



EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

For Immediate Release

EALA AND SEATINI SIGN LANDMARK MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MoU) TO ADVANCE GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRADE POLICY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN EAST AFRICA

Arusha, Tanzania — June 26, 2026 — The East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) today signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding with the Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) at the EALA Headquarters in Arusha, marking a decisive step toward embedding gender equality, evidence-based policymaking, and inclusive trade governance at the heart of the East African Community's regional integration agenda.

The MoU was signed on the margins of the successful conclusion of the 2nd EAC Women's Intergenerational Dialogue, lending institutional force to the commitments contained in the Arusha Statement of Commitment on Women's Leadership into the Future. It establishes a structured framework for collaboration between EALA and SEATINI that will strengthen the capacity of women Members of EALA to effectively undertake legislation, oversight, representation, and advocacy that advance gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and inclusive regional integration within the EAC.

A Partnership Grounded in Evidence from the Border

The MoU is rooted in the concrete realities of women engaged in cross-border trade across the East African Community. The EALA Women's Caucus, building on oversight activities conducted at four strategic border points — Gatuna/Katuna, Kamvira/Gatumba, Nimule/Elegu, and Namanga — documented the persistent challenges facing women traders: non-tariff barriers, administrative constraints, safety and security concerns, limited access to trade-related information, and the disproportionate burden that cross-border challenges place on women. The Caucus developed a comprehensive report that was considered and adopted by the Assembly, and this partnership now provides the institutional mechanism to publish, disseminate, and amplify that report in order to enhance policy influence, stakeholder engagement, and regional advocacy.

Recognising that funding constraints had prevented the Caucus from covering all remaining border points within the EAC, the MoU establishes a framework to extend similar oversight activities to additional border points, consistent with the Caucus' strategic commitment to inclusive regional coverage and sustained engagement. The partnership equally emphasises continuity, monitoring,

and evidence-based follow-up, committing the Parties to conduct follow-up visits to previously visited border points to assess progress, monitor implementation of recommendations, and ensure that interventions are not treated as one-off activities.

Strategic Objectives of the MoU

The partnership sets out seven interconnected objectives that align directly with the priorities affirmed during the 2nd Women's Intergenerational Dialogue. The Parties will work to strengthen the leadership, influence, and collective action of women Members of EALA in regional policy formulation and decision-making; promote gender-responsive and inclusive regional laws and policies, particularly in trade, investment, economic governance, climate change, and sustainable development; and enhance oversight of EAC programmes from a gender and inclusive perspective. The MoU further commits to advancing women's economic empowerment, including the protection of women engaged in informal and cross-border trade; amplifying the voices of women, youth, and marginalized groups in regional integration processes; supporting the institutional strengthening and sustainability of the EALA Women's Caucus; and establishing predictable and programmatic financing mechanisms to support continuous border oversight, research, publications, and follow-up.

Mobilising Expertise for Impact

Under the terms of the MoU, EALA will provide strategic leadership and direction, offer access to EAC library resources and facilities, champion gender equality within the Assembly and the wider Community, coordinate engagement with relevant EALA committees and stakeholders, and collaborate in joint fundraising and resource mobilisation. SEATINI, for its part, will provide technical expertise, research, and policy analysis; support evidence-based legislative and oversight work of the Caucus; support the publication and amplification of research outputs; and translate grassroots and border-level realities into policy-relevant evidence.

Both Parties commit to open communication, mutual respect, and ethical conduct in all collaborative endeavours, particularly concerning women in trade and the trade ecosystem. They will jointly develop detailed work plans and specific agreements for each collaborative activity, ensuring alignment with the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community and its protocols, and will jointly establish a mechanism to periodically review progress and align activities with emerging priorities. A coordinated communication and public relations approach will enhance visibility, foster stakeholder engagement, and raise public awareness of the partnership's work.

Voices of Leadership

Witnessing the signing, the Rt. Hon. Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly expressed his pleasure *“to witness the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding between the East African Legislative Assembly and SEATINI and that the partnership marks an important step in strengthening collaboration to support the East African Community's regional integration agenda through better trade, investment and evidence-based policymaking. As the legislative organ of the East African Community, EALA is committed to working with strategic partners that strengthen*

our legislative, oversight and representative functions. SEATINI's expertise in trade and investment policy will complement the Assembly's efforts to promote policies that improve the lives of the people of East Africa. I particularly commend the collaboration between SEATINI and the EALA Women's Caucus. Through research, capacity building, policy advocacy and support for oversight, this partnership will help address challenges affecting women engaged in cross-border trade while promoting gender-responsive trade and investment policies across the region. I am confident that this collaboration will strengthen research, enhance institutional capacity and generate practical policy solutions that advance inclusive and sustainable development in the East African Community. On behalf of EALA, I congratulate SEATINI and the EALA Women's Caucus on this important milestone and reaffirm the Assembly's commitment to making this partnership a success."

On her part, **Hon. Amb. Fatuma Ndingiza**, the Chairperson of the EALA Women's Caucus, stated that *"This is not a ceremonial moment — it is a strategic one. ... What we do today is not the beginning of our relationship; we are formalizing it. We give legal structure and institutional permanence to a partnership that has already proven its worth."*

In her remarks, **Ms. Jane S. Nalunga**, Executive Director of SEATINI stated that *"The success of regional integration will not be measured only by treaties signed or markets opened, but by whether women traders cross borders with dignity, whether young entrepreneurs can seize regional opportunities, whether MSMEs can compete fairly, and whether citizens experience the benefits of integration in their daily lives. She concluded by stating that "My hope is that this Memorandum will not simply be remembered as an agreement that was signed, but as the foundation of a partnership that strengthened regional institutions, empowered women, expanded opportunities for youth and MSMEs, and made East African integration more inclusive, more responsive and more meaningful for the people it is intended to serve."*

Implementation and Governance

The MoU takes effect from the date of signature and shall remain in force for a period of five years, subject to review and extension by mutual consent. The implementation shall be reviewed annually to ascertain effectiveness, and any disputes arising from interpretation or application of the MoU shall be resolved amicably through consultations between the designated focal persons, with escalation to the Clerk of EALA and the Executive Director of SEATINI as necessary.

NOTE: The MoU does not create any financial obligations for either Party as a standalone instrument; any financial commitments or resource allocations required for specific collaborative activities shall be defined in separate, detailed project agreements, proposals, or work plans to be mutually developed and approved in writing before implementation. The Parties expressly commit to collaborating on joint fundraising and resource mobilisation to support sustained oversight, research, publications, follow-up, and capacity-building activities throughout the duration of the partnership.

A Continuum of Commitment

The signing of this MoU follows directly from the adoption of the Arusha Statement of Commitment on Women's Leadership into the Future earlier today, which called for strengthening financing, market access, and digital capability of women-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises across the Common Market. The partnership with SEATINI gives practical and programmatic expression to that call, connecting the legislative authority of EALA with the technical expertise of a leading regional research and policy institute. Together, the Arusha Statement and this MoU represent a continuum of commitment — from declaration to implementation, from aspiration to institutional architecture.

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