



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Business-boosting African Trade Observatory (ATO) to start virtual demonstrations

African Union online portal, supported by the European Union and the International Trade Centre, will boost the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

(Addis Ababa/Geneva) – 14 October 2020 - An online tool designed to help businessmen and businesswomen in Africa understand how best to trade between African countries came a step closer to becoming fully operational in August 2020 as a demonstration version came onstream.

The African Trade Observatory (ATO) – a mechanism being implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) to help the new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) function when it goes live in 2021 – has begun testing the online dashboard to give real-time trade statistics to African users.

Such information will include intra-continental trade flows (traded values, traded quantities, the use of tariff preferences, taxes and fees paid at the border), and information on market conditions (such as taxes applicable at the border and regulatory requirements). The transfer of raw data from providers to the ATO team will be automated where possible to make the collection of quantitative information sustainable.

The portal will be divided into three modules to allow users to:

- Compare trade opportunities in Africa
- Explore market access conditions of African partners
- Monitor the implementation process and achievements of the AfCFTA and the Boosting Intra African Trade Action Plan.

Members of the ATO Steering Committee were presented with a beta version of the Compare and Explore modules on 21 August 2020. These two pillars of the ATO Dashboard have been designed to support micro, small and medium enterprises in Africa to simplify their market research.

A first set of live demonstrations were organized in September and highlighted how users can compare challenges and opportunities of the African markets, and explore market access conditions and business partners to expand their business within the continent.

The ATO Steering Committee includes representatives of the African Union Commission, the European Union, ITC, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

Ms. Dorothy Tembo, then acting ITC Executive Director, said that timely trade data could positively impact policy and empower businesses. She said that the ATO would be an essential tool in AfCFTA implementation. She added that RECs' presence on the Steering Committee portrayed a united front supporting African regional economic integration.

Mr. Thomas Huyghebaert, the EU Head of Cooperation in Addis Ababa, said: "The EU is committed to supporting the AU in its integration agenda, and ATO is one of the projects that it is supporting, which is a key operational tool to the AfCFTA."

The EU has pledged an additional €5 million to the ATO project to expand its scope by including additional modules on services, investment, and rules of origin. He noted that the AfCFTA is an essential pillar for the cooperation between the African Union and the European Union.

Mr. Chiza Charles Chiumya, the AUC Acting Head of Trade, participated in the Steering Committee review on behalf H.E. Amb Albert Muchanga and welcomed the participants to the ATO Steering Committee's inaugural meeting. He said: "One of the reasons for the low level of intra-African trade is the absence of trade information and market opportunities. The provision of market information and opportunities in Africa will be the main pillar of the ATO. Real-time data on trade flows is the new crude oil, especially now when the implementation of the AfCFTA is the beacon of hope towards the Post-COVID recovery strategy for Africa."

The Steering Committee agreed to meet regularly to review progress on this important and ambitious project. The next meeting is scheduled for March 2021.

Note for the Editor

About the ATO Steering Committee

The primary function of the Steering Committee (SC) is to oversee the implementation of the ATO project and advise the joint AUC-ITC implementation team. The ATO Steering Committee monitors and reviews the project status against the Work Programme in the Description of the Action and ensures that the ATO objectives are being adequately addressed and the project remains under control and on time. It also provides recommendations and suggestions on its respective plans and ramifications.

About the African Union (AUC)

The African Union Commission (AUC) is the AU's secretariat and undertakes the day to day activities of the Union. It is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Its functions include: Representing the AU and defending its interests under the guidance of and as mandated by the Assembly and the Executive Council. African Union Commission Department of Trade and Industry's core mandate is to support the AU in boosting intra-African trade, fast track establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and to ensure Africa's competitiveness in the global economy. For more information, visit www.au.int.

About the European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political union between [27 European countries](#).

The EU has delivered more than half a century of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards and launched a single European currency: the [euro](#). More than 340 million EU citizens in 19 countries now use it as their currency and enjoy its benefits.

As enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, 'the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'. For more information, visit <https://europa.eu/european-union>.

About the International Trade Centre (ITC)

ITC is the joint agency of the [World Trade Organization](#) and the [United Nations](#). ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations' Global Goals for Sustainable Development. For more information, visit www.intracen.org.

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Below are promotional YouTube videos on the ATO in all the four AU languages:

<https://youtu.be/nPWozjruSPs> (Arabic)

<https://youtu.be/1Detnq6V3oQ> (English)

<https://youtu.be/eOveoJhiolc> (French)

<https://youtu.be/6kMC00H5aUI> (Portuguese)

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