



AID-FOR-TRADE: CASE STORY

THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE

ACCESS! Export Training for Women Entrepreneurs in Africa



International
Trade
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EXPORT IMPACT
FOR GOOD

CASE STORY ON GENDER DIMENSION OF AID FOR TRADE

**ACCESS! Export Training for Women Entrepreneurs in
Africa**



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Executive Summary

The *ACCESS!* Programme for Women Entrepreneurs in Africa provides actual and potential exporters with the skills, the networks and the confidence to take on new markets. Launched in 2005, the *ACCESS!* Programme consists of a modular training programme, a business counseling programme, a market access component and a trade information web portal. Export Promotion Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and Women's Business Associations act as Focal Points institutions to deliver the programme in each of the 19 *ACCESS!* countries where *ACCESS!* is being delivered.

ACCESS! has opened the door for hundreds of African businesswomen. In the first Phase of the *ACCESS!* programme, the 22 training modules covering key aspects of international trade were made available in five languages (English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and Swahili). 46 trainers were certified and a total of 770 women entrepreneurs were trained. As a result of their new skills and business networks, *ACCESS!* participants developed new product lines, revised products to meet foreign standards and tastes and increased their sales. The Focal Point institutions reported an increase in their memberships, an expansion of their services to reach previously underserved clientele and an improvement in the quality of the trade support they can offer. *ACCESS!* has helped women realize their economic potential and thereby contributed concretely to poverty reduction and improved standards of living.

ACCESS! was seeded under the CIDA-funded Programme for building African Capacity for Trade (PACT) and implemented in partnership with COMESA, ECCAS and ECOWAS. With renewed assistance from CIDA, *ACCESS!* is adding a focus on priority sectors, where women are prominent such as leather, handicraft and textiles, horticulture, coffee and services.

ACCESS! has proven itself an asset to the menu of services provided by Trade Support Institutions and as a result several countries are taking *ACCESS!* on board without external funding support.

Case Story

Although women represent more than half the world's labour force and innovation power, there are too few initiatives to unlock women's potential to boost economic growth. In the context of its commitment to reach *Export Impact for Good*, ITC encourages the integration of women into international trade and development initiatives.

Women exporters in Africa face a host of challenges such as limited access to finance, export business training and market information. Cultural traditions and family obligations can also hold women back from living up to their potential. Few women are part of trade support programmes or "mainstream" business networks such as Chambers of Commerce and some may be lacking the confidence to overcome these barriers.

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Modular Training Programme

In the first Phase of the *ACCESS!* programme, the 22 modules covering key aspects of international trade were made available in English, French, Arabic, Swahili and Portuguese and adapted for national use.

Forty-six trainers, nationals from the 11 countries were certified as *ACCESS!* Trainers. They in turn trained more than 770 women entrepreneurs. A new phase received core funding from CIDA to add sector-specific modules and to expand the programme, including the roster of certified trainers into new countries in COMESA, ECOWAS and ECCAS.

The *ACCESS!* Programme counts among its results the improved *export readiness* of women-led enterprises. *“The ACCESS! training helped me a great deal...the training showed me how much I needed to prepare myself before venturing into export [and] I learned the export language, which I didn’t know before.”* -Ann Kusiima, *ACCESS!* participant, Uganda

Through the training, the participants strengthen their skills in developing an export strategy, they review their export capabilities from production, packaging, quality management to distribution. Modules also cover the essentials of export transactions including INCOTERMS © 2010, contracting and legal aspects and export documentation. Materials have recently been expanded to include key strategic sectors for the regions such as horticultural products, coffee, leather, services, crafts and textiles.

Businesses supported by *ACCESS!* have undertaken new activities and demonstrated major improvements, including introducing new product lines and developing products to better meet the standards of foreign markets.

Business Counseling Services

In addition to export training, key potential exporters are invited to benefit from the *ACCESS!* Business Counseling for women entrepreneurs. More than 50 exporters were mentored one-on-one to develop their export strategies, to strengthen their negotiations with buyers, and to prepare for trade missions and trade fairs. Those who benefitted from business counseling reported an increase in their self-confidence and knowledge of the buyers' needs as well as constraints in international markets. Through the business counseling services, exporters also had access to expert advice on export pricing, technical issues such as INCOTERMS and contracting.

Mymona Nassiep of South Africa’s Afri-Mystique Cosmetics (Pty) Ltd was in the throes of signing an international trade deal with a company in Taiwan. Through mentoring provided by ACCESS!, the contract of sale was rewritten to ensure that the best interests of the company were taken into account.
– Joan Warburton-McBride, *ACCESS!* Focal Point, Nafcoc-JCCI South Africa

"Aqua Salveo, South Africa

With support from the *ACCESS!* Focal Point in South Africa, Aqua Salveo, a women-owned company developed and patented a breakthrough Water Disinfectant utilizing nano-technology that is chlorine free and tasteless. It keeps water safe for an extended period of over 2 years. A long working 4-7 hours protection with one single application – “Alcohol free Hand Sanitizer known as the Human Glove Hand Sanitizer.” The application range for Aqua Salveo’s products includes farmers and people working in the medical and food-processing industries. The company has also increased its market to international aid agencies and is selling its water disinfectant to the United Nations and Non-Governmental organizations met during a buyers/sellers meeting organized within the framework of the ITC “Buying from Africa for Africa” initiative.

“The program has helped us tremendously!”
CEO Aqua Salveo

Market Development and Business Networking

From the launch of *ACCESS!* commitment has been foremost to ensure the most promising and innovative products and services are proudly featured and recognized at international trade venues. Where possible, selected *ACCESS!* participants are offered the opportunity to participate in trade fairs or join specialized trade missions. These are initiatives led by ITC, the national focal point institutions or generated by the networks these women have forged through their participation in *ACCESS!* Specific initiatives were developed during Phase I such as the Design Africa initiative, led by the Trade Facilitation Office of Canada and resulted in new contracts and export orders.

“Ms. Sarah Katebalirwe of MARIE SAR AGENCIES in Uganda is an ACCESS! graduate who made a successful bid at public procurement, securing an order worth \$ 15,000 through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to supply 1,200 Bark cloth gift bags to be marketed at the Commonwealth Summit. Following this success, she received additional orders of 300 gift bags worth \$ 495 per month for a year”.

Phase II will see a continuation of the emphasis on market development and business networking. The growing network of *ACCESS!* participants offers abundant opportunities for collaboration and strengthening regional prospects for targeting European and North American markets.

Nafytoos and La Maison du Karité

Nafytoos and Maison du Karité are two women-owned companies that participated in *ACCESS!* benefiting from the export readiness training, support for the development of their export strategy and the preparation for and conduct of a business contact mission. Maison du Karite is a cooperative created by women in Mali producing semi-processed and finished shea butter products. Nafytoos is a high-end swimwear and lingerie company started by Senegalese designer Nafissatou Diop. Both companies noted a significant enhancement in their capacity as exporters as a result of the programme, the fruit of which were orders and meaningful leads. Building on their learning and new found confidence through *ACCESS!* both companies ventured forth using their own funds to participate in trade fairs (Nafytoos) and make product improvements including packaging (Maison du Karité).

As a result of the *ACCESS!* programme the two met and decided to try a joint-venture. Maison du Karité began producing private label shea-based creams under the Nafytoos name to complement Nafytoos's primary product line of knitted "haute couture" swimwear and lingerie products. Both products were exhibited together at the famous "Salon international de la lingerie" in Paris. (See <http://www.afrik.com/article9419.html>). A few years have passed since they first participated, but both firms continue to enjoy success. In July 2010, Maison du Karite became the first shea butter cooperative to receive Fair Trade Certification in Mali and will soon be certified organic. <http://www.maisondukarite.org/eindex.html>

Nafytoos has expanded her markets to Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and export markets in Africa.

The *ACCESS!* Web Portal: An Engine for Growth!

A third component to the *ACCESS!* Programme, the global *ACCESS!* Web Portal was launched in October 2005 and led to 11 spinoff national *ACCESS!* national portals. The portal profiled the businesses of the strongest *ACCESS!* participants and is receiving over 35,000 hits per month on average. The *ACCESS!* Web Portal is instrumental in building visibility for women exporters, and for business networking. The portal is currently being renovated to expand its capacity to meet the needs of a programme that is now tripling in its geographic scope. The site is also being developed in order to provide an online *ACCESS!* training option. The portal remains key in providing trade information, profiling the best the women exporters of the region have to offer and providing links to the top trade support services available.

Raising the Bar for Institutions

Thanks to *ACCESS!*, public and private service providers in the *ACCESS!* countries have grown in their capacity to support existing and emerging exporters. Among the *ACCESS!* Focal Point Institutions, Chambers of Commerce and Womens' Business Associations reported an increase in their memberships, and all Focal Point Institutions expanded their services to reach a previously underserved clientele. The Programme also contributes to an improved quality in the trade support services they can offer.

At the end of Phase I, *ACCESS!* Focal Points (AFPs) were in place in nine countries, including Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal and a tenth country, Tunisia, joined on a self-financing basis. The Tanzanian Focal Point Institution reported:

"We received over 40 applications and started to pruning them down to 23 but on the morning of the first day some more people were forcing their way to the classroom. Thanks to the success of ACCESS!, SIDOWED managed to conduct self-sponsored training through contributions of entrepreneurs, an achievement which was not expected so soon."

Women tend to be underrepresented in Chambers of Commerce and rarely get to be part of trade support initiatives. *ACCESS!* in its work with mainstream institutions as well as businesswomen's associations empowers trade support institutions to be better able to reach out to businesswomen with their services.

"The potential of women-owned businesses in Ethiopia to contribute to the balance of payments and poverty reduction through exporting has barely been tapped, and there is a need to facilitate the provision of business development services that help women engage in viable business activities and in ventures with a high potential for growth. It is CAWEE's sincere belief that the ACCESS! programme, by encouraging Ethiopian women exporters to enter the international market, will contribute greatly in this regard." Nigest Haile, The Center for African Women Economic Empowerment (CAWEE) the Focal Point for *ACCESS!* in Ethiopia.

In addition to its comprehensive and practical training package, *ACCESS!* assists partner institutions in delivering customized business counseling to women entrepreneurs. Utilizing the network of high quality, certified experts and trainers at their disposal as well as the web portal, the Focal Point Institutions have new tools to support export entrepreneurship.

New Directions

ACCESS! was initiated under the CIDA-funded Programme for building African Capacity for Trade (PACT) and is implemented in partnership with COMESA, ECCAS and ECOWAS. With renewed assistance from CIDA, *ACCESS!* is adding a focus on priority sectors for the three regions, such as leather, handicraft and textiles, horticulture, coffee and services.

The new *ACCESS!* also recognizes that women need to be able to transform what they learn within the context of the barriers they face, and an emphasis is placed on strengthening networks with other businesses and local service providers, enhancing negotiations skills and tools are provided to assist women in generating support from family while balancing their multiple responsibilities.

ACCESS! has proven itself an asset to the menu of services provided by Trade Support Institutions and as a result several additional countries are taking *ACCESS!* on board without external funding support. *ACCESS!* is also expanding geographical outside the African borders and a number of similar initiatives are currently being developed by ITC and its implementation partners for increased results and greater impact.

Lessons Learned:

A number of “lessons learned” were drawn from the experience of the *ACCESS!* programme which can be applied to similar trade development programming:

Businesswomen need to develop *combined strategies* in order to meet the demands of export growth.

Women face both general and gender-specific barriers to business growth. Traditional business training programmes tend to provide skills and knowledge without considering the context in which the skills and knowledge have to be applied. Therefore the second edition of the *ACCESS!* training programme seeks to equip women with the confidence and the tools they need to develop strategies to address both the general and the gender based challenges they face. Participants learn about the legal instruments that exist to support them in their bid to access the resources they need to succeed, to develop their negotiating skills and by encouraging them to develop strategies that will work realistically, given the systemic and personal challenges they face as women.

Handloom Products in Ethiopia

An Ethiopian designer of traditional handloom products participated in the *ACCESS!* training and was recognized for her skills and the potential of her business. She received follow-up support in product development and realized the tremendous potential for Ethiopian handloom products in export markets. Successful in attracting buyers from Canada, the United States and Europe, she began receiving export orders, however her productive capabilities were limited, primarily due to her limited access to skilled weavers. Initially she solved this by sourcing additional weavers through intermediaries who in turn could subcontract to trusted weavers they knew. The end product was of poor quality because she could not gain direct access to the weavers to explain what was required to meet the standards of her international clients. Her way of dealing with this challenge was to establish a common production facility, namely her company premises. While still sourcing the weavers via the intermediaries, she enticed 200 weavers to come and weave on her company premises. She found it much easier to manage the quality of the end product, reduce costs, and provide hands on training to upgrade the skills and adaptability of the weavers to changes in product design. The company started producing its handloom products, up to the expected quality standard and started to supply its buyers in the required quantity and quality. As a result, her export orders are increasing such that she has had to expand her premises. Just a few years ago she was trading out of suitcases and sending small orders by post, but now she is exporting in container loads. The general business issue was her ability to access credit and skilled labour to meet the increased demand. The strategy involved successfully negotiating in an area where women are not traditionally active or encouraged in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, weaving is traditionally men’s work. She had to get past the reluctant male intermediaries to gain access to the skilled weavers. This was a significant challenge. In addition, she had to negotiate past the societal bias in order to access land and expand her business premises to accommodate more workers. In customary practice, women in Ethiopia have severely restricted access to land. In this case, the exporter’s supply side constraints were both general and gender-based. She was able to meet her economic potential by successfully addressing both.

Market Development and Business Networking: Making the most of trade fairs and missions

While the multi-faceted role of market contact activities is well understood, it is a common misunderstanding that business contact missions and trade fair participation are all about sales and that those sales deals will materialize immediately. *ACCESS!* Phase I learned that enterprises can also be encouraged to make use of these missions to learn about the competition (e.g. product design, pricing, packaging, marketing strategy, assess their production or managerial capacity vis-a-vis the markets they want to enter, map out logistics) and develop the right export strategies. Emerging exporters may not be able to meet the demand generated at trade fairs or on trade missions. This can be mitigated by proper

support in assessing trade-readiness – by managing expectations and by incorporating into the program after sales business mentoring.

Access! participants from the cosmetics sector participated in a trade mission to Canada. On the one hand, they expected to receive orders during the fair. It took six months for orders to come in, which is a reasonable amount of time even for experienced exporters! During that interim time frame they were supported by business counsellors to make significant improvements in their trade readiness for international markets (e.g. packaging improvements, pricing strategies, competitive positioning). When the orders came in, they were ready to respond.

One of the lessons learned is that market-based sector specialists can be engaged to provide follow-up support following buyer-seller meetings. Consultants can also play an important role in helping to support the initial discussions between buyer and seller to help ensure that opportunities to do business are maximised. This type of “hand-holding” is particularly valuable for early stage exporters for whom this may be their first time pursuing a formal market-entry strategy. By providing this form of support through a combination of domestic service providers (for management, financing and general export readiness issues) and market-based specialists (for identification of market requirements and buyer-seller support). This support can be provided in a cost-effective manner while at the same time enhancing the capacity of local business service providers.

Make the Most of Local Service Providers!

Programmes such as *ACCESS!* can actively link to relevant local service providers. Not only does this support the local economy and generate supply and demand for much needed business services, considerable work is needed to support an entrepreneur’s path to exporting. *ACCESS!* quickly adapted to involve local packaging companies, freight forwarders and financial institutions where possible by introducing them during the trainings and during the business counselling activities as well as providing links to these valuable service providers on the web portal.

Invest in Networking

ACCESS! I took keen interest in strengthening the potential for collaboration between many of the participating exporters. Training sessions, networking events and trade missions built synergies between women who otherwise would have been less plugged into business networks. *ACCESS!* activities generated synergies among participating enterprises leading to joint ventures and improved export readiness through mutual efforts. Networking should specifically be incorporated and measured in similar trade programming initiatives. Although some participants may be competitors, women will find many areas where they can provide peer learning and raise the bar for one another.

***ACCESS!* is a flexible and modular programme**

ACCESS! has proven itself an asset to the menu of services provided by Trade Support Institutions and as a result several countries are taking *ACCESS!* on board without external funding support. By building strategic partnerships with national Focal Point Institutions, *ACCESS!* and its dynamic network of trainers has grown to be a recognized programme for women exporters in Africa. The *ACCESS!* training programme can be a key component in Trade Support Initiatives looking for a trade education and training component. Given its modular structure, the *ACCESS!* programme can be adapted as a valuable component of trade support initiatives.

Through the *ACCESS!* programme, women exporters in the region have demonstrated they are worth investing in. Not only have they generated demand for their products in export markets, they have responded to these new opportunities by finessing their capabilities and creating jobs. *ACCESS!* has helped women realize their economic potential and thereby contributed concretely to poverty reduction and improved standards of living.