

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in collaboration with the Knowledge Partnership Programme of DFID India and IPE Global Pvt. Ltd organised a conference on Mega-Trading Blocs and the Future of African Trade: Moving from Fragmentation to Inclusive Trade Multilateralism on 26-27 May 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya. Thirty five (35) participants attended the conference representing Ministries



of Trade and Industry, standard-setting bodies, regional organizations, think-tanks and academia, and the private sector. The broad objectives of this conference were twofold: (i) to assist Sub-Saharan African policymakers and standard-setting bodies assess the policy implications and impact of the rise of mega-trading blocs; and (ii) to explore policy responses and strategies to ensure Africa’s trade success in this changing global trading landscape. The discussion at the conference was held in seven dedicated sessions. Presentations were made by both the Commonwealth Secretariat and invited policymakers and experts.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Amina Mohamed, the Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Republic of Kenya. She emphasized that African countries should explore policy responses to minimise any potential adverse spill-overs from mega-regionals and prepare to participate in this new global trading landscape.

The key messages that emerged from this conference include:

Domestically, African countries could unilaterally reform their national policy frameworks. African countries should also engage the major drivers of mega-regional agreements to develop more inclusive systems and rules of origin, help upgrade capacity and improve standards through a development package, including Aid for Trade, to assist non-members.

African countries need to strategically position themselves for this new global trading landscape. The major priority should be to advance an integration agenda in Africa that focuses on improving trade-related infrastructure, increasing productive capacity for trade, raising standards, and reducing the costs of trade. African countries would also need to pursue the Continental Free Trade Area (FTA) with speed which will help them counter balance the negative impacts of the mega regionals to some extent. This will also provide step-wise progress towards meeting the evolving conditions in their largest markets

and prepare the base for further integration into the world economy. The African Union Commission could be requested to undertake an assessment of the impact of mega-trading blocs on Africa and to disseminate the results to the Regional Economic Communities. To achieve the vision of an integrated and prosperous Africa, the Continental FTA would need to be flexible and developmental, cover trade in goods and services, and address behind-the-border regulatory issues to improve Africa’s competitiveness and capabilities.

