

Africa Trade Policy Centre - Supporting the Continent's Trade Agenda

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Doha, 22 April 2012 (ECA) – Senior officials of the Economic Commission for Africa participated in a special session of UN agencies that are members of an Inter Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity. The session was held on the sidelines of the ongoing UNCTAD XIII on ways to foster more cooperation and enhance synergies among themselves. The cluster has as its main focus, strengthening trade and productive capacities of countries.

According to Alan Kyerematen who heads the Africa Trade Policy Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Cluster's focus on productive capacity is an important part of the African trade agenda. He says African countries need to produce a broader range of better quality goods and in that regard, they need an understanding of their productive resources, entrepreneurial capabilities and productive linkages."

With this understanding, a country can determine its capacity to produce the kinds of goods and services that can propel it to greater growth and development.

Kyerematen underscores the need for a more coordinated approach to support African countries in this regard and echoes the sentiments of the African Trade Ministers, who earlier in the week said there has to be a clear commitment between UN agencies to collaborate.

"Member states have acknowledged the support we as UN agencies provide for the African trade agenda, but there is a need for agencies to work together, more than ever before," he said.

To this end, he says the Africa Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) is keen to work within the policies and programme priorities of member states; it is also focused on practical and pragmatic approaches that are results-oriented. "Our efforts are inclusive - aimed at benefiting our constituencies, including the private sector, academia and civil society," he adds.

According to Kyerematen, the ATPC also sees the need to strengthen advocacy for trade. "At the national level, trade needs to be brought back to the centre of the development agenda, otherwise our declarations will go to waste," he says.

He also points out that the disconnect between policy and implementation comes from a gap in programming and that supporting countries with detailed implementation planning is what can help generate results.

Kyerematen hopes that backstopping efforts to formulate national trade policies "that are fully consistent with national development strategies" is an important part of ATPC's support to countries. These policies, however, need to have coherence at the regional level in order to help advance regional integration and overcome the effects of Africa's small fragmented economies.

The Centre is already on course in this direction. The Africa Trade Forum that held its first meeting with the trade constituency in November 2011 was a landmark effort around advocacy for trade in the national development discourse. Going forward, national consultative stakeholder's meetings will be critical in the lead up to the next Forum.

"We will engage our partners in support of knowledge production on trade, providing technical advisory services, and mainstreaming trade in national development policies, he says. He adds that ATPC also aims to support mid-career post-graduate students and mid-career professionals through fellowships to help build what he refers to as "a pipeline of trade professionals for the future."

"We have a clearly defined service mix to support the African trade agenda and we hope we can work together with the UN agencies to deliver our services", he says.

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