


Trade policy should not be left to governments alone, says ECA's David Luke

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Lusaka, 25 September 2018 (ECA) – David Luke, Coordinator of the African Trade Policy Centre at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has called for greater private sector involvement in trade policy processes across the continent.

"Trade policy and its effects are too complicated and far-reaching to be left to governments alone and must include dialogue with the private sector through which trade occurs, and the civil society which can play a key role in monitoring outcomes and advocacy," said Mr Luke.

"Effective trade strategies are a product of a trade policy-making process that includes all the key stakeholders. We expect, therefore, to see consultation and dialogue become an inherent feature of trade policy governance at all levels," he added.

He was speaking in Lusaka on 25 September at the opening of a four-day African Union (AU) meeting on 'Strengthening National and Regional Trade Policy Dialogue Platforms.'

Mr. Luke stated that as negotiations and actual work of establishing the AfCFTA continue, the importance of consultations and dialogue among governments, private sector, civil society, parliamentarians and other relevant stakeholders cannot be overemphasized.

"We, at the ECA, believe that it is only through consultation and dialogue among key stakeholders that Africa will be able to strategically respond to emerging opportunities and challenges as well as defend its strategic interests," said Mr. Luke who also pointed out that it was imperative for governments to establish effective national mechanisms to facilitate dialogue.

The ECA official praised African countries for negotiating and signing the Agreement establishing the AfCFTA in Kigali on 21 March 2018, "At a time when the general trend is to be protectionist." He added that "ECA, in collaboration with AUC, is working with the seven countries that have not yet agreed to begin the liberalization process at 90 per cent of tariff lines," in a bid to get them on board.

49 AU Member States have signed the Agreement, and seven have deposited instruments of ratification with the African Union Commission (AUC). It is expected that the 22 ratifications required for the entry into force of the Agreement will be reached by its first anniversary next year.

The AfCFTA Agreement covers trade in goods, trade in services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy. The second phase of the negotiations, which is expected to start this year, will focus on intellectual property rights, competition policy and investment.

Mr. Luke said ECA will continue to support the second phase of the negotiations. He expressed hope that "e-commerce will soon be included formally."

Commenting on some ECA initiatives, he said, "Currently we are working on the next edition of Assessing Regional Integration in Africa volume 9, which will focus on a detailed analysis of AfCFTA Phase II issues, including e-commerce. We are also developing a monitoring and

evaluation tool to be known as the AfCFTA Country Business Index that will provide concrete data and information on the impact of the AfCFTA."

He noted that ECA is also giving priority to AfCFTA implementation by assisting countries on a request basis to prepare AfCFTA National Strategies, stating "These strategies complement the country's trade policies and identify the key trade opportunities, current constraints and steps required for it to take full advantage of national, regional and global markets."

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