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AUC Deputy Chairperson: Trade is a means of the development of the continent and women are key drivers of trade



Addis Ababa, July 6 2012 – The 6th gender pre-Summit meeting opened today under the theme: “Boosting Intra-African Trade”. The topics to be tackled during the meeting are the role of women in trade in Africa, the role of women entrepreneurs and food security in Africa. The meeting aims at updating the participants on what is being done on the continent in terms of gender equality and women’s rights by the

African Union and other actors.

In his opening remarks, Mr Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, underlined the importance of trade in Africa saying that “no nation or region that has developed has achieved that without being integrated into the global economy”. Indeed, trade is a means of the development of the continent and women are key drivers of trade. Unfortunately, the expansion of trade faces difficulties such as the lack of infrastructure, implementation of policies on trade or information about products. Women traders sometimes face violence, harassment and abuse when crossing borders and as mentioned by Mrs Treasure Thembisile Maphanga, Director of Trade and Industry, these realities are not always represented in mainstream trade institutions.

In view of these issues, one of the objectives of this gender meeting was to see what could be done to improve the situation of women in trade in Africa. Among the panellists of this discussion, Dr. Amani Asfour, President of Egyptian Business Women Association, emphasized the need for capacity building, empowerment of the private sector and ownership of the management of the continent’s resources. She said without ICT, negotiation skills and technical skills very few things can be achieved nowadays. Africa needs to add value to its products, to attend to issues such as branding, designing, packaging, and advertising so that they can be attractive to both local and foreign markets. But to achieve all this, women need to be empowered through more sensitization

of politics and to be financially independent because, as Dr. Asfour stated, “Financial independence is the key to have a voice and a choice”.

On the African continent, women traders face difficulties to access credit due to the absence of collateral, in many cases, they still need the consent of the husband and sometimes they do not even have any goods of their own.

Opening of the first ever Women’s Commercial Bank



However, there are some positive developments. In Ethiopia, this year, the first ever Women’s Commercial Bank will open. This bank’s shareholders are mainly women and it is 100% privately owned. When presenting this project, Mrs Nigest Haile, Founder and Executive Director, Center for African Women Economic Empowerment, underlined the fact that this bank is a milestone on the road to financial independence for women, because the key to enhance women entrepreneurs to economic services is through credit and new technologies. There is a need to provide package services along with a particular trade structure for women in Africa.

The Gender Pre-Summit will end on Saturday 6th July 2012 and is a preparatory activity of the 19th African Union Summit which will start on Monday 9th of July.

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