



Continental Dialogue on Enhancing the Contribution of Preferential Trade Agreements to Inclusive and Equitable Trade

23-24 October 2017, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ninth Tranche of the Development Account (DA9) Project, on “Enhancing the Contribution of Preferential Trade Agreements to Inclusive and Equitable Trade” aims to enhance the capacity of governments in selected least developed and low-income developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa to use preferential trade agreements (PTAs) to ensure that trade activities contribute towards equitable growth and shared prosperity for all social groups. In pursuit of this objective, a continental dialogue on PTAs was organized by the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) from 23 to 24 October 2017 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

The Dialogue was the third event to be organized in the context of the DA9 Project. Precisely, this Dialogue followed two regional training-workshops held respectively in Ebene, Mauritius, in 2015 in partnership with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA); and, in Dakar, Senegal, in 2016 in partnership with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP).

The objectives of the Dialogue were primarily to examining economic and social implications of preferential trade agreements (PTAs) on African economies as well as reflecting on how African countries and different groups within the population (particularly women and youth) can better take advantage of PTAs. A detailed agenda of the meeting can be found in Annex 1. Participants of the dialogue came from both the public (i.e. ministries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)) and private sectors as well as regional and international institutions/organizations from within the African continent and beyond. The complete list of participants is appended in Annex 2.

II. PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening session

Mr. Antonio Pedro, Director, ECA sub-regional office for Central Africa (SRO-CA) and Mrs. Marie Therese Chantal Mfoula, Deputy Secretary General in charge of Physical, Economic and Monetary Integration, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Secretariat, made opening remarks.

Mr. Pedro indicated that the context in which the Dialogue is taking place is in one hand, by the need for Central Africa to be fully involved in the CFTA negotiations; and, in the other hand, its commitment to pursue its regional integration agenda by implementing its FTA supported by a common external tariff (CET). Against this background, the issue of rationalizing the trade schemes at sub-regional level, i.e. the ECCAS and the CEMAC preferential trade instruments was also emphasized. He then recalled the progress made so far in the CFTA negotiations and highlighted that the CFTA could be a means for Central Africa to achieve some of its regional objectives. He concluded by mentioning that the discussions to take place during the Dialogue may provide for some insights to better approach the CFTA and other trade negotiations.

The ECCAS DSG addressed the meeting, highlighting the relevance of hosting the meeting in the Central African region at such a crucial time for continental economic integration. She explained that ECCAS is at the crossroads of Africa, neighboring most other AU-recognized RECs. Still, the ECCAS region, pending the implementation of its FTA, remains one of the least integrated African region. She also recalled that the dialogue is also taking place ahead of a meeting of the continental free trade area (CFTA) negotiating institutions. In this context, the organization of the Dialogue is timely for better engagement both at the regional and continental levels.

the Minister recalled the booming trends in PTAs over the last past forty-five years, with a notable increase in number since the launch of the Doha round, under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO). He underscored the fact that Africa had become a more and more attractive trading partner, hence the evolution of its trade relationships with some of its partners. Based on evidence from ECA's recent empirical work, the Minister emphasized the fact that Africa needs to conclude the CFTA before engaging with the rest of the world if the continent was to achieve the structural transformation objective it set for itself and better integrate in the world economy. The Minister concluded his statement indicating that the PTAs Africa conclude should pay close attention to ensuring that all, notably the youth, benefit from the gains derived from PTAs.

Following the opening ceremony, Mr. Mevel, representative of the ECA, introduced the dialogue, focusing on key concepts, the theme and its objectives. He also outlined that the project closure is approaching and that this activity was the last one, under the DA9 Project, to be organized by the ECA before the final tripartite dialogue to be organized by ESCAP, in collaboration with ECA and ECLAC on 14-15 December 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Session 1 - Introduction and objectives

The moderator, Mr. Samb, representative of Senegal, introduced the session by indicating that a number of thematic areas were put at the forefront of the development agenda in Africa; but trade was not sufficiently cited as one of them, despite its catalytic role. He emphasized the fact that unemployment trends in Africa, especially amongst the youth, could potentially constitute social bombs. Therefore, conducive trade policies need to ensure that trade benefits all social groups. In this light, Mr. Samb mentioned the need for national strategic documents, such as national development plans, to mainstream trade in all the areas of the said documents.

In this presentation, Mr. Mevel focused on trade-related implications of preferential trade arrangements (that are non-reciprocal and non-negotiable) and preferential trade agreements (or PTAs; which are implying at least some degree of market access reciprocity and are negotiable) on African economies and particularly their industrialization efforts, based on recent empirical work undertaken by ECA. He demonstrated that trade agreements can truly benefit African countries but that all forms or regionalism do not produce the same impact. For example, unilateral preferences (e.g. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)) can certainly support Africa's trade but their unpredictability makes it difficult to develop the regional value chains needed to sustain Africa's industrialization. Regional integration offers a stronger basis for Africa's industrialization as it has the potential to boost intra-African trade and its industrial content. Opening up Africa's market to external partners through reciprocal agreements can also deliver benefits for African countries but initial conditions strongly influence the effects on industrialization (e.g. the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are expected to be less supportive of Africa's industrialization than South-South engagements). The presenter concluded by stating that the right sequencing of trade policy reforms does matter considerably. In that respect, Africa's top priority should be to establish the CFTA along with complementary reforms (e.g. trade facilitation measures). It is only after the CFTA is established that Africa would be in better position to open up with outside partners (particularly with emerging partners from Asia and the Middle East) to improve its position in the global and rapidly evolving trade landscape.

A fruitful discussion was initiated after the presentation. Notably, exchanges focused on the fact that exporters still encounter difficulties to export due to numerous stringent market access requirements in

the markets where they enjoy preferential access. The examples of AGOA and EPAs have been cited numerous times to illustrate the difficulty exporters have to comply with the non-tariff market access requirements to penetrate the United States (U.S.) or the European Union (EU) markets. The participants also underscored the fact that trade liberalization, including in the context of the CFTA, needed to be supported by some ambitious infrastructure development initiatives.

3. Session 2 – Opportunities and challenges – Sharing of experiences from public and private sectors

The session aimed at providing a platform for the participants to share their experiences from the perspectives of the private and the public sectors. For this purpose, Mr. Murigande, representative of the WTO, moderated the session. He explained that the focus of the interventions should be placed on the successes and difficulties of the private sector to benefit from the PTAs and the public sector to frame a conducive environment for the private sector. He then passed on the floor for five interventions.

The first speaker, Mr. Ghenna, representative of the Pan-African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PACCI), pleaded for a CFTA that makes trade easier and cheaper, notably by reducing the hassles of cross-border trade. He highlighted that although tariffs may be a concern for traders, as it increased the costs of trade, they laid lower in the priorities to be addressed. He notably mentioned that administrative burden was one of the most important impediments to trade. Mr. Ghenna also said that easing the movement of business people was a key area to be addressed by the CFTA. In addition, he informed that standards being a recurrent issue for traders, helping businesses to understand the market requirements in the export markets was a necessity.

The second speaker, Ms. Narrainen, representative of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), presented the Mauritian strategy for implementation of adequate preferential trade frameworks. She first presented the Mauritian context, explaining that Mauritius heavily relies on trade preferences. She also showed how Mauritius managed to use unilateral trade preferences under the Lomé conventions to transform its economy, from an agricultural, sugar-based economy in the 1970s, to a more diversified industrial basis in the 1990s. Though she highlighted some benefits that Mauritius managed to draw from trade preferences, Ms. Narrainen also presented some of the challenges the private sector faced to fully benefit from preferences, including the lack of well-structured representative organizations, the lack of human and financial resources, and the lack of capacities to meaningful influence trade negotiations. She then shared her perspectives on how the African private sector could better have their interests taken into account in trade negotiations. She notably informed that, at national level, a structured platform was necessary for consultations between the public and private sectors to prepare negotiation positions. At regional level, regional consultative platforms should also exist for private sector organization to meet and come up with positions on issues of common interests. Those then have to find their way to the trade negotiators to take into consideration the inputs received from the regional private sector institutions. Ms. Narrainen then highlighted the other side of the coin, explaining that the public sector was also constrained by the policy objectives it pursued, on the one hand, and the pressures from multiple, not necessarily converging private interests, on the other hand. She concluded on the need for an integrated public-private approach of interests and positions formulation in trade negotiations.

The third speaker, Mrs. Umulisa, representative of the Secretariat of the East African Community (EAC), presented the strategies and challenges to free the movement of goods, services and people in the EAC region. To this end, she first gave a quick briefing of how far the EAC had gone in terms of regional integration. She explained that the EAC had established full liberalization of trade in goods and harmonized their common external tariff, under a 3-band common external tariff with exception of 58 tariff lines deemed sensitive for the EAC economies which attract tariffs out of the three bands. Furthermore, EAC countries have established a single market with minimized internal borders controls, which resulted in drastic reduction of time of moving goods. She gave the examples of the central corridor (Dar Es Salaam/Bujumbura) which reduced transit between the two cities on each side of the corridor from 20 to 4 days; or the northern corridor (Mombasa/Kampala) from, reducing transit

between the two cities from 21 to 4 days. Mrs. Umulisa exposed some of the other initiatives that facilitated trade such as a common NTB elimination mechanism, common competition rules, over 600 harmonized standards. In addition, the EAC have progressively ensured free trade in services, free movement of capitals, free movement of labor and right of establishment and residence. In addition, mutual recognition agreements permit qualifications to be recognized, allowing the movement of some specialized professionals across the region, such as engineers, architects, accountants and veterinary officers. She then exposed the challenges that the region faced, including the slow pace in harmonization of domestic laws and other instruments to conform with the regional laws and instruments; inadequate political mobilization for the full implementation of the signed EAC Protocols; national sovereignty issues; long and tedious decision-making process; or, funding constraints. Nonetheless, Mrs. Umulisa said that the region was committed to maintain the momentum.

The fourth speaker, Mr. Mindaye, representative of Ethiopia, articulated Ethiopia's views and considerations in respect to preferential trade. He started with presenting the country's most important economic features, including the main exports which are composed of coffee, pepper, seeds, flowers, leather products, textiles and gold; those being mostly exported to the EU, China, the US, and Saudi Arabia. He then explained that Ethiopia had signed 19 bilateral economic agreements, a majority of them with African countries. Those agreements are mostly trade cooperation agreements. However, Ethiopia has concluded an FTA with Sudan and is negotiating another one with South Sudan. Ethiopia is also committed to regional integration, being member of IGAD and COMESA. With regards to COMESA, though not implementing the FTA, Ethiopia offers preferences to COMESA countries on the basis of a 10% tariff reduction for COMESA originating products. The country is also involved in TFTA and CFTA negotiations, as well as negotiations of the ESA-EU EPA and accession to the WTO. Mr. Mindaye indicated that regional integration was the main focus for Ethiopia, highlighting that, once member of African PTAs, they could expect a broader and more predictable access to regional markets, which may result in better prices, FDI attraction, enhanced employment opportunities for Ethiopians, reduced trade disputes, and less corruption. On the other hand, he expressed, as the main challenges for Ethiopia: tariff revenue loss induced by trade liberalization, the eroded policy space, and tougher competition from regional trade partners which may harm Ethiopian infant industries. As a way forward, he concluded that support is required to address supply-side constraints, improving the quality of the products, allocating resources to trade facilitation and infrastructure development, as well as capacity-building for private and public stakeholders.

The last speaker of the session, Mrs. Sougoule, representative of Guinea, shared Guinea's perspectives on the trade liberalization scheme in Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). After presenting the PTAs Guinea is a member and the preferential trade arrangements it benefits from, she highlighted the gains Guinea derived from preferential trade, including a larger market, referring to the ECOWAS PTA, as well as other markets in traditional and other new markets under unilateral preferences from the EU or the US, but also to Morocco and other limited preferences in emerging markets under the Generalized System of Trade Preferences among developing countries (GSTP). She notably used the example of the relaxed rules of origin for textile and apparel under AGOA to illustrate benefits for local producers, where the preferential margin for AGOA-beneficiaries is a noticeable advantage. Mrs. Sougoule also presented some of the challenges. She mentioned that producers needed to upgrade and upscale their production to be able to get greater benefit from exports. Furthermore, infrastructures are needed to allow exporters to package and store their products. Studies show that Guinea has clear export potentials but the producers are not sufficiently structured, organized and professionalized to fully benefit from trade opportunities.

The subsequent discussion essentially highlighted the need for the private sector institutions to also think about how best they can influence the national and regional institutional negotiations.

4. Session 3 – How to better take advantage of PTAs for both public and private sectors

The Secretary General of the African Association of Trade Promotion Organizations (AATPO) moderated the session. He emphasized that the African economic environment was characterized by a

particularly weak intra-African trade, whilst great opportunities are available to African Countries to strengthen their partnership between them and South-South cooperation. He then introduced the two speakers, highlighting that the objective of the session was to present the best strategies African countries could use to plan for expanding their trade and creating jobs.

The first speaker, Ms. Escudero, representative of the Tony Blair Institute, made a presentation on how to identify and penetrate export markets. She first recalled that when designing its export strategy, a firm needed to: i) conduct some trade intelligence research to identify the markets the firm could export to, looking at the size of the market they can tap into and the returns they can get there; ii) look at the regulatory requirements they have to comply with to be allowed to enter the market (norms), as well as the other market requirements that are not necessarily mandatory but may be voluntary standards that meet the expectations of the customers of the market (standards); she illustrated with an example of foodstuffs in the EU that could face 7 norms plus up to 18 standards; iii) look at tariff preferences they can benefit from, as well as the requirements to profit from the preferences (e.g. rules of origin); and, iv) elaborate an export promotion strategy. Ms. Escudero then concluded by providing some elements that governments could consider to allow their exporters to better enjoy preferences, including harmonizing international standards, facilitating accreditation and certification, facilitating firm's awareness and training, negotiating low tariffs for exports, ensuring low tariffs for imports, negotiating tariffs and rules of origin, and facilitating cumulation with trade partners.

The second speaker, Mr. Kwenani, representative of Meatco Foundation, made a presentation on his company's experience in exporting grain-fed Namibian meat. He explained that Namibia had concluded number of PTAs and is granted trade preferences (particularly under AGOA), which virtually offered various opportunities to trade on a preferential basis. However, he explained that in practice, the numerous and various trade rules made it difficult to penetrate the markets where Namibia enjoys preferences. Notably, Meatco encounters challenges to meet standards and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements in some of the targeted markets. For example, he presented and indicated that it took over 14 years to get proper certification to export to the US under AGOA. Mr. Kwenani also emphasized the need for Meatco to intervene along the meat value chain to ensure that both the norms and voluntary standards are respected. He concluded saying that signing a PTA does not give a guarantee for trade.

Following the presentations, discussion focused on how to get better information, and subsequent capacity building required to meet the norms and standards of identified export markets.

5. Session 4 – Employment and labor provisions in PTAs

The session moderated by Mr. Chetima, representative of the ECA SRO-CA, aimed at providing insights on employment and labor-related provisions in PTAs. The moderator linked the issue with the objectives of the dialogue, by explaining that poverty alleviation and decent work conditions laid at the heart of the inclusivity dimension of PTAs.

Mr. Viegelah, representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO), made a presentation on "labour provisions in trade agreements: an assessment". He first informed that African countries where good gender policies were implemented showed better results in terms of employment of women in trading firms. He highlighted that labor provisions were becoming more and more common provisions in PTAs, including in African PTAs. He notably showed that the following African PTAs also included cooperation provisions with regards to labor:

- ECOWAS instruments entail cooperation regarding labor law harmonization and the promotion of women's professional organizations;
- COMESA instruments have provisions on cooperation regarding employment conditions and labor law;
- EAC instruments have provisions on cooperation on employment and working conditions with an emphasis on gender equality, including the abolition of discriminatory law and practice;
- SADC has a relatively broad coverage of employment and labor issues;

- EU-Morocco and EU-Algeria Association Agreement, as well as the EU-Central Africa EPA provide for cooperation and dialogue on selected issues related to labor standards; and,
- EU-SADC EPA has provisions making reference to ILO's fundamental conventions.

Mr. Viegelah indicated that those provisions had a beneficial effect on easing labor market access, particularly for working-age women. He furthermore showed that there is country-evidence of the impact of labor provisions on the narrowing of the gender wage gap and that there is no evidence that labor provisions diverted or decreased trade flows. He also mentioned that the setting up of labor market institutions are key mechanisms for labor provisions to have an impact, with supported by stakeholder involvement.

The discussions following the presentation pointed out the fact that ILO labor standards' conventions may produce beneficial effects on inclusivity but that they did not entail any sanction mechanism, thereby limiting their implementation to the good will of countries.

6. Session 5 – Employment and labor provisions in PTAs – Sharing of experiences from public and private sectors

Session 4 was followed by another session on the same topic, in view of giving the opportunity to participants to share experiences.

The session was moderated by Ms. Bile, representative of the National Commission of Women Entrepreneurs, Federation of Businesses of the Congo. She introduced the topic and the four speakers.

Prior to presentations from representatives of private and public sectors on the topic, the first speaker, Mr. Sghair, representative of AATPO, made an intervention on the objectives and mandates of the organization. He explained that the AATPO was an intergovernmental trade promotion organization established in 1974 under the impulse of the ECA and the African Union, which objective is to facilitate contacts and regular commercial information exchanges between its members, as well as to assist harmonizing trade policies. Its mandates are six-fold: i) help its members to set up national trade promotion organizations; ii) facilitate experience and views sharing amongst members; iii) provide trade policy advice to its member states in order to increase intra-African trade; iv) advise member states with regards to trade-related issues; v) Share trade policy information to member states; and, iv) facilitate contacts between business persons, notably by organizing meetings and events. Mr. Sghair also informed that due to some human and financial constraints, as well as lack of support from member states, the AATPO was experiencing difficulties to fulfill all its objectives. Interest from participants in view of eventually creating partnerships with the AATPO was shown.

The second speaker, Mr. Samb, representative of Senegal, gave some perspectives of PTAs where labor provisions existed, in different world regions, highlighting that those provisions were framed in a wider context of deeper integration. In this light, he presented a certain number of elements, notably studies which results showed that there is no correlation between wages increase and respect of right of labor unions, or that there is little evidence showing correlation between salary-related labor provisions and trade impacts. Reflecting further on the issue, he explained that PTAs including labor provisions usually provide for prohibition of forced travail, freedom of association, freedom of collective negotiation, elimination of child labor or non-discrimination in employment. He mentioned that other labor-related provisions covered guarantee of minimal wages, limitation of working hours, or social security and protection in the work place. He then concluded explaining that the Organisation for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) was working on a labor instrument.

The third speaker, Mr. Akadiri, representative of the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FEWACCI), provided a case study of the ECOWAS labor and employment provisions. He introduced his statement presenting the FEWACCI which serve as a platform for discussion, networking, information transfer, operational capacity building and support members in order to facilitate private public dialogue and improve its quality. He then explained that from a conceptual standpoint, international labor and employment best practices in PTAs address acceptable

conditions of work taking into consideration minimum wages, workers safety and health, work hours, and prohibition of forced and compulsory labor, among others. He then presented the ECOWAS case study, highlighting that number of ECOWAS instruments of relevance for labor and employment notably covered: Free Movement of Good, Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment, Education and Training, Establishment of West African Health Organization, recognition of equivalence of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications in Education within ECOWAS, and the functioning and operation of the ECOWAS tripartite social dialogue forum. He explained that those instruments permitted to build capacity in ECOWAS countries and to provide appropriate high quality, specialized care through the exchange and attachment of specialists, and to share information on centers of excellence in the region. For instance, in the West African block, French-speaking countries in WAEMU issued many directives or regulations which promote the right of establishment, in professional categories such as lawyers, architects, doctors, veterinary surgeons, pharmacists. Mr. Akadiri also outlined certain challenges, noting the existence of difficulties related to the implementation of the above-mentioned legal instruments on labor and employment provisions. He specified that in fact some countries are still maintaining domestic barrier to such movements of labor and persons. He concluded his intervention saying that trade unions and other stakeholders, as well as the private sector organizations, should be an integral part of the negotiating and implementation processes of trade agreements. This involvement would ensure that governments take the appropriate measures and regulations aimed at protecting labor and employment within the context of their policies.

The fourth speaker of the session, Mr. Musengele, representative of the COMESA Secretariat, made a presentation on labor mobility in COMESA. He highlighted that COMESA have regulatory frameworks for freedom of movement, services, capital and goods at least as envisaged by the treaties, as well as two additional instruments on gradual relaxation and eventual elimination of visa requirements, and on free movement of persons, labor, services, the right of establishment and residence. However, the implementation of the protocols on the movement of persons is limited in the COMESA region. He noted that it will be beneficial to adopt frameworks for partial labor integration as they are more likely to be implemented rather than of full labor mobility plus agreements. He also recalled that some COMESA countries have undertaken unilateral initiatives to ease the movement of persons. Notably, he mentioned the EAC Free Movement Protocol signed by Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia; the fact that Mauritius, Rwanda and Seychelles waived visas to all COMESA citizens; or the fact that Zambia has issued a circular waiving visas and visa fees for all COMESA nationals on official business. Mr. Musengele informed that since implementation was an issue in COMESA, it would be beneficial to adopt frameworks for partial labor integration as they are more likely to be implemented instead of full labor mobility plus agreements.

In the discussion, participants highlighted that trade policy-makers need to also set up frameworks for youth and women, noting that there exist opportunities for them behind each and every product/tariff line. In this light, encouraging sectoral social dialogues may be an avenue to capitalize on those opportunities.

7. Session 6 – Informal trade – Sharing of experiences

The session was moderated by Mr. Sacko, representative of the ECOWAS Secretariat, who introduced the topic and speakers.

The first speaker, Mr. Hussein, representative of the Somaliland Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, provided insights on the issue of informal trade from Somaliland's perspective. He indicated that the private sector is the most powerful actor in Somaliland and therefore plays a more important role than the public sector. He pointed out the lack of regulation for businesses and significant barriers (e.g. lengthy processes to get required documents, legal framework largely unknown by the people, high level of corruption) to be able to enter the formal trade; emphasizing that informal trade was dominant in Somaliland. He also enumerated a number of challenges such as the limited education skills, weak technology and the lack of capital available. He concluded his statement

by stressing the need to establish dialogue between formal and informal actors and setting-up a one stop shop for business associations.

The second speaker, Ms. Avore Bekale, representative of Gabon, presented the actions undertaken by the government of the Gabonese Republic to help small traders to move from informality to formality. She initially explained the context, saying that Gabon is preparing a policy to help informal traders to move towards formality, notably building on the OHADA law which proposed some innovative concepts of relevance for informal trade-related policy formulation, through simplified procedures and lower costs linked to formalized existence, notably through amendments of the fiscal regimes applicable to entrepreneurs and facilitating administrative requirements to register and operate. She then presented the institutional framework in which this policy would be implemented.

The third speaker, Mr. Touka, representative of the ECCAS Secretariat, presented some theoretical background and contextualized the discussion to the ECCAS situation. In this light, he clarified that informality does not mean the absence of rules, or illegality. He furthermore mentioned that formality and informality sometimes coexisted, depending on the activities. Some of the characteristics of the informality are: the simplicity of the activity; its small scale; the acquisition of skills with practice, rather than after a formal training; simple operations and limited number of workers. Mr. Touka then provided some recommendations: i) reducing taxes and border fees; ii) simplification of commercial and customs procedures, as well as reduction of costs of authorizations or certificates issuance; iii) promote gender-sensitive policies; iv) facilitate access to financing; v) improve infrastructures that connect remote areas to markets; and, vi) deletion of value threshold to facilitate small-scale preferential trade.

The fourth speaker, Mr. Odjo, representative of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), made a presentation on “road harassment and cross-border trade prospects in West Africa”. He made several policy recommendations, including the need to facilitate formal trade and reducing opportunities for corruption through the improvement of facilities that support traders (single window border posts, internet and online booking for trucks, etc.) and the simplification of bureaucratic procedures imposed on business and reducing the number of documents; as well as to encourage the domestication of ECOWAS CET by member countries through the facilitation of inter-ministerial dialogue between Agriculture and Trade.

The last speaker of the session, Ms. Diop, representative of the African Alliance for Electronic Commerce, made a presentation on how electronic commerce could help formalizing trade. She highlighted that informal trade refers to activities outside the legal and fiscal system, which entailed a very wide diversity of activities. She informed that although informality came at a loss for revenue collection, it helped to mitigate the effects of unemployment, poverty and women empowerment. Ms. Diop provided some recommendations to help informal traders to move to formality by using electronic means, including registration of operators on the single window before any operation, facilitation of market information access, creation and wide use of electronic payment means, or facilitate access to electronic platform for MSMEs.

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