

WOMEN IN BUSINESS DOWNLOADS

East African Women in Business Seek Increased EAC Participation

Dorothy M. Tuma © October 2012

The East African Women in Business Platform (EAWiBP) is one of five platforms established and hosted by the East African Business Council (EABC) to enhance its advocacy on sector specific issues in the East African Community regional integration process. The other platforms are the East African (EA) Professional Services Platform, the EA Private Sector Standards Platform, the EA Employers Organization and the EA Tourism Platform. TradeMark East Africa supports all five platforms.

EAWiBP draws its mandate from Articles 121 and 122 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (EAC) which address the EAC's commitment to enhance women's socio-economic status and their role in business. The platform is inspired by its vision of becoming "**A Women's Centre of Excellence for Intra and Extra-EAC Trade**" and its mission: to position and catalyze the participation of women-owned businesses in the EAC integration process.

Officially launched by the EAC Secretary General, Ambassador Dr. Richard Sezibera in May 2012, the Platform represents over 6,000 EAC women in business through their national apex bodies, associations and networks. Membership is also open to professional women associations (PWA) and civil society organizations (CSO) that promote women in business. The Steering Committee that currently guides the Platform is comprised of twelve members – two representatives from apex/national women associations in each EAC country, one representative from a regional CSO and one representative from a PWA.

EAWiBP's three strategic objectives are: increased effective participation of women in business in the EAC integration process; improved economic contribution of women in business in the EAC and increased progression of women-owned enterprises in the EAC from informal to formal status. By joining the platform therefore, women entrepreneurs, through their associations, have an opportunity to raise regional visibility around the issues they face, get their voices heard at the highest decision making level in the East African Community and also influence policy. Membership of a regional platform also brings with it unique regional and international opportunities that may be just out of the reach of a national association.

A clearer understanding of the manner in which the platform's objectives will be achieved may be gained by reviewing some of the platform's regional and international activities since its May 2012 launch.

June 2012, Washington DC: EAWiBP was the only private sector member of the EAC delegation to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Summit. This invitation underscored the EAC Secretariat's commitment to working with the private sector and deepened the Platform's understanding of AGOA opportunities and challenges.

July 2012, Arusha: EAWiBP partnered with the EAC Gender and Community Development Department to develop a concept note for a regional policy on promoting women in socio-economic development and women in business. The policy will be in place by June 2014.

In the same month, EAWiBP attended the 2nd African Women Economic Summit in Lagos, Nigeria. The Platform's participation raised its international visibility and cemented the relationship between EAWiBP and the South Africa-based summit sponsor; New Faces New Voices (NFNV). NFNV seeks to increase women's representation at the higher levels of financial institutions and to increase women's access to finance. This link will be instrumental as EAWiBP partners with the EAC and the East African Development Bank to establish a regional women's financial facility, scheduled for rollout in early 2014.

August 2012, Stockholm, Sweden: EAWiBP attended the Swedish Chamber of Trade Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment. The Platform's participation resulted in an on-going negotiation for advocacy training for women in business associations and public private dialogue support in 2013.

September 2012, Arusha: EAWiBP attended an EABC Regional Public Private Dialogue on EAC Services Integration. The dialogue resulted in recommendations for stakeholders on service sector development in the integration process.

In the last week of September, the Platform hosted an inward EAC women's trade mission from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) at the EAC Secretariat. Participant enterprises included companies engaged in green technology, precious stone mining and cutting, hospitality, leather processing, business development services, agri-business and processing, electrical infrastructure engineering, waste management, water recycling and storage technology, urban planning and management as well as legal services. In addition to the hosting of buyer/seller meetings, the event also included mentoring sessions and training on EAC and SADC trade policies and regulations as well as the drafting of a three-year intra-regional trade promotion programme. The programme implementing agencies will be EAWiBP and the Leading Women of Africa (LWA) in the EAC and SADC respectively.

October 2012, Berlin, Germany: At the invitation of the EAC Secretary General, EAWiBP will be part of an EAC delegation attending an bi-lateral investment forum under the theme "*Beyond Coffee and Tea – New Chances in the East African Market.*" Forum participants will explore opportunities for both trade and collaboration between the two countries. The findings will be disseminated to EAWiBP member associations.

November 2012, Mexico City, Mexico: Three members of the platform will attend the 2nd Women Vendors' Exhibition and Forum in Mexico City. Their participation is fully funded by the International Trade Centre in Geneva.

As demonstrated above, initiatives like EAWiBP are some of the means by which citizens may influence and effectively participate in the EAC integration process. EAWiBP therefore invites interested private sector organizations and civil society organizations to join as members which will enable their membership base to benefit from a wide range of opportunities.