



Webinar organised in the context of World MSME Day

**“COVID-19 CRISIS: MITIGATING ITS IMPACT ON OACPS
MSMEs, IDENTIFYING AND LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES”**

WELCOME SPEECH BY

**H. E. Mr. Georges Rebelo Pinto CHIKOTI
Secretary-General of the Organisation of the African,
Caribbean and Pacific States
(OACPS)**

Friday 26 June 2020 from 14:15 to 18:00 Brussels (CET)

**Your Excellencies,
The Representatives of the European Commission,
OACPS Regional Focal Points for Private Sector Development,
OACPS Private Sector Representatives,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honour for me to address this very timely Webinar, which will focus on the
***“COVID-19 CRISIS: MITIGATING ITS IMPACT ON OACPS MSMEs,
IDENTIFYING AND LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES”***

In addition to claiming a high death toll, putting global health systems under extreme stress while disrupting global and national food supply and distribution chains, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the already fragile yet dynamic micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) sector of OACPS countries has been devastating. This is due to the combined effects of lockdowns and the drop in both global and domestic demand.

The negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the OACPS MSME sector is all the more devastating as MSMEs are at the centre of much-needed job creation, industrial development, and the export competitiveness agenda of our regions. As a result, mitigating the impact of the crisis on OACPS MSMEs and leveraging opportunities for the same MSME sector within and beyond the context of the crisis is of paramount importance to our Organisation and hence very opportune.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Based on the 2019 statistics from the SME Finance Forum, there are more than 50 million registered MSMEs in the OACPS regions.

These MSMEs represent around 90% of the entrepreneurial fabric and a share of employment that fluctuates between 50 and 70 percent across the OACPS regions.

However, it is recognised that they can further contribute to the socioeconomic transformation of our regions through improved performance in the areas of value addition, export competitiveness, and industrial development, if they are provided with well-targeted and result-oriented support.

Cognizant of the critical importance of MSMEs to the socioeconomic transformation of our regions, the OACPS and the European Commission, under the 11th EDF intra-ACP programme, have articulated the Joint Private Sector Development (PSD) Framework, which is financed to the amount of €600 million. This Framework is built on four operational pillars:

- (1) Investment Climate, Value Chain Development and Enterprise Development;
- (2) Access to Finance for SMEs including through blending;
- (3) Financial Inclusion; and
- (4) PSD Knowledge Management, Best Practice Sharing, and Peer Learning.

The main targets of this joint strategy are the MSMEs, including the most vulnerable, women, and young people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to note that after only 29 months of operation, the intra-ACP programme for PSD, financed under the 11th EDF, is gaining traction with nearly ten large-scale PSD and MSME-related programmes operational, or in the process of approval. In addition, 2 other multi-component action documents are under review, coordinated with our partner, the European Union, and the technical support from our joint programme, "Business ACP".

During the recent 1st Extraordinary Intersessional Summit of OACPS Heads of State and Government, OACPS leaders and key partners pledged their solidarity, unity and commitment to ensuring the well-being of their constituents at all levels. In this, an important element is the MSME Sector, which they recognized as being key to recovery post-COVID.

Today, through this Webinar, the OACPS Secretariat intends to further reaffirm its commitment to support the private sector, namely the impacted MSMEs in Member of the OACPS.

More generally, the Webinar will enable OACPS MSMEs and other private sector stakeholders to:

- Understand the steps to be taken to protect their business, reduce risks, and minimise the economic impacts of the Covid-19 crisis; and
- Anticipate the redeployment of their industrial and commercial activities in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

With these words, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my full commitment to this and other similar activities in support of our MSME sector.

I am therefore looking forward to your fruitful deliberations on matters related to the resilience of OACPS MSMEs.

I thank you for your kind attention.
