

Initiative to empower women traders in W/A launched

By Diana Mensah

A SIX-YEAR project to support women traders across West Africa has been launched in Accra.

The \$19,700,000 project, dubbed; "Making trade work for women in West Africa," is being funded by Global Affairs Canada.

It was jointly launched by the Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI) and TradeMark Africa (TMA).

The project aims to support about 80,000 traders over the next five years, with about 70 per cent of beneficiaries being women.

It is designed to address the persistent challenges faced by women traders, including barriers to markets, financial exclusion and gender-based violence at border crossings.

The project will be implemented along six key corridors in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin and Nigeria.

In addition, it intends to institutionalise impactful innovations within regional economic plans and strategies, ultimately contributing to inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth.

Role of women

The Programme Manager of Making Trade Work for Women in West Africa, CECI, Madeleine Tsimi, highlighted the crucial role of women in inter-regional trade, citing data that show that between 38 per cent and 61 per cent of traders on key corridors such as Tema-Ouagadougou and Abidjan-Lagos are women.

The project is built on three major pillars - enhancing women's capacity and rights in trade, advancing gender-responsive trade policies and strengthening regional value chains and financial inclusion.

Mr Tshini said the initiative was not about reinventing existing structures but

rather strengthening ongoing efforts to ensure that women traders thrived in a more inclusive, secure and economically viable trade environment.

The Board Chair of TMA, Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, also called for inclusive trade policies to empower women in West Africa.

He said there was the need for more investment in real-time data collection on the economic impact of gender disparities, adding that "outdated data weakens policy decisions and leads to missed opportunities".

Mr Boshe lauded the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) protocol on women and youth in trade as a major step forward, adding that TMA's role in streamlining trade procedures mandated governments to

simplify procedures for small-scale traders and remove discriminatory barriers that restricted women's access to markets.

Partnership

The High Commissioner of Canada to Ghana, Myriam Montrat, reaffirmed Canada's partnership with stakeholders in advancing inclusive trade.

She pledged to collaborate with stakeholders to drive meaningful economic change in the region, adding that Canada had maintained strong diplomatic ties with Africa for over 60 years, committing to trade, development, peace, security and cooperation.

"Our commitment extends to international platforms where Canada has played a leading role in adopting the Joint

Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment and establishment of an informal working group on trade and gender equality," Ms Montrat said.

Appreciation

A beneficiary and vice president of National Cross-Border Trader's Women's Association, Gloria Sackey, thanked the donors for their support, saying "at least our voices are being heard. We need practical solutions to ensure smoother trade operations for women".

She said women traders continued to face numerous challenges at border crossings, and expressed the hope that those struggles would soon be addressed.



• Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe (4th from left), Board Chair, Trademark Africa, and Myriam Montrat (5th from left), High Commissioner of Canada to Ghana, with some participants. Picture: ESTHER ADJORKOR ADJEI

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