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WACOMP Programme Highlights

June 2021 - Issue #6

Regional Component

West African Trade Promotion Organisations Establish Regional TPO Network



After several progressive consultative meetings, the heads of member organisations of the Trade Promotion Network gathered for a two-day session meeting held via videoconference on 30 March and 22 April 2021.

The chief executive officers of national Trade Promotion Organisations (TPOs) from ECOWAS member countries agreed to establish and operationalise the ECOWAS TPO Network. With the establishment of a regional TPO Network, TPOs gain a solid platform for collaborative engagement and increased support towards regional value chains, business linkages as well as a boost in both 'intra'

and 'extra' regional trade. The meeting achieved consensus on technical documents including the memorandum of understanding, the terms of reference as well as the statutes and internal regulation of the network.

During the second session, the president and vice president were unanimously elected; Mr Olusegun Awolowo, Executive Director of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council as president and the Director General of the Association for the Promotion of Exports of Côte d'Ivoire (APEX-CI), Mr. Guy M'Bengue as vice president. Members also initiated the consultative process to establish technical committees focusing on finance, trade policy and strategy, trade promotion events, as well as communication and marketing.

To begin its work the network will define its workplan and initiate activities with support from the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the ECOWAS Commission through the West African Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP).

The ECOWAS TPO Network establishment was also acknowledged during the recent meeting of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers held virtually on the 3 June 2021. The outcomes of this session are available [here](#).

West African Employers Rubber Stamp New Strategic Plan

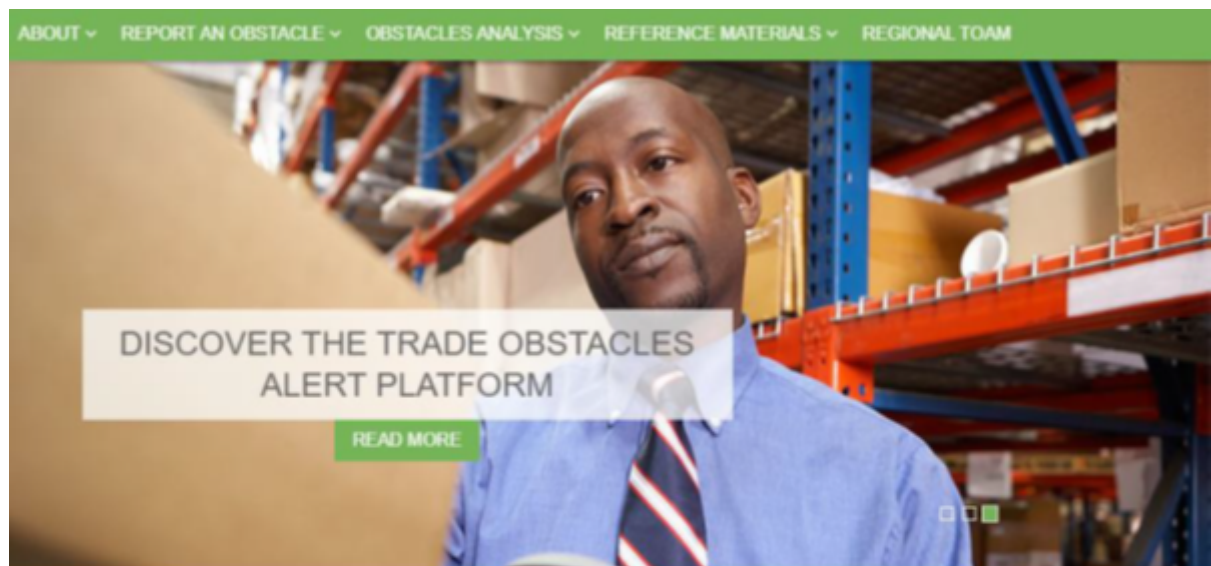


Representatives from the Federation of the West African Employers Association (FWAEA) Secretariat as well as leadership and focal points from national employer organizations met to review and approve the organisation's strategy for 2021-2023. The FWAEA strategy provides a roadmap for employers to best address the regional economic challenges, consolidate its legitimacy and support its members to better service their local companies.


22 representatives convened for the consultative meeting on 31 March 2021 to preserve financial stability as well as sustainability in activities and objectives of FWAEA. In accordance with the performance improvement roadmap (PIRM), representatives provided the membership with a detailed action plan which included an outline of expected actions and annual activities.


The strategy also outlined expected responsibilities and objectives for evaluation. Members expressed commitment towards the implementation schedules and ensuring the association's sustainability.

National Focal Points Review the Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism (TOAM)



 **Report an obstacle**
Report the obstacles you face when exporting or importing your products and let the responsible authorities find a solution.

 **Set up your alerts**
Get timely updates on the problems faced by other trade operators in the markets and product categories you are interested in.

 **View the reports**
See the obstacle reports submitted to date and understand what the main concerns are for trade operators.

On 21 April 2020, national focal points from across the ECOWAS region attended a workshop to share experiences and discuss progress made with Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanism (TOAM). The 12 focal points used the workshop as a platform to highlight key features for continued use and enhancement of the ITC tool.

Through the national focal points, ITC held several online training sessions for chambers of commerce, private and public sector representatives on the TOAM

tool. Participants took part in live data entry and reporting simulations; the trainings also improved their understanding of Non-Tariff measures (NTMs).

In Cabo Verde, the national focal point Jailson Semedo also emphasised the need for government to incorporate the tool in existing systems. “The national government must take the TOAM mechanism as an important tool to facilitate trade and improve the business environment, and the TOAM must be seen as an integrated government tool” said Semedo.

Overall, the TOAM platform has over 770 website users in the region and documented 270 trade obstacles with 137 being resolved and 133 resolved obstacles. The development of an ECOWAS TOAM platform is ongoing this includes implementing new features to report obstacles in trade services and provide users with access to the system through a mobile app.

Regional stakeholders engage with various African business councils ahead of establishing ECOWAS Business Council

WACOMP 

**AFRICA'S REGIONAL BUSINESS COUNCILS:
SHARING BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE**

31 May 2021 | 9am GMT (11am CEST, UTC+2) | ITC Webinar

 <p>Ms. Sandra Uwera, Chief Executive Officer, Comesa Business Council</p>	 <p>Mr. Denis Karera, Acting Director, East African Business Council</p>	 <p>Ms. Agatha Nderitu, Consultant and former Executive Director, East African Business Council</p>	 <p>Ms. Amany Asfour, Chairperson, African Business Council</p>
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As part of the West Africa Competitiveness Project (WACOMP), ITC has undertaken several activities to support setting up and operationalizing the ECOWAS Business Council. On 31 May 2021, ECOWAS country policymakers and West African regional business associations (RBA) joined a webinar session with established African regional business councils (RBC). The webinar was attended by over 60 participants and sought to provide an opportunity for

ECOWAS stakeholders to gain insight on the benefits of a founded RBC to effectively support and strengthen the private sector.

Participants from ECOWAS included representatives from the ministries of trade and finance as well as various RBAs. Invited business councils included the COMESA Business Council (CBC), the East African Business Council (EABC) and the African Business Council. Webinar discussions were based on two case studies on the CBC and the EABC.

Representatives also focused on the mandates of RBCs representing and ensuring the inclusion of private sector interests in the regional policy making agenda such as the structure, key features, functions as well as challenges encountered. During this experience sharing event, ECOWAS stakeholders received valuable recommendations on elements needed to successfully establish a regional business council, as they work towards installing the ECOWAS Business Council.

During its recent working session held on 3 June 2021, the ECOWAS Council of Ministers adopted the decision on the amendment of the statutes on the ECOWAS Business Council, as a result of the contributions from ITC trade experts. The outcomes of this session are available [here](#).

WACOMP programme gears up for West Africa Connect event



Ahead of the West Africa Connect event set to take place in November this year, the WACOMP programme launched two call for applications for West African small businesses. Small businesses in the ICT, textile and garment sectors were encouraged to apply to take part in the regional B2B event.

The West Africa Connect 2021 and 2022 events aim to provide international and regional buyers with a platform to communicate their requirements to small business owners and ensure these are met for matchmaking purposes. The 2021 event will focus on the ICT, textile and garment sectors whereas 2022 will cover ICT, mango and cassava sectors. Due to COVID-19, the event may take place in hybrid format with both virtual and physical presence – organisers are hoping to finalise these deliberations.

With over 670 applications in the textiles and garment sector, and an additional 340 applications in the ICT sector, small businesses are keen to benefit from the tailored trainings on export promotion, business plan development and an evaluation of their business' export potential. Selected businesses will need to be headquartered and registered in an ECOWAS country or Mauritania and be export ready.

Additional information on the finalised call to application is available [here](#). Women and youth-led businesses were strongly encouraged to apply.

National Components

ITC begins palm oil sector study in Sierra Leone



As ITC gets under way with its assessment of the palm oil sector in Sierra Leone, a technical team initiated the relationship building process with local villages to identify locations suitable to conduct its research.

The study aims to include information directly from smallholder farmers and the technical team met with farmers in Kambia, Port Loko, Pujehun and Bonthe districts. The initial study will indicate existing opportunities, challenges and potential market links in palm oil production based on the data from smallholder farmers.

To engage with key stakeholders in the sector, the technical team met district officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, non-governmental organizations as well as private palm oil estate owners and large-scale companies. Overall, the study aims to improve the performance of palm oil as well as invigorate the country's business climate.

SMEs in Sierra Leone seek to improve funding opportunities through financial analysis of business



A pool of 40 small businesses in the cocoa, cassava and palm oil are going through a financial and non-financial diagnosis of their businesses since early May. The diagnosis exercise will result in an improvement plan and coaching sessions for each small business to improve its access to capital.

Two national Financial Management Counsellors (FMCs), Mr. James Koroma and Mr. Raphael Marrah have travelled across the country for the diagnosis exercise, to support business owners with an improvement plan and deliver coaching on improving the credit profile of businesses. “The coaching sessions made clear the stark realities of what it means to be investment ready. Now I am

taking steps to ensure that I meet the minimum standards before approaching investors,” said Musa Tarawally, CEO of the Progressive Green Revolution Network.

During the diagnosis a majority of small businesses proved to be high-potential marketers, in Sierra Leone as well as across the region. This financial analysis exercise follows two bootcamps covering business planning, compliance with tax, product costing and forecasting held in Kenema and Makeni by the access to finance team. “The most fun is seeing these SMEs put into practice business skills they had learnt during both bootcamps and coaching sessions and watching them maximize their fullest potential for the growth of their businesses,” said Raphael Marrah, national Financial Management Counsellor.

Small business owners will continue to receive coaching until the end of June 2021. Once completed, business owners will have created a solid financial plan for their business and will use these to pitch their business to local and international funders.



After attending ITC’s 3-day boot camp training for small business owners in Sierra Leone, Fatimata Kallon owner of JMK Foods Limited learned to tailor her business plans based on the sector of her business – Palm Oil. The 3-day

intensive training organised by ITC's access to finance team took business owners through financial planning, business plan development and product costing.

Kallon's main business challenge is securing external funding, "because investors and financial institutions consider our business to be too risky because we lack collateral, a bankable business plan, proper financial management skills, etc."

The agribusiness owner and mother of three plans to improve the creditworthiness of her business and improve her opportunities in securing financing from microfinance institutions and banks. She is also looking forward to having her business go through a financial analysis to better identify areas for improvement and improve opportunities in accessing finance.

In two years, Kallon hopes to double her production from two and a half drums a day to five by successfully securing financing for her business.

Read more from Fatimata and her business JMK Foods [here](#)

WACOMP Senegal raises more programme funding and welcomes its local team



After its launch in June 2020, the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) Senegal sought to expand its work with cooperative societies in Senegal. As a result, ITC signed an amendment to its grant agreement with the European Union securing an additional EUR 2,844,902 to establish and boost identified cooperative societies. This additional funding raises the total budget of the programme to EUR 6.3 million.

Based in the “Land of Teranga”, the programme has also set up its project office led by national coordinator, Oulimata Fall Sarr. The local office hosts a team of technical experts with a variety of skills and complimentary profiles. The team will work towards developing exports, income-generating activities as well as sustainable employment for women and youth in the country.

WACOMP Senegal aims to enhance the competitiveness of the mango, onion and ICT sectors.

Operationalising cooperative societies in Senegal



Focal points from Senegal's 14 regions attended a training on using the digital system for the Cooperative Societies Register (RSCOOP). Participants were learned to compile documents for entry into the digital system on 15-16 and 18-19 March 2021. The proposed digitalisation of the RSCOOP will boost security for its cooperative society users as well as improve the average registration time. The platform also registers personal property securities through its connection with the Trade and Personal Property Credit Register.

Representatives from the ministries of agriculture, trade and justice all validated the plan to form the RSCOOP including its proposed digital registration platform on 18 February 2021. With this new registration process the RSCOOP can receive registration applications, modify as well as delete information. The plan to register cooperatives at the RSCOOP was identified as part of the Uniform Act on Cooperative Societies (AUSCOOP) feasibility study of over 480 farmer organisations.

The AUSCOOP developed an approach to support stakeholders in the mango and onion sectors; the act provides a cohesive approach for cooperative societies to promote the economic development of rural areas through the increased competitiveness of mango and onion produce in the country.

A key objective for the WACOMP Senegal programme is to reinforce the mango and onion sectors through the establishment of commercial cooperative societies, which will work within the framework of the Uniform Act on Cooperative Societies (AUSCOOP).

WACOMP Senegal takes part in Mali Digital Awards



Senegalese e-logistics consortium Afriware attended the Mali Digital Awards with sponsorship from the WACOMP Senegal programme. The start-up's representatives Outalma and Paps presented on last mile and cross-border logistics, as well as highlighted prospective opportunities with the National Post Office of Mali, Orange Mali and other informal transportation networks.

The awards event took place as part of the Malian Digital Exhibition held on 25 to 27 March 2021 at the International Conference Centre of Bamako. As the main event sponsors, the country's Minister of Employments and Vocational training Mr. Mouhamad Salia Toure launched the 3-day event.

Senegal Innovation Hubs set to receive technical support

The WACOMP Senegal programme launched a call for applications targeting innovation hubs across the country. Applications were submitted by tech hubs, with a large number of the applicants based in the country's capital, Dakar.

After its shortlisting process, WACOMP Senegal will support the following innovation hubs with individual grants structured as a technical support package; CTIC Dakar, Concree, Impact Hub Dakar and Jokkolabs. Each of the hubs will receive communications and office equipment, guided support on finance, accounting, digital systems, legal aspects as well as logistics.

Management teams of these hubs will also attend skills and knowledge building sessions based on the capacity building feature of the grant. The four selected innovation hubs were identified to have the largest footprint in Dakar.

Promoting the Senegalese digital ecosystem with a new dynamic platform



Since early March, ITC has been in close consultations with stakeholders from Senegal's digital ecosystem, as it seeks to develop and design a platform to promote the country's ICT sector. Stakeholders have emphasised the need for the platform to be versatile and accommodate their needs. This will ensure they can contribute towards the content generation and value-addition in information as well as leverage contributor's expansive social network. In addition, stakeholders are also keen to establish a platform that is sustainable.

The platform will establish a central point for stakeholders to exchange views, carry out extensive mapping of the ICT sector and improve approaches to secure buy-in from domestic and foreign markets. With the peak in Senegal's digital sector, there is a greater need for the platform to be sustainable and dynamic once established and integrated. The search for a local company to support the development work of the platform will begin in June 2021.

To learn more about the West Africa Competitiveness Programme visit:

WACOMP ITC



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