

SIDS Partnership Dialogue, New York, 25 June 2015

ITC's remarks

I'll speak about three partnerships addressing women's economic empowerment in the Pacific that ITC announced in Samoa at the SIDS conference and then go on to say a few words about a new partnership we are supporting in the Caribbean region. The partnerships, respectively addressing needs in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, and Vanuatu, have the following reference numbers: 2543, 2544, and 2545. Since descriptions of the partnerships are on the screen in front of you, I shall refrain from describing them again.

All three partnerships, while pursuing different strategies, respond to a common development problem. Women play a key role in Pacific economies. They largely operate, however, in the fragmented informal sector where the lack of organization, management, quality orientation, and access to markets jeopardize their capacity to grow and develop their businesses. This undermines the region's potential to use trade as a driver of growth, employment, and poverty reduction.

Though at national level ITC partners not only with the Governments of PNG, Vanuatu and Samoa but with a range of partners, all three initiatives entail the participation of a common international development partner of the three countries: namely, the Australian Government operating through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Another common thread: All three partnerships are carrying out development projects that were first identified by national authorities in PNG, Samoa and Vanuatu with the support of Pacific Islands Trade and Invest, an arm of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

The partnership in Papua New Guinea is currently promoting the creation of a Bilum Promotion and Export Development Association. While international buyers of bilums – a bilum being a string bag made by hand -- have begun placing orders, fulfilling these orders calls for more sustainable, price conscious solutions. Buyers have expressed difficulty communicating by e-mail with cooperatives in the Highland provinces, where bilums are made, mostly because the women who make bilums are not

connected to the internet and are handicapped by low literacy levels. It was felt necessary that an intermediary mechanism should exist. The PNG Bilum Promotion and Export Development Association will fulfill this role as well as carry out all export related facilitation, including fumigation of bilums prior to shipment.

ITC Australia-based experts, fashion and colour consultants are regularly travelling to Goroka and Mount Hagen to train groups of bilum weavers on design techniques and to help rationalize their twisting and looping techniques, all with a view to producing high end products for export.

Partnerships with local financial institutions are under study so that means of direct payment to the weavers through electronic cash cards could help create transparent and auditable payment mechanisms.

All and all, the partnership empowers women who have missed an early chance at primary education because they live in remote areas. ITC operates in PNG in partnership with the Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Corporation (SMEC), the national entrepreneurship development agency.

In Vanuatu, following cyclone PAM that devastated much of Port Vila, international tourist arrivals have been in free fall. Consequent to post-cyclone consultations with provincial authorities, ITC is intensifying light handicraft design training for village women so that their products could be more attractive to cruise liners' passengers who stop for a few hours once a week. ITC is also conducting fruit and vegetable packing and packaging clinics with women farmers so that their products arrive to market in

better shape. Focus clinics are also planned for transporters so they gain better awareness of the importance of delivering undamaged produce to clients. These training activities are being conducted in partnership with the Vanuatu Agriculture College (VAC) in Santo, Sanma Province.

In Samoa, thanks to a successful partnership with the National University of Samoa, procurement officials of the Ministry of Finance are being trained in public procurement from women owned enterprises. This training is as much about procurement techniques as about changing mind-sets aimed at giving women-owned companies producing quality goods and services a better share of government procurement spend. Samoan women entrepreneurs jointly

attend these seminars as a way of promoting mutual understanding of each side's business imperatives.

While the three Pacific region partnerships have not been in operation for long, they have highlighted the critical importance of a number of things:

- Partnership and collaboration must be fostered at all levels with particular attention being paid to local agencies and groups.
- Capacity development and institution building is key.
- Also of high importance is leveraging of information and communication technologies.
- Resilience and flexibility must be built into programme design from the start.

Let me now speak briefly about a new partnership aimed at reviving an industry that once flourished in the Caribbean

region – namely, the coconut industry. Recent years have witnessed skyrocketing demand for fresh coconut produce and coconut-based health and beauty products in world markets. Yet, because of a variety of problems, farming communities in the Caribbean have not been able to respond to this expanding opportunity. To address this situation, ITC, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, and the European Union launched in 2015 a partnership embracing a collaborative project for Coconut Industry Development in the Caribbean. The main aim is to enhance the competitiveness of small-scale coconut farmers and enable them better to integrate into regional and global value chains.

Financed under the 10th European Development Fund, the project partners with the CARIFORUM countries of Belize,

Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago.

It is my earnest hope that my brief remarks this afternoon demonstrate clearly that ITC's partnership with SIDS is both expanding and diversifying. In keeping with a commitment made by ITC's Executive Director at the Conference in Apia, we are developing this partnership with a view to providing integrated solutions that take into account the economic, social and environmental dynamics of the island states we have the privilege of working with.

