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Meeting Summary / Key Messages

**Virtual Webinar on**

**“The African Continental Free Trade Area: Maximizing opportunities for inclusive sustainable development”**

21 March 2023

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**I. Meeting Summary**

- The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), in collaboration with the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, and the OSAA-ACBF Think Tank Network [Nkafu Policy Institute (Cluster 5) and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), (Clusters 3 & 5)] organized on 21 March 2023 a virtual Webinar on the theme “*The African Continental Free Trade Area: Maximizing opportunities for inclusive sustainable development*”.
- The key objective was to provide a platform for policy makers, experts and practitioners to exchange views on ways and means to fully harness the potentials of the AfCFTA to support inclusive socio-economic development on the continent, mainly through enhancing the economic participation of women and youth. The webinar’s theme is aligned with the African Union’s theme for 2023 “*Acceleration of African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) Implementation*” which reflects Africa’s strong commitment to advancing the AfCFTA and harnessing its full developmental impact.
- The webinar was moderated by **Dr. Barassou Diawara**, Senior Knowledge

including creating a liberalized single market for goods and services, enhancing the competitiveness of African economies, and promoting industrial development through diversification and regional value chain development, agricultural development, and food security. He provided an overview of the progress made in the negotiations and implementation of agreements and protocols pertaining to trade in goods, including schedules of tariff concessions and rules of origin; and trade in services as well as Phase II issues; namely investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, women and youth in trade, and digital trade. Mr. Antonio also shared updates on the establishment and operationalization of the AfCFTA Dispute Settlement Mechanism and other AfCFTA Implementation Tools, including the Adjustment Facility, the Pan-African Payments and Settlements System, the Intra-Africa Trade Fair, and the Guided Trade Initiative launched in July 2022. [Briefing : Progress in the Implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement \(un.org\)](#)

- The presentation on progress in the implementation of the AfCFTA Agreement was followed by a panel discussion that featured: **Prof. Robert Nantchouang**, Director, Nkafu Policy Institute; **Dr Joseph Matola**, Senior Research Fellow, SAIIA; **Ms. Sherine El-Saeed**, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations and Coordinator of the Group of African Second Committee Experts; **Ms. Madvee Muthu**, Founder/CEO, T.i.A Bee Products Ltd; and **Ms. Amandla Wadzingaire**, Gender Focal Person, Zimbabwe Youth Champions for Agenda 2063. The Panellists shared their perspectives on the webinar's theme and reflected on challenges and opportunities for strengthening the socio-economic impact of the AfCFTA.
- **Mr. Hussein El-Shaar**, Economic Affairs Officer, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, OSAA, summarized the key salient points that emerged from the webinar on ways and means of maximizing the socio-economic impact of the AfCFTA, including strengthening the economic participation of women and youth. He noted that the summary and policy recommendations would feed into the Africa Dialogue Series 2023, to be held in May 2023.

## II. Key Messages / Policy Recommendations

- The AfCFTA is a game changer in Africa's growth trajectory. It is underpinned by the vast potential of intra-African trade as a critical catalyst in pursuing an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future on the continent. The AfCFTA reflects a level of ambition commensurate with the continent's development aspirations. The

Agreement covers goods, services, and dispute settlement. In addition, it regulates

namely investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, women and youth in trade, and digital trade. This includes on Phase II issues, protocols on investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, e-commerce, and women and youth in trade.

- There is also a need to strengthen African governments' human and institutional capacities to formulate and implement sound trade policies to ensure that trade policy support broadly-shared economic growth. Strengthening the domestication of the AfCFTA agreement is critical to ensuring that national and regional trade policies are aligned with the AfCFTA Agreement.
- In addition, targeted public policies that promote equality and improve income distribution when implementing the AfCFTA are key to ensuring that the AfCFTA is delivering results for the most vulnerable, including women and youth.
- The African business landscape predominantly comprises SMEs, including those owned and led by women and youth. It is imperative to maximize the benefits of the AfCFTA for SMEs. Adopting policy reforms to facilitate trade, streamline procedures, and promote SMEs' access to market, finance, and technology is critical to accelerating Africa's inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- Promoting partnerships and harnessing the potential of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, think tanks, regional and sub-regional institutions and international organizations is crucial for promoting the effective implementation of the AfCFTA and maximizing its socio-economic impact and accelerate progress towards the goals and targets of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

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