

“Evaluating the Impact of EPAs on Africa 's Regional Integration Agenda”

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Addis Ababa – 29 September 2008 - ECA - The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is convening a continental workshop on Economic Partnership Agreements between European and African countries at its headquarters in Addis Ababa , Ethiopia , on 8-10 October 2008. The meeting is a follow-up to the previous continental meetings on the same issue held in Mombassa (2005), Cairo (2006), and Nairobi (2007).

African countries have for the last six years been engaged in two important tracks of trade negotiations. These are the Doha Round at the World Trade Organization and the Economic Partnership Agreements negotiations with the European Union.

Given the broad objective of Africa's integration, a key challenge remains how the EPAs negotiations can consolidate rather than complicate the regional moves towards the creation of a Common African Market. As things stand, the EPAs negotiations have resulted in interim agreements being initialed by individual or groups of African countries. These interim agreements vary across the countries and groupings. Hence, the critical question now is how to salvage the regional integration agenda given the possible inconsistency between regional objectives and the way in which several African countries and their European Union trading partners are progressing with these bilateral trade agreements.

In that context, this year's continental EPAs workshop aims to take stock of the results of the EPAs negotiations in the light of what African countries had hoped to achieve. In addition, it will evaluate the effects of EPAs on progress towards the African Economic Community. The workshop will also look into issues of coordination and harmonization as well as review questions of trade facilitation, infrastructure development and product quality in order to identify existing gaps and needs.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) through the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC), in collaboration with other institutions such as UNDP, UNCTAD, FAO and UNIDO, has been working closely with African countries in the Doha and EPA negotiation processes. Specifically, the ECA has provided technical results suggesting options on how African countries could deal with the various issues raised in each of the negotiations.

The 8-10 October 2008 workshop is being organized jointly by the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) and the Trade, Finance and Economic Development Division (TFED) of Economic Commission for Africa in collaboration with their partners who are active in this field.

The overarching objective of the meeting will be to produce a template that is designed to assist the African Union member states in their negotiations of the EPAs. The request for the template was made by the Conference of African Union Ministers of Trade and Ministers of Finance at their meeting in April 2008. It is expected that the meeting's background documents and discussions will also provide the basis for the preparation of future ATPC policy briefing notes focusing on different aspects and areas of EPAs, which will be prepared for African trade negotiators and policy makers.

Furthermore, in line with ATPC's objective of supporting common African positions, the meeting will facilitate consensus building by coming up with proposals on how possible inconsistencies arising from the interim EPAs could be overcome so that the objective of achieving an accelerated African Common Market for Basic Food Products is not compromised.

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