

COMMUNIQUE

FOLLOWING THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON EAC'S CUSTOMS REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND TRADE REGIME, 12-14 JUNE 2013, ARUSHA TANZANIA

PREAMBLE

We, the business women trading within the East African Community region state the following;

WHEREAS, The East African Women in Business Platform (EAWiBP) and East African Business Council (EABC) held a two and half day(2 and ½ days) Regional Workshop on EAC Customs Regulations and Trade Regime from 12-14 June 2013 in Arusha, Tanzania. The workshop aimed at sensitizing business women on a number of issues related to the EAC integration process and intra-EAC trade. These included;

1) *EAC Customs Union Protocol and its regulations such as Export Processing Zones (EPZ), Application of the Common External Tariff (CET) and Rules of Origin* 2) *Ongoing trade negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements between EAC and EU and Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) between COMESA-EAC-SADC and* 3) *Rights*

and Freedoms (and status of these rights and freedoms) established under the Common Market Protocol.

AND WHEREAS, Fifty (50) business and professional women from across the East African Community participated in the regional workshop. Participants were drawn from the following national business and professional women associations;

- 1. Association of Media Women in Kenya (AWMIK)**
- 2. Association of Women in Agri-Business Network (AWAN) Kenya and East Africa**
- 3. Burundi Women Entrepreneur's Association (AFAB)**
- 4. East African Association of Women Entrepreneurs**
- 5. Eastern African Sub Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI)**
- 6. Federation of Women Entrepreneur Associations in Kenya (FEWA-K)**
- 7. iCON Women's and Young People's Leadership Academy**
- 8. New Faces, New Voices**
- 9. Regional Cross Border Traders Association of Women in East Africa**
- 10. Rwanda Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (RCWE)**
- 11. Tanzania Women's Chamber of Commerce (TWCC)**
- 12. Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited (UWEAL)**

WE THE BUSINESS WOMEN OF EAST AFRICAN WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT AND ACCENT THE FOLLOWING;

REITERATE the key commitments and undertakings outlined in the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community particularly under **Articles 5, 6, 7, Chapter 25** and **especially Article 121** which states ***“The Partner States recognize that women make a significant contribution towards the process of socio-economic transformation and sustainable growth.....(therefore) Partner States shall through legislative and other measures.....; and Article 122 which states that “.....Having recognized the importance of women as a vital economic link between agriculture, industry and trade, the Partner States undertake to.....”***

EMPHASIZE the challenges and recommendations advanced in the Regional Study on Barriers faced by Women-Owned Businesses (2013) that was commissioned by EABC and EAWiBP.

TAKE COGNISANCE of the progress made in EAC integration process particularly in the establishment of a Customs Union and Common Market and ongoing negotiations to establish a Monetary Union.

CALL UPON THE EAC SECRETARIAT AND THE FIVE (5) EAC PARTNER STATES

to **urgently** address the following issues that are adversely affecting business women in the region;

1. ***Lengthy, complicated and bureaucratic procedures*** in accessing import tariff reduction advantages under Duty Remission and Duty Draw Back Schemes.

Recommendation: Harmonise and simplify the process of accessing benefits under the aforementioned schemes *especially for micro, small and medium enterprises.*

2. ***Prevailing double domestic taxation regimes within the region*** that result in increased costs of doing business.

Recommendation: Fastrack harmonization of domestic taxes within the region through policy and legal initiatives as well as ratification, by all Partner States, of the Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation in regard to Income Tax.

3. ***Difficulty in accessing customs documentation for cross border trade*** especially for cross border traders as well as Micro and Small Enterprises.

Recommendation: **Ensure access to free of charge, simplified customs documentation** for instance the Simplified Certificate of Rules of Origin at border posts/points.

4. ***Inadequate support to Joint Border Committees (JBCs)*** who carry a very crucial mandate of supporting and promoting cross border trade.

Recommendation: Enhance support to Joint Border Committees in terms of awareness/visibility, financial, technical and infrastructure assistance.

5. ***Gender neutral trade policy and legal frameworks*** at the regional and national levels.

Recommendation: Fastrack the development of an EAC (Regional) Strategy on promoting women-owned businesses as well as Gender Equality Law. The aforementioned Regional Strategy will be the blue print for interventions (including increasing access to finance) towards support and promote women-owned businesses engaged in intra-EAC trade and across Partner States in the region.

6. ***Limited awareness on EAC trade and customs policy and legal framework especially*** in the area of Standards (including Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Standards), Trade Regime and Customs Regulations and Trade Facilitation and Private Sector initiatives.

Recommendation: Design a multi-stakeholder, multi-year and multi-level (national and sub-national) programme aimed at raising awareness on the issues mentioned above. Further, establish Call Centers or 24 hour Hotlines at Border Points to increase access to information and curb malpractice by border officials.

7. ***Inadequate facilities and public services at border posts/points especially for sanitation, accommodation, waste management, ICT, warehousing, grain bulks and modern markets.***

Recommendation: Work with Joint Border Committees and Local Authorities to establish initiatives and services on the aforementioned issues.

8. ***Inadequate participation and representation of business women*** in trade policy and negotiations fora.

Recommendations: Ensure **40% representation** of business women in trade negotiations. Additionally, business women should form part of government delegations to these negotiations.

9. ***Potential loss of business for certain private sector players especially Freight Forwarding*** Companies when the Single Customs Territory (SCT) is established.

Recommendation: Assess the impact of SCT on the aforementioned businesses and include mitigation plans in the SCT framework.