

ACCESS Background

Written by

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ACCESS! for African Businesswomen in International Trade is part of the Programme for building African Capacity for Trade (PACT II), which is implemented in partnership with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). ACCESS! aims at enhancing the competitiveness of women-owned enterprises in Africa and at promoting concrete business opportunities in international markets. It targets African women entrepreneurs who have already attained a fair level of management competence and are actual, emerging or potential exporters. The initiative provides gender-responsive business development services:

- A comprehensive exporters' training programme focusing on selected sectors in which women are traditionally involved and for which a significant export potential has been identified (coffee, leather, horticulture, services and textile/handicrafts). In addition, the programme strengthens local trade-related training capacity reaching out to women entrepreneurs, through partnerships with African training organizations and business associations.
- Business counselling to selected enterprises to support them in developing and implementing their individual export strategies complements exporters' training with tailor-made expert advice and guidance from certified trainers and sector specialists (for selected countries only).
- Market Linkages allowing selected women entrepreneurs to access foreign markets through Trade Fairs, Buyers-Sellers meetings, Trade Missions or other international Trade Events.
- A Web portal, facilitating women entrepreneurs' access to relevant export information tools and services, and providing an opportunity to showcase their company's capabilities. (<http://www.womenexporters.com/>)

Developed in 2007 under PACT I, and further enhanced under PACT II, ACCESS! services are offered to a total of 5 COMESA countries, of which 3 are new countries validated by the COMESA Secretariat and ACCESS! stakeholders during the PACT II kick-off meeting. COMESA beneficiary countries include Ethiopia and Uganda (which were already benefiting from ACCESS! I), as well as Kenya, Uganda and Zambia (as new countries). Zambia is being referred to as a 'new country' because it was not a direct ITC-PACT beneficiary, but benefited through the TFOC on a pilot basis.

In Kenya and Uganda, situation analyses were carried out during the second part of 2009 with the support of national consultants and in close consultation with regional partners, assessing national institutional capacities in beneficiary countries. Subsequent validation missions were undertaken in late 2009-early 2010, to identify ACCESS! Focal Point (AFP) and associated partner institutions.

For the benefit of COMESA countries exchange of experiences, and within the framework of the Tripartite Free Trade Area between COMESA, EAC and SADC, ACCESS! will continue activities under phase II with other countries from phase I i.e. South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania.

In 3 – 5 years it is anticipated that the programme will offer actual and practical solutions for women entrepreneurs to expand their business beyond the borders of Zambia as a country and COMESA as a region. The programme will be popular among business development specialists

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as a link to knowledge for export purposes. It will serve as “Step 1” after the woman’s business has been formalized towards being export ready. The programme will act as a trade hub for local women producers and traders, and as a network of like-product manufacturers and traders.

It is further anticipated that, through links to the existing women development initiatives, such as ILO’s WEDGE and Broad Based Wealth and Job Creation Programme (BBW&JC Programme), women entrepreneurs will experience growth in the form of increased incomes (through expanded markets and improved knowledge of export procedures) which will lead to increased number of employees.