

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF A THE - DAY
CONFERENCE OF THE WOMEN ENTERPRISE ALLIANCE ON
SME SCALABILITY IN INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE HELD ON 6TH
AND 7TH JULY 2021 AT CHIDA EVENT CENTER, JABI,
ABUJA- NIGERIA.**





PREAMBLE

The conference was declared open by HE, The Honourable, Minister, Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment Otunba Adeniyi Adebayo, The welcome address was delivered by the Founder of the Women Enterprise Alliance (WenA), HE, Aisha Babangida. The Keynote Address was delivered by the Director-General/CEO, Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC), Mr. Segun Awolowo ably represented by a Director in the Agency, Mrs. Getrude Uko Anam. Other Agencies represented include The National Agency for Food & Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON), Nigeria Customs Service, the ECOWAS Commission, and other service providers in the Export Trade Sector of the Nigeria economy. The theme of the Conference was SME SCALABILITY IN INTER-REGIONAL TRADE.

In attendance were over 150 physical participants and over 250 virtual/online participants who joined through live streaming of the event on social media and via the conference website.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the conference were:

- To identify new trends in the export market and opportunities for increased regional trade, especially in the light of the new Africa Continental Free Trade Area agreement (AfCFTA) recently ratified by Nigeria.
- To obtain first-hand information from industry regulators and stakeholders on challenges facing the sector and how entrepreneurs can better navigate the challenges and run a profitable export business.
- To share experience and lessons learned from exporters, network with export support service providers, packaging materials manufacturers, and contract manufacturing professionals willing to share their stories in order to motivate new entrants into the economic space.
- To discuss opportunities and challenges of the new AfCFTA agreement, its conflict prevention provisions, a mechanism for management of trade disputes, barriers to the export trade among others.



KEYNOTES & PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The following issues were discussed and debated at the various panels during the conference:

- **Panel 1:** New Voices, New Trade, The section had panelists from four private organizations involved in the export sector who discussed challenges faced by exporters such as multiple certification requirements across neighboring countries, variation in standards, and several bureaucratic bottlenecks and red tapes in the sector needing urgent attention and review to facilitate export trade.
- **Panel 2:** The Export Value Chain System, The panel discussion focused on expected support from a number of stakeholders in the export market space and an analysis of the export value chain. It attempted to analyze each link in the chain of export activity with the objective of developing a strategy to increase export earnings and explore improvement opportunities in the chain by reviewing the market conditions, buyer/seller requirements, and processes needed for export.
- **Panel 3:** The Role of Investment in Export. This session examined a strategic approach to increasing export transactions in investments as export contributes to increasing national output and is, therefore, an engine for growth. The session was a unique conversation set to catalyze new investments in Nigeria, creating commercially viable linkages between investments and investors.
- **Panel 4:** Trade Policy & Export Promotion. This panel session examined current trade policies, including the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement and its implications for Regional Trade, especially in the West African sub-region. What options exist within the now-ratified agreement to promote trade competitiveness and reduce barriers and potential trade conflicts etc.

Other Presentations includes:

- Import and Export Transactions -(Nigeria Export Promotions Council)
- TECH e-Commerce as a trade facilitator- (Tech Advocate: Accra Ghana)
- Supporting SMEs with Standards (Standards Organization of Nigeria)
- The Role of NAFDAC in Enhancing International trade. (National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control)
- NGO Management: Managing a non-profit organization - Better Life for Africa Women Initiative.

OBSERVATIONS

- Entrepreneurs are already breaking trade barriers and engaging their customers across the world and the pandemic has limited need for physical travels but opened opportunities for more online trade facilitation.
- Trade enablers are taking steps to address challenges, especially those affecting women. Several initiatives targeting women entrepreneurs have been introduced to stimulate growth and encourage business expansion.
- Regulators in the industry are making genuine efforts to facilitate the fast-tracking for registration, access to information and reducing the cost of doing business, and improving the ease of doing business in the region.
- Opportunities for contract manufacturing and export-specific packaging exist in-country, more entrepreneurs are encouraged to consider this option before trying to invest in new production facilities if they can rent, co-manufacture, or outsource their production to already certified and GMP-approved facilities.
- Some of the agencies of Government frown at the use of private consultants and encourage direct engagements with the agencies for all trade or certification-related transactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is the need to harmonize the export regulatory authorities by slightly amending the laws establishing the agencies in order to facilitate trade and reflect the reality of the provisions of AfCFTA in the continent.
- The one-stop-shop facilities at the Export Desks of the regulatory agencies should be made functional and truly supportive of growth opportunities for SMEs.
- The Multiple Certification requirements across the regional space and the continent should be harmonized and strengthened to allow for cross-country recognition of standards, certifications, and testing to reduce artificial barriers at borders across Africa.
- Modifications of existing and introduction of new policies aimed at facilitating export trade should be made popular to discourage a “business as usual” attitude of operators who hide behind the ignorance of stakeholders to delay implementation and discourage change. Such policies must be displayed openly at the border posts and premises of the organizations.
- Deployment of new technology for production and value addition using joint processing facilities (Export villages) and market stability systems should be introduced and made functional in view of the huge forex earning potentials in the sector.

2021 | WOMEN ENTERPRISE ALLIANCE

- Government should consider a policy on the exportation of empty containers out of our seaports (law to allow not more than 70% empty cargo space on ships leaving Nigeria), Hopefully, this will create more opportunities for exports in view of the global scarcity of shipping containers.
- Need to fast track establishment of a payment system that is truly African (e.g. the Pan African Payment System-PAPS) as the lack of such platforms continues to affect e-commerce opportunities and trade facilitation.
- Fast track establishment of fully functional dispute resolution facilities to meet the provisions of existing trade laws and the newly introduced AfCFTA in order to minimize trade disputes.

NEXT STEPS

- WenA will continue to advocate for the formulation of flexible regulations to aid trade, reduce bottlenecks and ease doing business in Africa; this includes advocating for the review of existing legal and policy frameworks.
- Create an eco-system to support SMEs and social enterprises in Intra-regional trade, conduct advocacy and awareness-raising on gender and AfCFTA issues while strengthening women's intra-trade associations and networks.
- Support capacity-building initiatives for SMEs on international and regional trade requirements. Promote the use of information and communications technology-based systems to improve regional integration frameworks from a gender perspective.

APPRECIATION

- The conference appreciates the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Investments, Otunba Adeniyi Adebayo, The DG/CEO of Nigeria Export Promotion Council, Mr. Segun Awolowo, The Directors General of Nigeria Customs Services, Standards Organization of Nigeria, Nigeria Agency for Food, Drugs Administration & Control (NAFDAC), and all stakeholders for their contribution and continuous support to the initiative.



WOMEN ENTERPRISE ALLIANCE

90, Aminu Kano Street

Wuse 2, Abuja

www.wena.org.ng

info@wena.org.ng

+234 (0) 908 771 1765

+234 (0) 703 109 3550