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Empowering women coffee producers in East Africa

Prospects for African women coffee producers were given a boost yesterday (6 May) as two African chapters of the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) were launched at a reception hosted by the International Trade Centre (ITC) at the Palais des Nations. The reception marked the end of the first day of the meeting of ITC's Joint Advisory Group.

The launch of the two chapters from Africa – Rwanda and Tanzania – also marked the successful conclusion of the first phase of the 'Africa: Improving economic benefits for women in the coffee sector' project, which forms part of ITC's successful Women and Trade programme.

The addition of Rwanda and Tanzania to IWCA means that ITC has assisted the establishment of five IWCA chapters since 2010. The other chapters set up with ITC assistance were in Burundi, Kenya and Uganda. In addition, a chapter of IWCA is to be launched in the Democratic Republic of Congo later this month.

In the run-up to the launch of the project, which has been funded by UK Aid, it was revealed that in some countries women are not paid at all for the coffee they produce. This triggered ITC to back the work of IWCA to ensure that more women make money from the coffee that they produce, and as such make certain that these women are included in the regional and global value chains. This decision was further strengthened by research showing that women reinvest 90% of their earnings in their family compared to men – and in health and education in particular.

'This shows that investing in women is not only the right thing to do, it is also sound development policy,' said Ms. Patricia Francis, ITC's Executive Director.

In addition, women from 12 countries received training that helped several to engage with buyers under the Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors, which has since resulted in commercial transactions. The president of IWCA Burundi, for example, signed a Letter of Intent with a buyer that has since resulted in USD 400,000 worth of sales. As a step towards women retaining control over the money they are now making, ITC has identified savings institutions prepared to work with chapter members in rural areas.

Intermediary steps taken to ensure sustainability included the development of women's coffee associations (IWCA-chapters), the promotion of women produced coffee with buyers and research into branding women's coffee, the establishment of a leadership and mentoring programme to boost women's self-confidence, and the examination of options for saving schemes for women.

The chapters, as legally incorporated entities, have been the vehicle for the success of the 'Africa: Improving economic benefits for women in the coffee sector' project. Through these IWCA chapters, trade-related technical assistance has been provided, and through the establishment of these chapters, more women are now being paid for the sale of their coffee.

At the request from West African trade support institutions, ITC is currently considering expanding the project to also include countries in West Africa.

ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small- and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economy countries to become more competitive in global markets, contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the [Aid for Trade agenda](#) and [the Millennium Development Goals](#).

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