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## ITC CONCENTRATES EFFORTS ON WOMEN AS CRISIS HITS THEM HARD

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ITC is responding to women business owners' needs in the financial crisis by focusing more efforts on helping to improve their success, through its new Women and Trade Programme.

"Women entrepreneurs are having an especially difficult time in the ongoing financial crisis because they work in sectors that have been hardest hit. Now more than ever, governments can no longer afford to ignore gender issues when talking about trade," said Patricia R. Francis, ITC Executive Director.

"Women make up the majority of the world's poor, but they also account for a significant proportion of small enterprises in developing countries. ITC's Women and Trade Programme will help governments and trade support institutions (TSIs) invest in women, while empowering women themselves to be successful."

The Programme will work in three ways: helping governments develop a gender inclusive approach to trade strategies with the aim of realizing both export and human potential; helping TSIs become better able to serve women in their communities; and working directly with women entrepreneurs, providing training sessions and connecting them with buyers.

"The economic empowerment of women is fundamental to poverty reduction," said Meg Jones, Gender and Trade Adviser. "Helping women succeed in export will mean improved education, reduced maternal mortality and will provide women a way out from violence. Trade not only brings with it dollars, but a sense of broader horizons."

LDCs are the main beneficiaries of the Programme, starting in East Africa, in response to requests for gender-sensitive National Export Strategies. The approach is market driven: Matching buyers and sellers, and building the capacity of national institutions to meet the needs of women in trade.

ITC is a joint agency of the United Nations and the WTO, focusing in particular on developing the export capabilities of small and medium-sized businesses in developing and transition countries.

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