

## **The African Union's African Women in Processing (AWIP) Initiative** **20th-25th November 2022 Niamey, Niger.**

### **Vision**

AU envisions African Women in Processing [AWIP] coherently and successfully supported as startups, MSMEs, SMEs including large corporates to leverage operational and technical resources, networks for ideas exchange, attracting investing and accessing all the critical assets needed to drive an inclusive industrialization and growth aligned to the AU aspirations towards the Africa We Want.

### **Mission**

To ensure that Women in Processing are better organised, technically supported, gainfully invested, have equitable access to industrial opportunities, and play their part in transforming Africa's economy and contributing to Africa's Industrialisation agenda.

### **Inspiration**

AWIP draws inspiration from various instruments and protocols focused on women economic empowerment. AWIP is especially aligned to the new Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030). AWIP also leverages on the AU Agenda 2063<sup>1</sup>, the AfCTA, the RECs and nation states established protocols, policy frameworks geared towards the transformation of Africa through industrialisation led by African Women. AWIP further supports the global compacts including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs<sup>2</sup>) Agenda 2030.

The promotion of women independence and their stronger role in industry is seen as key to promoting the continent's socio-economic development. AWIP is aligned to the AU mandate to enhance industrialization and structural economic transformation efforts (Aspiration 6), the Action Plan for the implementation of the Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa (AIDA), the AU Commodity Strategy, the AU SME Strategy Implementation, and the AU Digital Transformation Strategy. This informs the new continental initiative called "African Women in Processing".

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<sup>1</sup> <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

## 1. Background and Rationale

**In the past decade, private sector interest in African Women in Processing has been unprecedented**, leading to an upsurge in interest from the private sector in the African agricultural sector. The sector is creating an emerging African middle class of hundreds of millions of consumers. While presenting formidable opportunities and providing livelihood for 70% of Africans, the sector is also prone to market failures, value chain related risks, climate related impacts among other risks. The potential is further constrained by the limited use of technology, untargeted investment, and poor industrial policies. This creates a paradox where Africa is a net importer of food, yet it is also host to over 60 % of world arable land<sup>3</sup>. Africa is also endowed with a rich base of natural resources and a youthful population, a nexus that can power the industrialization agenda, especially led by women in processing.

The underutilisation of our resources has been a bottleneck to industrial transformation, in turn making Africa a net importer of food and susceptible to global shocks (pandemics, war, crisis). With well-coordinated support, African women will be able to multiply the value of the current raw produce and unlock the potential of the arable land in Africa which currently is under limited productive use.

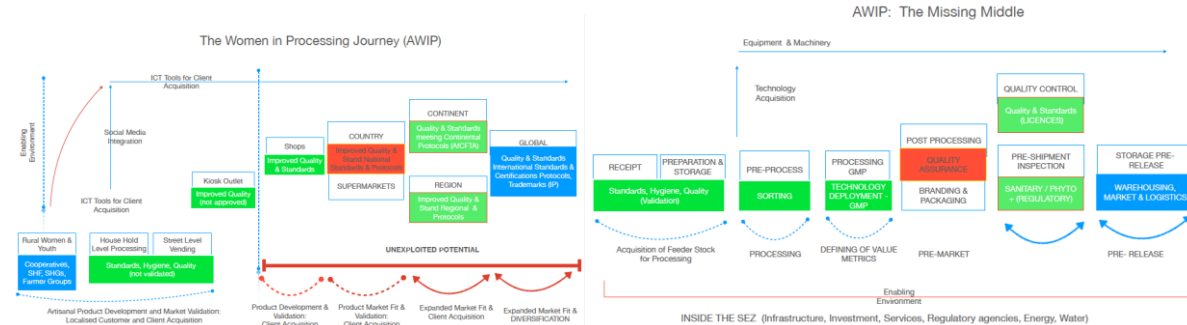
AWIP aims at catalyzing and accelerating the transformation of the Industrial Processing led by Women to support the African Union industrialisation Agenda and achievement of SDGs amongst other national, regional and continental and international targets. It further aims at expanding the opportunities for women especially in the context of AfCTA. AWIP is focused on delivering inclusive and sustainable social-economic development with gender equity at the center. It addresses structural and gender norms and sets a new path for women focused policy direction.

The Women in Processing journey can be generally characterised at seven levels based on the sophistication and level of finished product and potential market. The lower level is primarily at the household (cottage), where the entry barriers are low based quality, quantity, standards investments. The higher levels have more entry barriers based on quality, quantity and standards that require more input in terms of resources, skills

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/how-africa-can-feed-the-world/>

including technology. It is important to note that the majority of Women in Processing Africa are within the lower rank with a few operating at the higher levels which are mainly male dominated. To address the critical missing middle and accelerate the role of women in the industrialisation of Africa, it is important to understand the journey and status of WIP and map out the opportunities. The two figures below are a summary overview (Fig 1. The Women in Processing Journey, and Fig 2. AWIP Missing middle).



In this regard, AWIP Summit seeks to accelerate the strategic execution of the initiative at the different scales across Africa and targeted at millions of women involved in processing.

The First African Women in Processing Summit follows a consultative process that has mapped bottlenecks that women in processing face, the projected opportunities under AftCA and those emerging under the AU industrialisation agenda. The summit AWIP strategy borrows on scalable models with high impact aimed at driving Industrialization and inclusive financial and economic advancement for women.

AWIP is further proposed as an investment strategy that embraced technical support, access to infrastructure, appropriate and tailored investment, technology development, innovation management, including research and development. It also takes into consideration the different contexts of AWIP from the rural, informal to urban ensuring that the model approach leaves no one behind.

AWIP requires broad ranging policy changes including those focused on targeted support. The AU, RECs and African Government's should design and develop policies that incentivise women in processing including dedicating spaces within the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for AWIP.

On Finance and Investment, AU, African Governments, Development Banks, Partners, Investment Banks and Private investors should develop innovative financial products, tools and services dedicated to AWIP.

On partnerships, the AU and partners, RECs and Governments should support the establishment of an AWIP Forum to organise the women and improve the visibility of African Women in Processing

## 2. Objectives

AWIP initiative aims at provisioning women with the right tools that will enable them to tap into viable sectors, exploit available assets, transform the raw inputs into globally competitive products, feed Africa and in turn catalyse industrialisation. AWIP calls for the development of "destabilising, disruptive and ambitious strategies" that will address the systemic barriers comprehensively and deliver visible and accountable actions. These strategies must focus on building a robust ecosystem that improves access to critical assets, accelerate the implementation of existing policies, break the existing barriers, address negative gender norms and drive structural transformation that delivers change. This can only be achieved through better organised and catalytic partnerships between all key actors from civil society, public to private sector.

The AWIP Summit seeks to collectively build an understanding of the journey of the African women in processing, elaborate on how the emerging opportunities can be exploited, and the kind of support needed (financial, investment, infrastructure, technical to policies environment) by the Women. It will also seek to generate concrete recommendations and commitments that will ensure that change will happen at country, regional and continental level. It will also propose and validate a governance structure and general strategy to supports, harmonize and facilitates the actualisation of AWIP across all AU Member states (at country, regional and continental levels). During the summit, panel discussions and several training modules delivered by AUDA - NEPAD (4 modules) will seek to explore and improve the understanding the emerging opportunities under the AfCFTA and globally. The appreciation of different models that support industrial development, types of investments and Investors, how to develop products and services for different markets including leadership. There will also be a special panel hosted by the First Ladies focused on role of ICT and technologies the advancement of the Women in

Based on the above, AWIP will seeks to:

- i. Generate Policy recommendations to support the envisioned change.
- ii. Develop Recommendation on Investment strategy and economic models including the establishment of SEZs focused on AWIP
- iii. Develop a strategy for organising and visibility for lobby and strategy building at country, regional and continental level
- iv. Develop a system of documentation, sharing and facilitating learning and exchange for better trade.

## **Expected Outcomes**

The key expected outcomes of the meeting include:

- i. Recommendations on Policy change or alignment that will lead to AWIP agenda actualisation at National, Regional and Continental level.
- ii. Strategies for key sectors or priority areas which can be addressed through SEZs or similar supporting ecosystems
- iii. Develop and define the Regional and Continental agenda of visibility and lobby to assist in mainstreaming the AWIP agenda
- iv. Develop a structure that will facilitate member alliances and commitments to be fostered at local and regional levels to increase the participation of partners in all key spheres of economic and industrial change.

## **3. Participation / Who will be attending**

- Leaders from industry
- Government Heads and Ministers
- Investors, Funders and Donors
- Women in Processing
- Start-ups, SME, MSMEs and Corporate
- Entrepreneurs and entrepreneur support network leaders
- Mentors and Skills providers (incubators and accelerators)

### **● Contacts**

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