

UNITED NATIONS
INTER-AGENCY NETWORK ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

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**Gender and International Trade:
ITC's Approach to ICTs in Business Development**

ITC's overall objective of integrating gender issues into its technical co-operation activities is to encourage, support, and sustain the participation of women in international trade on terms that allow women the same choices as men, in conditions where they are equally involved in decision making, with the same opportunities for accessing the resources and for the growth of their businesses and exports. This is seen as an important contribution to trade, poverty alleviation, and overall sustainable development.

ITC follows a two-tiered approach: first, to mainstream gender-specific components within all major programme activities. This "inclusive" approach helps address trade related constraints specific to women and men and to address their needs on a collective basis. Secondly, where the "exclusive" approach is justified for realising beneficial gender effects or for developing best practices, ITC develops and implements pilot projects exclusively targeting women entrepreneurs or sectors with a large participation of women entrepreneurs/managers. The following projects were undertaken in this context:

1. Use ICTs to enable businesswomen develop their business internationally

ICTs offer women unique opportunities to overcome certain specific constraints, such as lack of access to reliable and comprehensive market information, limited mobility or other social and cultural barriers. In the field of trade, the technology gives women entrepreneurs/managers the opportunity to move their operations up the value chain.

In this context, ITC launched a pilot project in Cameroon to help women entrepreneurs to understand, develop and apply the technology and associated business practices to develop their trade internationally. In particular, ITC will assist them in playing a more active role in international trade by including ICTs systematically in their activities. The project includes

- Capacity building activities for women entrepreneurs and their associations on using ICTs to improve access to financing, enhance their purchasing and market their products internationally
- Development of appropriate training tools - in cooperation with Business Women Associations - combining traditional forms of communication with the use of ICTs, and incorporating hands-on exercises to train women entrepreneurs in business management and how to

access information and knowledge in trade related areas.

- Strengthening women entrepreneurs associations to become a business support centre for their members, offering much needed services such as advisory services, business counselling and training

2. Support the development of new trading opportunities for women

One of the most promising sectors for economic development is the services sector, particularly e-based services, which is also the fastest growing component of international trade. It is estimated that 75% of woman-owned firms are in the service sector. ITC has undertaken a pilot project in Nigeria, Mozambique and Mauritius to help increase exports of business and professional services by women entrepreneurs. Studies were conducted in each country, followed by a workshop which were attended by over 160 women entrepreneurs and covered topics such as:

- Relationship Marketing
- Effective Networking
- Working with Partners
- Using the Internet Effectively
- Gaining International Profile and Credibility
- The Role of the Entrepreneur in Gender Mainstreaming
- Benefiting from International Networks

3. Engendering ITC Partner Networks

The “product-network approach” imparts ITC a global outreach through its extensive network of partner associations. ITC is actively seeking inclusion of support institutions specific to women in trade, and associations of women exporters within these networks., as well as inclusion of women in its training and trade support activities. In this context, ITC produced and published two directories:

- World directory of women entrepreneurs associations
- World directory of sources of financing for SMEs

The two directories are conceived as networking tools to facilitate contact among the associations worldwide, and to serve as an interactive reference document on the services offered by the various organisations. It is expected that the directories will help the associations network with each other and share experiences to provide effective business support services for their members. It is also expected that the directories will help entrepreneurs access information sources and explore potential for exporting their products and services internationally.

The world directories were designed as a dynamic tool. Organisations, receiving the electronic version of this directory, will be able to download the database on their computer, and to update it by modifying existing records, adding new information, or deleting old records. To date, the World directory of women entrepreneurs associations includes 80 associations from 48 countries, whereas World directory of sources of financing for SMEs includes 239 institutions from 100 countries.