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WACOMP Programme Highlights

December 2021 - Issue #8

Regional Component

Nigerian Women Entrepreneurs learn to use the Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanism



25 members of the African women's entrepreneurship program (AWEP) attended a training on the Trade Obstacle Alert Mechanism (TOAM). The training held on 27 September 2021 introduced the women entrepreneurs to the ITC tool, giving guidance on how to gather real-time information on existing obstacles faced in trans-border processes.

ITC and Nigeria's Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment noted the obstacles once uploaded onto the TOAM platform. Hajara Usman represented the Permanent Secretary and thanked ITC as well as the team working on the TOAM in the ministry to resolve these trade obstacles. Local institutions are charged with ensuring the obstacles are addressed and resolved.

During the workshop participants outlined some of the obstacles they continue to face in their daily activities such as difficulties in gaining export permits, high compliance costs, cultural barriers, multiple taxes and checks-points as well as foreign exchange. These drawbacks provided feedback on possible areas of focus for the TOAM based on the outlook of women entrepreneurs' experiences.

Angela Ajala, President of AWEP thanked ITC's WACOMP programme for introducing women entrepreneurs to the innovative tool, acknowledging the platform's role in supporting exporters currently lacking information. The tool will support efforts to boost Nigeria's export competitiveness and provide solutions to address existing challenges, said Ajala.

ITC Executive Director visits Nigeria



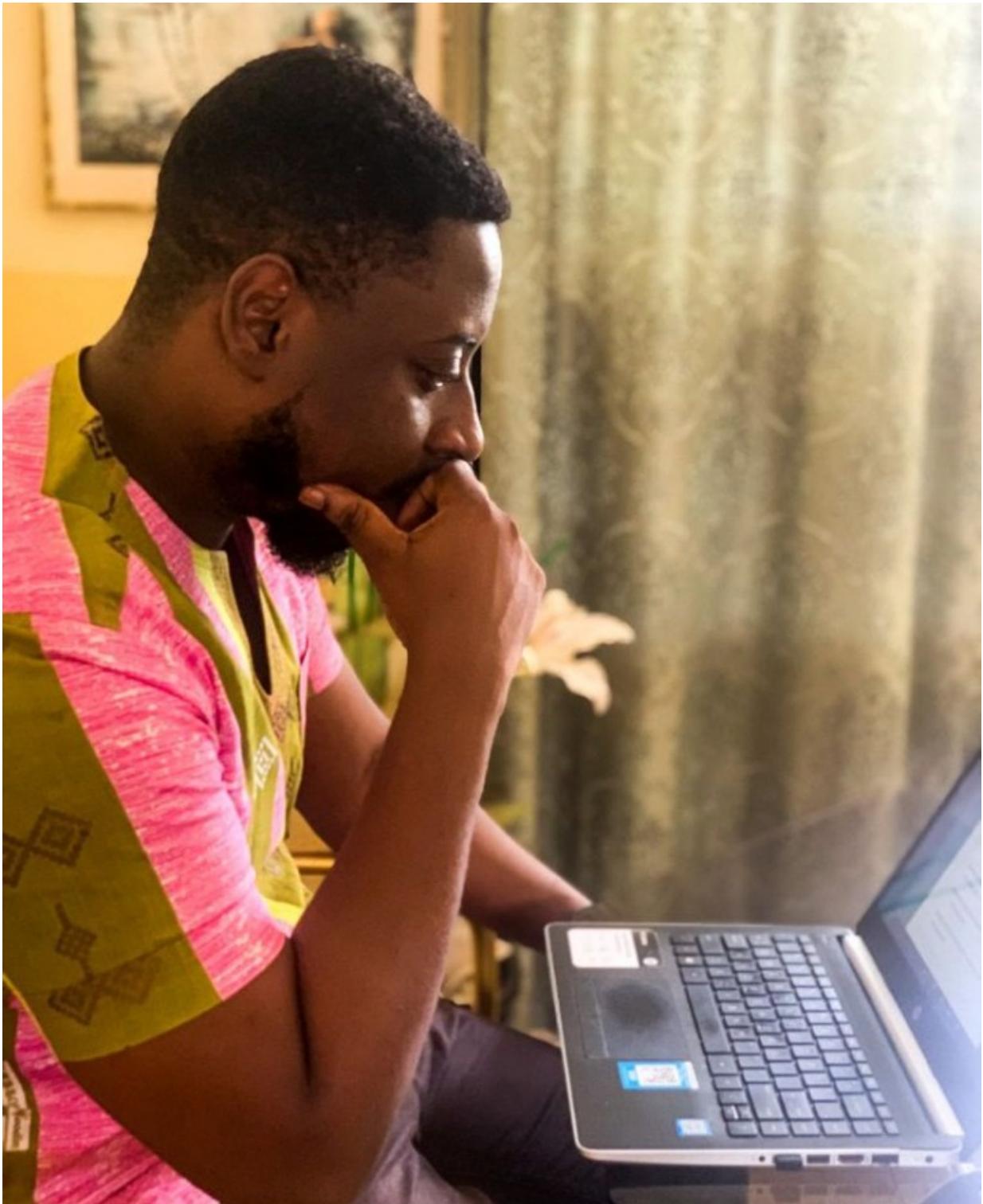
ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton maiden voyage to Africa began with a visit to Abuja, Nigeria. The mission aimed to reiterate ITC's commitment to boost trade opportunities for small businesses owners in the country by placing a focus on intra-regional trade, increasing competitiveness and cement small businesses transition to trade within the African single market.

Several bilateral talks were held with key partners and stakeholders in the country including WACOMP implementing partner UNIDO, WACOMP funding partner the Delegation of the European Union as well as German Development Agency GIZ. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) CEO Segun Awolowo, the Abuja Chamber of Commerce and members of the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FEWACCI) also hosted the Executive Director.

While visiting the CEO of Bimfak Palace, Coke-Hamilton also met with the community being supported by ITC's WACOMP and SheTrades Initiative. The local company also walked her through its coconut production process and

showcased its final products. The Executive Director's visit to the country was an opportunity to emphasise ITC's strategic partnership with Nigeria as one of ITC's flagship countries with key ITC projects and she thanked partners as well as stakeholders for their warm welcome.

Small businesses in the ICT, Textile and Garment sectors prepare for West Africa Connect event



120 small businesses from the ICT, Textiles and Garment sectors were selected to take part in the West Africa Connect, which aims to facilitate regional B2B match making opportunities for businesses in the region. In preparation for the matchmaking event, ITC held two sector tailored capacity building programmes for the identified small businesses in each sector.

For business owners in the fashion industry, the training aimed to hone their entrepreneurial skills and the second prepared them for the Meet the Buyer event, giving insight on areas to focus on for the export market. ICT small businesses owners learned to develop resilient businesses, topics covered included improving their core competencies, implementing a business structure. Thereafter, SMEs were trained and coached to improve their odds to successfully participate at a virtual B2B event.

“The first training session was a mind-opener to the growth opportunities that exist in other African markets. My team looks forward to learning more on how we can build resilience as we scale up. Thank you to the WACOMP initiative” said Kwesi Kwofie CEO, Dataware.

Each training module included a video, PDF reference sheets, homework sheets and additional references where applicable. As a result of the training, Nigerian ICT company Cotton Loops received \$25,000 technology upgrade from Amazon Web Services and is selected to for the Halcyon House Incubator. ITC will continue following up these opportunities unlocked by small businesses.

Small Businesses Match, Meet and Trade at West Africa Connect

Match. Meet. Trade.

Products and services



The much-anticipated virtual trade fair, West Africa Connect kicked off on 16 November engaging small businesses in the ICT, Textiles and Garments industries from 16 West African countries. The two-day matchmaking event hosted over 270 sellers from the region (228 textile SMEs and 69 ICT SMEs) and over 80 buyers from across Africa, Europe, and North America.

Small businesses also accessed ten tailored webinar sessions to improve regional business opportunities. The sessions covered topics including digitalization, sustainability, investment opportunities, and the impact of COVID-19 on digitalization in West Africa. The webinars were available in English, French, and Portuguese for event attendees. A few sessions were also made available to participant groups in different locations, the African Fashion Development and Empowerment Centre (AFDEC) took advantage of this and broadcast the webinars to a room of 30 women entrepreneurs.

The event brought together over 360 participants from the two sectors that attended 10 webinars organized with international experts and participated in

over 70 B2B meetings organised through the online matchmaking platform (which remained available until 30 November 2021).

Federation of West African Employers' Association agree on next steps to strengthen institution



To wrap up the Performance Improvement Roadmap (PIRM) outputs, ITC and the Secretariat of the Federation of West African Employers' Association (FWAEA) held a working session on 18 to 20 October 2021 to include good sustainability strategies in the roadmap.

Representatives discussed the current FWAEA business model and action priorities, the customer relationship management system (CRM), developing the FWAEA communications strategy, website modernisation and the FWAEA result framework. Also reviewed was the action plan and thereafter a first project proposal was developed to submit for donors' assessment.

The proposal covered implementing an employment barometer as well as a platform to identify skills needs in the ECOWAS region. The CRM outlined the modules, fields, roles, and responsibilities as well as needs for the system.

Representatives also discussed the membership questionnaire to assess the member's needs.

The discussions also underscored the importance of creating visibility of FWAEA, increasing proactivity, and engaging the business community. Due to COVID-19 some activities were delayed as physical meetings were hindered. The next FWAEA Annual General meeting will take place early this year. ITC also reiterated its commitment to closely collaborate in achieving the outlined objectives of the FWAEA Secretariat.

West African SME Development Agencies try out the SME Check Tool



Financial Institutions in West Africa were introduced to the SME Check tool during a webinar session on 16 and 18 November 2021. The diagnostic tool provides small businesses with the opportunity to identify areas for improvement. Using the tool, SME development agencies are also able to perform financial and non-financial assessments for small businesses.

Over 100 participants from SME development agencies and financial institutions across West Africa attended the webinar sessions available in either English or French. ITC experts took participants through the beta version of the diagnostic tool, highlighting its functions of assessment and the approach to generate reports. Participants also learned steps to download the software and to share the source code with SME development agencies.

Webinar participants also took part in a Q&A session at the end of the presentation and provided feedback on the tool and its prospective use. This webinar was part of the set of trainings organised by ITC for public and private SME development agencies to improve the support given to small businesses in West Africa on access to finance.

ICT, Textile and Garment businesses pursue collaborative opportunities at networking lab



After attending the West Africa Connect virtual trade fair in November 2021, Nigerian small businesses in the ICT, Textile and Garment sectors gathered in Lagos to attend a Learning and Networking Lab. Held on 7 and 8 December 2021, ITC in partnership with The Assembly Hub sought to develop the skills of MSMEs and equip small business owners to identify and solve problems.

The lab began with an interactive workshop session on human centred design, digitalization and export readiness. Thereafter, small business owners had one-on-one discussions on partnership and explored areas of collaboration. These interactions also included an hour of B2B speed networking to share ideas. Business owners also gained insight on human centred design, business

digitalization and how to optimise export operations using technology to refine business structure.

Over 70% of 21 attending participants were women entrepreneurs keen to improve their networking skills and best practices in managing business relationships. Overall, the learning and networking lab provided insight through panel discussions, facilitated networking opportunities with peer small businesses as well as exposure to key industry players in the ICT and textile sector.

National Components

Small businesses attend the Inter Africa Trade Fair in Durban, South Africa



As part of its engagements with small business owners, the WACOMP programme engaged 10 businesses from its regional, Guinea and Senegal programme to attend the Inter Africa Trade Fair held on 15 to 21 November 2021. The five-day event was geared towards boosting trade in Africa and attracted over 1100 exhibitors, 10000 buyers and sellers. The entrepreneurs representing the ICT sector in Senegal, Agriculture in Sierra Leone, handcrafts and agriculture in Guinea described the one week stay in South Africa as a success that gave them opportunities to network and find new markets.

Through the WACOMP Sierra Leone programme, Noellen Barber, director at Nianda Agriculture and Trading Company is improving Nianda's access to markets. Barber brought products such as plantain chips, cassava flour, plantain flour potato flour to IATF and was particularly excited about the big interest in her plantain chips and cassava flour that could be exported as far as the United Kingdom.

Oumar Camara, export officer for Coopérative des exportateurs des fruits et légumes (COPEFL), was pleased to have attended the IATF through the WACOMP Guinea programme. Through COPEFL, Camara works with over 100 farmers in Senegal, specialising in the sale of fruits and vegetables. The enterprise has ten years of experience in distributing a variety of fresh farm produce. The young Guinean entrepreneur described the international trade fair as a huge eye opener that had helped him appreciate the value of new markets. After engaging in over 30 meetings, Camara plans to follow up with business trips to Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

Representing the Organization of Professionals in Information and Communication Technologies in Senegal (OPTIC), Abdoukhadre Diagne also highlighted the benefits of attending the international trade fair with the support of the WACOMP Senegal Programme. ITC is supporting Senegal's promotion of its ICT services and as a member of the National Employers Council (CNP) in Senegal, OPTIC brings together the main companies operating in ICT but also telecommunications operators. Over 80% of Senegalese companies are part of CNP.

Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency renews its overall Strategic Plan



46 staff from the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) attended a retreat organised by ITC to review the agency's Strategic Plan of 2018 and develop a new plan aligned with the country's Medium Term National Development Plan 2019-2023. The retreat which took place on 28 to 30 October 2021 gave staff an opportunity to set targets for key deliverables and outcomes. By clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities, SLIEPA will ensure improved performance in its service delivery mechanisms.

During the retreat, SLIEPA's CEO Sheku Lexmond Koroma thanked ITC for their support to SLIEPA since the agency's establishment 14 years ago. With the "establishment of the SLIEPA Trade Information Centre, capacity building under the MOPS, and more especially the WACOMP project which has sponsored the staff retreat, established the ECOWAS TPO Network of which SLIEPA is a proud member and other staff capacity building activities," said Koroma.

Staff also discussed the agency's operational successes and challenges as well as its new leadership vision and objectives. Other group discussions also highlighted the importance of increasing the agency's visibility and being more proactive by engaging the business community.

Trade Support Institutions attend export readiness workshop



The Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), the SME Development Agency (SMEDA), the Produce Monitoring Board (PMB) and the Sierra Leone Chamber for Agribusiness Development (SLECAD) attended the second module of an export readiness training in Freetown on 20 October 2021. The session was delivered as part of a six-month capacity building programme which will cover client management, knowledge application, service portfolio design and delivery.

The training took 19 participants through preparing an export marketing plan and assigned them to designated groups to work on a business case with a company of their choice. The task was to develop an export strategy plan and implement it during the six-month programme. The group coaching was divided into the cocoa, palm oil, cassava, and rice sectors. At the sessions end, participants received post-training coaching and advisory support to improve support mechanisms for companies to become export ready and build strategic export plans.

The workshop aims to improve the support Sierra Leone's Trade Support Institutions provide its SME members to achieve better export performance and competitiveness.

Pineapple exporters improve marketing techniques



Pineapple producers and exporters attended a week-long workshop to improve their approaches in marketing the fresh fruit to Morocco and the European Union. The 3-day workshop held on 30 November to 2 December 2021 provided exporters with essential information on marketing trends and requirements of their target markets as well as an increased understanding of export promotional tools.

Results from the marketing studies on fresh pineapples for the Moroccan & European market were shared with workshop participants as other private and public sector stakeholders in the value chain. Participants also shared experiences of the marketing challenges being faced while promoting pineapples to target markets.

ITC took over 15 Pineapple producers and exporters through a weeklong workshop on how to market fresh pineapples to the EU and Morocco. The workshop ended with individual coaching sessions for experienced exporters to review promotional tools and improve export performance.



ITC publishes study on the feasibility and opportunities for cooperative societies



Following a study that was undertaken, the WACOMP Senegal programme held a workshop on 2 November 2021 to highlight the opportunities and benefits of establishing commercial agricultural cooperative societies in the country.

The study examined the legal framework governing cooperative societies under the Uniform Act of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) in Senegal. It also analyzed the existing financing mechanisms and proposed a plan for the operationalization of the national register a mandatory requirement to establish and formalize cooperative societies (SCOOP) in Senegal.

The workshop was a culmination of collaborative efforts between Senegalese institutions, the private sector and the agricultural community to set up cooperative societies. The cooperatives will also provide a sustainable development approach for the country's mango and onion sectors.

During the workshop, Irene Mingasson, Ambassador of the European Union indicated the positive implications of creating these cooperative societies, "WACOMP has given itself the objective to vitalize and develop food value chains, in order for each producer or processing cooperative to create jobs through better structuring and by broadening their possibilities with better connections to regional and global trade. Through the project, Senegal has achieved significant progress for the development of MSMEs and is now compliant with OHADA community regulations," said Mingasson.

To learn more about the West Africa Competitiveness Programme visit:

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