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## Australia donates AUD 3 million to ITC to bolster exports by Pacific women

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Geneva – Women entrepreneurs in the Pacific region are to benefit from increased export and income opportunities following a funding agreement signed yesterday by the International Trade Centre (ITC) and AusAID.

ITC is to receive AUD 3 million from the Australian Government through AusAID to support the economic development of women in the Pacific region. The commitment is a “recognition of the excellent work that ITC does”, said Ambassador Tim Yeend, Australia’s Permanent Representative to the WTO. “ITC is one of the organizations that has led the way in recognizing the particular challenges of Pacific island economies,” he said.

Through ITC’s Women and Trade Programme the project will link women entrepreneurs from the Pacific to regional and international markets, enabling them to increase their exports. The contribution is part of a 10-year AUD 320 million initiative by Australia to improve the political, economic and social opportunities for women in the Pacific.

ITC’s Women and Trade Programme seeks to improve access to markets for women entrepreneurs in developing countries through trade. It bases its interventions on analyzing demand and potential demand for goods and services produced by women entrepreneurs, followed by technical assistance to enable beneficiaries to meet this demand. USD 20 million worth of contracts have been signed by women entrepreneurs as a result of interventions by ITC since the launch of the programme in 2010.

ITC Executive Director Patricia Francis said: “The economic empowerment of women is not only the right thing to do, it is also good development policy as women reinvest up to 90% of their earnings in their families’ well-being. With this funding from Australia we will take further steps towards closing the gender gap in the Pacific and towards larger development objectives.”

Spread over thousands of islands, the Pacific is one of the most culturally diverse regions in the world. One-third of the region’s population lives in poverty and progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals is slow, with parts of the region having some of the highest gender gaps in the world. Given the size, diversity and dispersed nature of the Pacific Islands, there is a prevailing culture of informal trade among women entrepreneurs and little experience of dealing with formal business processes.

“I hope it is the first step of a continuing and systematic development programme in the region,” said Robyn Ekstrom, Trade Promotion Adviser at the Permanent Delegation of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to the WTO. ITC will work in close partnership with national and regional institutions, such as PIFS to train women entrepreneurs on how to understand demand, develop the right products, build their businesses, and access markets in a sustainable manner. Two countries in the region will be chosen as focus countries for the project, after which it is envisaged that the project will be replicated in other parts of the Pacific region. The project in the Pacific is part of the second phase of ITC’s Women and Trade programme, with a planned total delivery of USD 15 million in technical assistance during 2013-2016.

ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small- and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries become more competitive in global markets, thus

contributing to sustainable economic development while contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

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