

**Meeting of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender
28 April 2021**

- Thank you for inviting Mauritius to participate in this experience sharing exercise on Women Entrepreneurs.
- Like all countries who have spoken ahead of me, Mauritius has done, is doing and will continue to take initiatives to support Women entrepreneurs.

National Women Entrepreneurs Council

- Since 1999, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare has set up the National Women Entrepreneur Council to:
 - Provide technical guidance and counselling to existing and potential women entrepreneurs;
 - Organise fairs for women entrepreneurs often with stakeholders such as local authorities and supermarkets;
 - Build capacity.

National Computer Board

- In addition to this, we have the National Computer Board which has developed ICT-based capacity building programmes for Women Entrepreneurs.
- Women Entrepreneurs are, since COVID-19, also being trained on use of social media as an Integral part of their marketing strategies to maximise the use of online platforms.
- A Women Entrepreneurs Innovative Award has been launched.

Regional Activities

- Beyond the national level, we encourage women entrepreneurs to participate in regional initiatives such as:

(a) The 50 Million African Women Speak Project

- COMESA's 50 Million African Women Speak Project
This project goes back to 2015 and This come about follow a study of the African Development Bank in 2014 that shows that 70% of women in Africa were financially excluded.
- It is a 24 million USD project that was conceived as an online multinational networking platform for women entrepreneurs providing access to different financial and non-financial services.
- The project is funded by the African Development Bank, COMESA, EAC (East African Community) and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and is being implemented in 36 African countries.

(b) COMESA Federation of National Associations of Women in Business

- The COMESA Federation of National Association of Women in Business which promotes programmes that integrate women into trade and development activities in the region.
- This Federation was previously known as FEMCOM and draws from Article 154 and 155 of the Treaty establishing COMESA (the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa). It has 20 Member Countries.

What I share with you is what all of us share in Common Initiative.

- I believe there should be time when we as women decision makers can make a difference and we need to seize these opportunities. I want to share a story with you.

- In recent year during the Joint Commission held between Mauritius and Kenya, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monica Juma, an amazing woman, expressed her concern that Mauritius was still applying SPS restrictions on imports of avocado from Kenya when the disease to which the avocados had been subjected had long been dealt with by the Kenyan authorities.
- Although we dealt with all other issues under consideration by the Joint Commission without problem, issues which had much higher financial significance, we were intrigued as to why the Minister kept coming back to the avocado issue. I meant Mauritius is a very small market so how many avocados could one sell when Mauritius itself produces avocados. However, Mauritius can be an interesting platform to export to other countries given its numerous trade agreements with some bring countries.
- Well it was only in a meeting in the office of Minister Juma that we understood that these avocados were cultivated principally by Kenyan women – Remember that half of the agriculture labour force in Africa are Women. Well, in Kenya, Women constitute a significant part of the smallholder farms sometimes no bigger than 0.2 hectares. In fact, 60-80% of labour in households and agriculture in Kenya are women. However, women rarely have ownership over avocado trees which are mainly owned by male households. The Kenya authorities are working to ensure women farmers participate at all levels of avocados production.

- Kenya, for those who are not aware, is the world's 3rd largest producer of avocados and avocado production the horticultural sector in Kenya.
- When we returned home after the Joint Commission in Nairobi, we worked with the Ministry of Agriculture in an accelerated manner to see how we could ease restrictions on avocados whilst respecting SPS standards. When Minister Juma travelled to Mauritius a few months later with President Uhuru Kenyatta, we felt both honoured and privileged to offer her a basket of Kenyan avocados, the first imports which had reached Mauritius from Kenya.
- Women Decision makers in Trade can make a difference for other Women Entrepreneurs. We need to reach out to them, find out who they are and help them to see where they could make a difference.