

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Venue: Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

### **Empowering Women in Processing: The African Women in Processing initiative**



The African Union Commission, Department of Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals has concluded the inaugural meeting of the Interim Steering Committee of the African Union's Initiative on African Women in Processing (AWIP) held from 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

The AWIP initiative aims to support the African Union's industrialization agenda and achieve the goals of Agenda 2063 by catalyzing and accelerating the transformation of industrial processing led by women. With a focus on inclusive and sustainable social-economic development, AWIP addresses structural norms and sets a new policy direction for women in Processing. Its objective is to expand economic and business opportunities for women in Processing, especially under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) context and to support the creation of an enabling environment for African Women in Processing as part of the new Decade of Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion (2020-2030), as a strategy for the implementation of the Plan of Action for Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa.

The meeting is a follow up of the 1st African Women in Processing Summit held in Niamey, Niger in November 2022, attended by over 400 delegates from 22 African countries showcasing products by African women in processing. During the summit, women in processing received training in business development and a strategy was developed to support the growth of AWIP businesses across Africa. The AfCFTA provides opportunities for AWIP to engage with the integrated African market, to

mobilize urgent and sustained action to achieve empowerment but there is a need to develop systems and platforms to improve understanding of these opportunities and provide support for women to respond to them.

By mainstreaming AWIP across all levels of business development, African women will benefit greatly from mechanisms for knowledge documentation, sharing, and experience capitalization to facilitate learning and exchange. It will also be an opportunity to develop systems for business intelligence, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the implementation of policies is effective in Africa.

Speaking on behalf of H.E Amb. Albert Muchanga, Commissioner AU ETTIM, Mrs. Ron Osman, Ag. Head of Industry, Innovation and Minerals Division expounded on the role of the African Women in processing initiative (AWIP) interim committee in terms of creating frameworks for the development of strategies for mobilizing resources to support various stakeholders, as well as putting in place systems and processes to support the sustainable growth of women-led businesses in processing. She emphasized the role of made-in-Africa products, especially products made by women. “Much of the discourse is around trade but none of it is about producing. In order for Africa to industrialize, we need to produce Made in Africa products first and then trade”, she stated.

“The whole continent is focused on industrialization as the engine of economic transformation at all levels. Industrialization in Africa is not possible without the input of women”. Mr. Emmanuel Tra Bi, Director General Industry, on behalf of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Promotion of SMEs in Cote d’Ivoire.” The government is making sure that women are supported to participate in industrial development” he noted.

Mrs. Rabiadou Mamadou Arzika, AWIP President (West Africa) elaborated on the role of AWIP at the continental level whose operations are focused on advocacy, research and analysis, and networking and partnership building with continental-level policymakers and industry associations. This involves developing and executing advocacy strategies to promote policies that support women-owned businesses in the processing industry. It also involves conducting research and analysis to identify key issues facing women-owned businesses and prioritizing solutions to address these issues. She underscored the importance of the work of the interim steering committee on planning a concrete roadmap for AWIP and its vision to be one voice for women in processing on the African Continent.

Further, the steering Committee meeting addressed issues of access to finance for women in the processing value chain, developing the AWIP business plan, mapping resource mobilization and partnership strategies for the implementation of AWIPs activities and further elected AWIPs leadership committee.

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