

Namibia: Barcode centre needed to boost local products on retail shelves

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WINDHOEK, Namibia - The Namibia Trade Forum (NTF) is currently working on two projects to boost retail access of locally manufactured goods. These projects entail a feasibility study on establishing a Barcode Centre as well as a Supplier Development Programme in Namibia.



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"A local barcode centre has been necessitated by the fact that we have identified a barcode as a minimum requirement for entry onto the shelves. We currently use the South African GS1 accredited Bar Code Centre and all our manufacturers source the barcodes from SA. The idea is that we have our own centre to administer the GS1 barcodes as originating from Namibia," said Ndiitah Nghipondoka-Robiati, CEO of the NTF.

Regarding the Supplier Development Programme, Nghipondoka-Robiati explained that it involves working with the South African Federation of Clothing Retailers in a benchmarking assessment, to evaluate the capability of Namibian suppliers in relationship to the requirements of the retailers. "This will give us an idea of the next step in order to improve the capacities of our manufacturers to supply the SA clothing retailers," she noted.

As an agency of the Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and SME Development, the NTF is mandated to institutionalise public-private dialogue and cooperation, with emphasis on international and domestic trade and investment policies as stipulated by the National Development Plan.

The role of the NTF is to act as the main consultative body, representing the private sector views to the government. It thus serves as the highest public private partnership on international and domestic trade and investment matters of government through workshops, seminars, trade negotiations, meetings and media releases.

The NTF was instrumental in the launching of Namibia's Retail Charter in 2016. The charter clearly stipulated principles and targets to ensure greater access into the retail market for local beneficiaries. This intervention was established partly to monitor and assess the impact and its contributions to the trade ministry's 'Growth at Home' strategy. It was envisaged that the charter facilitates the creation of a suitable climate for local procurement, stimulation of demand and accompanying growth targets, according to the NTF.

However, Nghipondoka-Robiati admits that the impact of the Retail Charter is still being assessed. "What is certain is that the manufacturers are comforted by the fact that there is a policy in place, albeit voluntary, to ensure greater access for Namibian manufactured products. We have seen several manufacturers approaching the NTF to assist in their understanding of the work of the retail charter," she told *New Era* during an exclusive interview.

"When we conducted a pilot study to assess the effectiveness of the score card that was developed by the stakeholders, it was gratifying to know that most retailers do shelf Namibian products. The caveat, however, is that we do not have a database of all Namibian manufactured products, to analyse the percentage being shelved," Nghipondoka-Robiati confessed.

She continued that another challenge is that the NTF does not have an updated database of operating Namibian manufacturers, leading to difficulty in establishing a baseline for targets to be met.

"The voluntary nature of the Charter has been a challenge, however, I still believe greater learning has been accumulated in the way retail works in Namibia. The other challenge we face is that manufactures approach the NTF with pre-production challenges and matters, which are not the ambient of the work of the Charter. The cost of production in Namibia is high and leads to challenges of competitiveness and scale as opposed to the competitors," Nghipondoka-Robiati explained.

When asked about the estimated value of local goods sold locally and how this compares to before the implementation of the Retail Charter, Nghipondoka-Robiati stated that this information will only be available next year, when audits are conducted based on the targets set by the individual retails.

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