the Ivorian models within the framework of the AfCFTA, in relation to this African vision of economic and commercial integration. With this in mind, the mission brought together a team in Abidjan that will carry out a mission to accelerate the increase in the level of trade and investment between the two countries, in order to promote the achievement of results linked to the implementation of actions relating to the African Union's Agenda 2063.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SME EXPORTERS IN THE AfCFTA

The AfCFTA National Committee held a capacity-building workshop from 2 to 6 October 2023 at the Grand Hôtel, with exporting companies and SMEs as the main target group.

The aim of the five (05) days of training was to build the capacity of exporting companies and SMEs in technical barriers to trade, analysis & market access tools and consumer preferences.

During this week of exchanges, various experts in the field of trade, exporting and digital marketing gave innovative and captivating presentations on the practical tools needed to organise and prepare foreign trade in the best possible way.

Experts conducted training sessions on technical barriers to trade, market analysis and access tools, as well as consumer preferences. Regarding the module on consumer preferences, it highlighted information on raw materials necessary for the packaging and conditioning of targeted products.

Additionally, the thirty-five (35) SMEs in attendance participated in practical exercises, particularly on the use of market analysis and access tools (Trade Map, market access, export potential Map).

The activity, which was held with technical support from GIZ, saw the effective participation of Minister Assemien YAO, Technical Adviser, Representative of the Minister for Industry, who encouraged the actions carried out by the AfCFTA National Committee with a view to offering local producers the visibility they need to market their products.

As for the representative of the Executive Secretary of the AfCFTA-NC, Mr. Zohou Boly, he urged local producers operating in the activity chains covered by the workshop to take ownership of and integrate the main obstacles to trade and to take ownership of the AfCFTA Agreement.

This activity, which falls within the scope of Axis 5 of the AfCFTA's national strategy, which focuses on improving the competitiveness of producers and quality of their products, equipped participants with the tools they need to analyse and access markets. It allowed the producers to learn about how to package their products taking into account packaging and export standards and procedures, in order to facilitate their entry into target markets. Secondly, to learn about e-commerce, technical regulations and, above all, consumer preferences, so as to be able to offer a real comparative advantage.

PROVISION OF AN ADJUSTMENT FUND FOR THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE AfCFTA

The Adjustment Fund of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which met in Kigali on 9 October for the first meeting of its Board of Directors, has begun negotiations with a view to fulfilling its mission as soon as possible.

The adjustment fund, described as “historic”, is estimated to be worth between 5 and 10 billion US dollars.

Set up by the AfCFTA General Secretariat and Afreximbank, the African Export-Import Bank, the purpose of the fund is to provide special assistance to African countries and private sector companies to help them adapt to the new liberalised trading environment established under the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA.

The well-developed adjustment fund comprises three (3) sub-funds: the core fund, the general fund and the credit fund.

The basic fund will be focused on the various tariff revenue losses, in other words it will consist of contributions from the States Parties, tariff subsidies or compensation intended to measure the revenue losses that will be eliminated.

The general fund will be used to finance the development of infrastructure conducive to trade. And finally, the credit fund will mobilise trade funds to provide substantial support to private sector actors.

According to H.E. Mr. WAMKELE MENE, Secretary General of the AfCFTA, this first meeting of the Board of Directors of the AfCFTA Adjustment Fund marks an important stage in the successful implementation of the Free Trade Agreement. For him, the collaboration with Afreximbank will make it possible to provide the necessary support to the States Parties and private entities through the Adjustment Fund. He also pointed out that the Fund's Board of Directors is made up of experts and leaders from across the continent, who will take the necessary steps to ensure compliance with all the rules and regulations.

With the launch of the Fund, one of the most important steps in the establishment of the mechanisms of the African Continental Free Trade Area will be taken, in the hope that all the parties concerned will be able to benefit fully from its advantages.

AWARENESS DAY FOR WOMEN EXPORTERS

During the year 2023, the AfCFTA National Committee endeavoured to implement axis six (6) of the national strategy, which is to promote the participation of women and young people in trade. To this end, it has initiated a series of awareness-raising days for women exporters on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

These activities took place in three towns in Côte d'Ivoire, namely Yamoussoukro on 7 November 2023, Bouaké on 9 November 2023 and Abidjan on 14 November 2023.

Highlights of these activities included presentations by the Executive Secretariat of the AfCFTA-NC, the Ministry for Women, the Family and Children, and experts from the Côte d'Ivoire Export Agency and the Côte d'Ivoire Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Through presentations and discussions, the women exporters were informed of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA. They were also made aware of the products and services they need to export, and the AfCFTA's measures and facilities for accessing African markets. Finally, they were encouraged to play an active role in intra-African trade under the aegis of the AfCFTA.

The awareness-raising days were attended by various authorities from the towns visited. These were, among others, representatives of regional prefects, town halls, as well from regional directorates of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children.

With a varied target audience consisting of women exporters, cross-border traders, processors, producers and economic operators, as well as all women interested or involved in trade, these days helped to build women's capacities in operational tools and exporting within the framework of the AfCFTA, thus contributing to the empowerment and development of women entrepreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire.

EGYPT HOSTS THE 3rd IATF FAIR

The Egyptian capital, Cairo, hosted the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) from 9 to 15 November 2023. Focusing on connectivity, this year's theme was “the AfCFTA market”.

Organised by the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), in collaboration with the African Union and the AfCFTA General Secretariat, this third (3rd) edition of the fair was attended by Côte d'Ivoire's Minister of Trade and Industry, who led a delegation of businessmen and officials to showcase Côte d'Ivoire's economic, cultural and craft potential, and at the same time promote export assistance for Ivorian companies.

Several young Ivorian entrepreneurs also took part in the event, with the aim of promoting products made in Côte d'Ivoire. For seven (07) days, the Ivorian delegation had the honour of strengthening economic and trade relations between our country and its African partners, but more importantly, of making an inescapable contribution to promoting exports and increasing the expansion of foreign trade.

With its unique prospects, IATF 2023 will see over 1,600 exhibitors, 35,000 visitors, and trade and investment agreements worth around 43 billion dollars signed at the event.

It is important to know that, thanks to the AfCFTA, Africa has at its disposal enormous tools and potential that will enable it to take a decisive step towards economic integration.

The next edition, in 2025, will be held in Algiers, Algeria, as announced by the Chairman of the Advisory Council, H.E. Mr. Olusegun OBASANJO, during the closing press conference.

PANORAMA

THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON THE DISPUTE SETTLEMENT BODY TAKES STOCK

The first meeting of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) on the AfCFTA's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) Protocol was convened to provide a debriefing on the ten previous meetings on the protocol. The meeting took place on Thursday 09 November 2023 at the National Centre for Legal Documentation (CNDJ) in Cocody, Deux-Plateaux vallons - Abidjan. It was attended by nearly a dozen members of the TWG.

According to the agenda, the CNDJ representative, Mr. Bidi, welcomed the participants. Mrs. Allou, representative of the Executive Secretary of the AfCFTA-NC, then set the scene for the meeting, recalling the very important role of the TWGs, which is, among other things, to reflect on the content of the protocol on the dispute settlement body, to refine Côte d'Ivoire's position on specific issues and to help implement the AfCFTA agreement.

A presentation by the Deputy Director of the Directorate of International and Regional Cooperation (DCIR), Mr. Félix Kouakou, provided participants with information on the legal framework, governance bodies and structures of the protocol on rules and procedures for dispute settlement.

This was followed by a debriefing of the ten (10) meetings on the dispute protocol and an update on the works carried-out related to it were presented. The members were able to identify the details, results and topics for discussion at the ten (10) meetings on the protocol.

After congratulating the AfCFTA-NC on its efforts to publicise and promote the Agreement to date, the members pointed out that the judiciary is increasingly interested in AfCFTA issues and took the opportunity to call for the judiciary to be genuinely involved in the AfCFTA, from the negotiation stage through to operationalisation.

Several recommendations were made during the meeting, which was organised with technical support from GIZ. These included the creation of a pool of experts (lawyers, economists, private sector) to enable the Ivorian private sector to benefit from the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA, the sharing of documents put forward at meetings and following developments at the General Secretariat, and the creation of a framework for exchanges between members of the TWG, ensuring that meetings are held regularly.

PANORAMA

CÔTE D'IVOIRE STRIVING TO UNLOCK FULL POTENTIAL THE AfCFTA MARKET

With the technical support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the AfCFTA-NC held working sessions with Trade Support Institutions and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises on 28 and 29 November 2023 at the “Latrille Events” venue located in the 2 Plateaux neighborhood of Abidjan.

The aim of the workshop was to validate the various studies on the proactive trade sector strategy for Côte d'Ivoire under the AfCFTA.

The aim of this initiative is to identify and find out which markets in Africa's five Regional Economic Communities have a comparative advantage for Côte d'Ivoire products when it comes to exporting under the AfCFTA.

It will also open up promising prospects for Côte d'Ivoire's exporters.

A total of 60 participants representing the AfCFTA-NC Technical Committee, Trade Support Institutions, economic diplomacy, private sector federations, economic operators, SME-SMI exporters, agro-processors, industrialists, as well as technical and financial partners (UNECA and UNDP) took part in these two days of intense work.

[IMAGES]

WORKSHOP FOR THE VALIDATION OF MARKET STUDIES FOR THE PROACTIVE
SECTORAL TRADE STRATEGY OF THE Afcfta

ADDED VALUE

INTERVIEW WITH THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UGECI

The workshop to validate the Ivorian private sector's AfCFTA strategy was held on December 12, 2023, at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. At the end of the event, Mrs. Rose DON MELLO kindly answered a few questions on the subject.

What prompted the private sector to develop an AfCFTA strategy?

The studies available show that the implementation of the AfCFTA offers a vast array of opportunities to boost intra-African trade, develop the industrial sector in Africa, and diversify the production of African countries.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the AfCFTA could contribute positively to economic growth, particularly through a significant expansion of Ivorian exports to an African continental market that currently is home to over 1.2 billion consumers, 600 million of whom are in the middle-class. Especially considering projections that the number of consumers is expected to reach 1.75 billion consumers by 2030.

To fully capitalise on this vast emerging market, Côte d'Ivoire has developed a national AfCFTA strategy.

However, it can be noted that many economic operators have little or no knowledge of the AfCFTA (Protocols, Rules of Origin as understood under the Agreement, list of commitments, lists of products taken into account, instruments, etc.). And this knowing that ownership of the AfCFTA by private companies remains the main prerequisite for conquering African markets.

Involving the private sector in drawing up its own AfCFTA strategy, which is integrated into the national strategy, would enable it to take real ownership of the AfCFTA, its instruments and its operational mechanisms, in order to speed up the gradual lifting of customs duties.

The development of the private sector's AfCFTA strategy has allowed economic operators, through a strategic diagnostic, to assess their actual capacity to conquer the vast continental market. This exercise has also enabled private companies to better prepare for the new competition that the opening of their market entails.

As a result, the private sector was able to formulate proposals and recommendations to, on the one hand, strengthen its export capacities and those of Côte d'Ivoire's support ecosystem for market access, and on the other hand, take anticipatory measures to mitigate the negative effects of border openings.

Could you elaborate on how the private sector plans to deploy this strategy?

The private sector's AfCFTA strategy and its action plan matrix were validated under the effective chairmanship of the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Souleymane DIARRASSOUBA.

The private sector thus has a clear roadmap, as the strategy was developed following the RBM (Results-Based Management) method, with clearly defined objectives, measurable results, performance indicators, prioritization, and budget allocation for the planned actions.

Currently, we must focus on continuing awareness-raising and mobilizing all private and public actors around this strategy to ensure its adoption. This includes using all forums and consultation frameworks to promote it to companies, funding agencies, professional organizations, and public administrations.

We have also established an institutional framework, consisting of a Technical Committee and a Technical Secretariat, which integrates all components of the private sector to ensure the effective implementation of this strategy.

How would you rate the government's support throughout the process of developing this strategy?

The support of the Ministry of Trade and Industry was decisive in the development of the Private Sector AfCFTA strategy.

Although the strategy was developed by the private sector, it was carried forward by Mr. Kalilou SYLLA, Director General of Foreign Trade, who along with his team spared no effort to support the private sector throughout the process.

We would like to seize this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Trade and Industry for its support, and to salute the leadership and strong presence of the Director General of Foreign Trade at every step of the process.

This support from the Ministry of Trade and Industry could be noted to several concrete actions such as facilitating the mobilisation of private sector stakeholders (young entrepreneurs, processors, SMEs, transporters), providing guidance for the works carried out, holding an awareness-raising session on the stakes and challenges of the private sector's AfCFTA strategy for members of the UGECI, and mobilising a donor, GIZ, which made available a pool of experts to assist the private sector in formulating the strategy. The Ministry of Trade and Industry also funded studies that identified trade opportunities for Ivorian private companies within African regional spaces.

In our view, this fruitful collaboration between the private sector and the ministry is a successful example of synergy between the public and private sectors.

What were the main axes adopted by the private sector during the development of its strategy?

The private sector's AfCFTA strategy revolves around three key strategic axes:

1. Improving the governance of stakeholders through an improved synergy between the administration and the private sector;
2. Supporting the private sector in conquering the AfCFTA market;
3. Strengthening the capacities of the private sector to address the adverse effects of market openings.

Could you share the challenges encountered during this strategic development process?

The process of developing and validating the private sector's AfCFTA strategy was carried-out in overall favorable conditions, despite a very tight schedule.

Private sector stakeholders who participated in this strategic reflection activity (large companies, SMEs, young entrepreneurs, processors) fully understood the stakes of the AfCFTA for their future. Their interest and involvement were demonstrated by strong mobilization and regular attendance at the various workshops. Moreover, the diversity of stakeholders allowed for rich discussions, sharing of experiences, and proposals that led to remarkable results within the tight deadline.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the private sector has committed to contributing to the financing of activities outlined in the developed action plan matrix.

What are the expected next steps for advancing the private sector's AfCFTA strategy?

Following the drafting of the private sector's AfCFTA strategy, the private sector plans to implement the following actions:

- Sustain awareness-raising initiatives for all private sector stakeholders.
- Activate the institutional framework for the strategy's execution, including the steering committee, technical committee, and technical secretariat.
- Engage in a donor roundtable to secure the necessary funding for the planned activities.
- Facilitate meetings with state structures that support private sector enterprises in enhancing their capacities to access international markets. These include organizations such as Côte d'Ivoire Export (CI-EXPORT), Single Window for Business Development in Côte d'Ivoire (GUDE), Single Window for Foreign Trade (GUCE), CI-PME (The body responsible for managing the entrepreneur's status), the AfCFTA National Committee with its Executive Secretariat, and the General Directorate of Industry.

ORI'DJIDJI

AT THE HEART OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Diomy's Group is a pioneer of women's entrepreneurship in Côte d'Ivoire's dynamic fashion scene. Founded in 2019 by Mrs. Diomandé Mayou, a seasoned entrepreneur whose company embodies a bold vision that combines creativity, innovation and social responsibility. This vivacious lady, who has a degree in commercial engineering and a BTS in transport-logistics, made the courageous choice in 2019 to leave an established career to give life to Diomy's Group. Specialising in design, dyeing and clothing, the company has quickly made a name for itself on the Ivorian market, moving from ready-to-wear to fashion accessories, including decoration, furnishings and bedding.

The very essence of Diomy's Group lies in its ability to respond innovatively to the varied expectations of its customers, establishing the brand as a key player on the local scene. This position has been strengthened by strategic collaborations with other industry actors and a business model focused on sustainability and social responsibility. Today, with strategic offices in Abidjan, the company is inspiring a new generation of young female entrepreneurs to conquer the Ivorian market.

Diomandé Mayou's exemplary entrepreneurial journey is part of a significant social initiative, which earned her the distinction of the Réseau des Femmes d'Impact (Women of Impact Network) in Benin in 2014.

In the heart of the disadvantaged Bafing region of Côte d'Ivoire, Diomy's Group contributes to the empowerment of rural women through SCOOPS VAMOF, offering work and employment in weaving and dyeing.

In this quest for excellence and social responsibility, Diomy's Group seeks support from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The company aims to strengthen its global presence while serving as an inspiring model for women's entrepreneurship in Côte d'Ivoire. Under the visionary leadership of Diomande Mayou, Diomy's Group emerges as a dynamic force, contributing to the growth of women's entrepreneurship in the Ivorian fashion and crafts sectors.

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