

The banner features a woman with curly hair smiling and holding a tablet. The background is a blurred office setting. The text is overlaid on the image. Logos for UNCTAD, UN Trade & Development, and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives are visible in the bottom right corner.

9 April 2025, 2:00–3:30pm EAT
Kampala, Uganda

Enhancing SMEs' Integration in Regional Value and Supply Chains for Job Creation and Sustainable Growth in Africa's Vulnerable Countries



Side event to the Eleventh Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD):
“Driving job creation and economic growth through sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”

I. Background

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a critical role in economic development, contributing significantly to employment, innovation, and GDP growth. However, their participation in regional value chains (RVCs) remains limited due to challenges such as access to finance, regulatory barriers, and market access constraints. Enhancing SME participation in RVCs is essential for fostering inclusive economic growth, increasing productivity, and creating quality jobs.

Regional integration and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) present a unique opportunity to boost SME participation into RVCs by reducing trade barriers and creating a unified market of over 1.3 billion people, with the AfCFTA holding an export potential of USD 217 million from partial tariff liberalization¹.

II. Objectives:

Co-organized by the Uganda Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives and the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), this side event will discuss practical approaches, policy interventions, and innovative financing solutions to scale up SME participation in RVCs, thereby driving employment and sustainable development in Africa. Specifically, the session aims to:

- Explore strategies and policy measures to enhance SME integration into regional value chains under AfCFTA for job creation and sustainable growth.
- Highlight best practices and case studies from Africa that have successfully linked SMEs to regional and global markets.
- Identify innovative financial and technological solutions that can bridge the gap between SMEs and regional markets.

¹ UNCTAD estimates

- Foster dialogue among policymakers, development partners, financial institutions, and SMEs to create actionable recommendations for deeper SME participation in RVCs for job creation and sustainable growth.

III. Expected Outcomes:

- Identification of concrete policy measures to enhance SME integration in RVCs for job creation and economic growth.
- Strengthened partnerships between SMEs, policymakers, financial institutions, and international organizations.
- Practical recommendations for leveraging the AfCFTA framework to enhance SME competitiveness.
- Increased awareness of financial and technological solutions to support SMEs in RVCs for job creation and economic growth.

IV. Organizing Partners:

- Uganda Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MTIC)
- UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Sub-regional Office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA)
- United Nations Resident Coordination Office in Uganda

V. Session Format:

The session will be held in a virtual format and will be structured as follows:

- **Opening remarks (10 min)** by Mr. Junior Davis, Director, Policy Analysis and Research Branch, Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes, UNCTAD
- **Presentation (10 min): “Unlocking African SME’s trade potential through building stronger resilience”** by Mrs. Habiba Ben Barka, Chief, Africa Section, UNCTAD
- **Panel Discussion (45 min): “Enhancing SMEs Integration in Africa’s Regional Value Chains: Overcoming barriers through policy incentives, finance and innovation for job creation and sustained growth”**
 - Mr. Andrew Mold, Chief of Regional Integration and the AfCFTA Cluster, Subregional Office for East Africa, UNECA
 - Mr. Fabian Kasi, Managing Director, Centenary Bank
 - Mr. Qamar Saleem, Head, SME Finance Forum
 - Mrs. Tamara Egbedi, Co-Founder & Director, PachaMama Foods
 - Mr. David Ofosu-Dorte, Executive Chairman and Senior Partner, AB & David Africa
 - Ms. Brigitte Harrington, CEO and President of Igire Continental Trading Company
- **Audience Q&A (20 min)**
- **Closing Remarks (05 min)**

VI. Contacts

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