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International Trade Centre and Access Bank partner to boost small business growth across 14 African countries

(New York/Geneva/Accra) – The International Trade Centre (ITC) and The Access Africa Office, the coordinating office for the African subsidiaries of Access Bank Plc, one of Africa's leading pan-African financial institutions, establish a new partnership to boost access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises, and increase access to markets and skills training, in 14 African countries. The programme will start with a pilot in Ghana.

The 14 countries include Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

African small businesses generate most of the continent's jobs but regularly struggle to get the financing and market access they need to grow. This partnership brings together the strength of the UN small business agency and its technical expertise with a pan-African bank's on-the-ground reach to close that gap. This reflects Access Bank's long-standing commitment to closing Africa's SME finance gap through inclusive, sustainable ecosystem banking.

The partnership – marked by the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York – will focus on five priority areas, over three years: job creation through small and medium enterprises (SMEs); access to finance, with particular attention to women- and youth-owned businesses; SME business sustainability; capacity building, including digital trade skills; and access to markets, including support for intra-African trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This work directly advances the UN Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).

The implementation begins with a pilot phase from September 2026 to June 2027, focused on a cohort of small businesses in Ghana, with women-led enterprises prioritized.

The pilot draws on ITC's existing digital learning tools and training-of-trainers programmes, delivered in coordination with Access Africa Office staff. The partnership aims to scale up from 2027 onwards to cover additional countries and programmes, including advanced training on sustainability standards and digital marketplace tools.

Access Bank operates across Africa, with a network of more than 700 branches across 25 countries on three continents and over 63 million customers.

[Pamela Coke-Hamilton](#), Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, said: 'Access to finance is the biggest barrier to trade faced small businesses across Africa. We're working with Access Bank to tackle this challenge and accompany the enterprises as we equip them with the knowledge, networks and market connections they need to grow.'

Seyi Kumapayi, Executive Director, African Subsidiaries at Access Bank, remarked: 'We see every day that finance alone does not get a small business to scale. It is the combination of capital, market access and trade-ready skills that makes the difference. Which is why this partnership pairs our reach across African markets with ITC's expertise in knowledge, networks and market connections. Together, we are starting with women-led enterprises and small businesses in Ghana, with the ambition to scale intra-African trade and deepen financial inclusion across Africa.'

Notes for the editor

About ITC – The International Trade Centre is the joint agency of [World Trade Organization](#) and the [United Nations](#). ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become

more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

For more information, visit www.intracen.org.

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About The Africa Office Ltd – The Africa Office Ltd. is a company duly incorporated under the laws of Ghana to operate as the coordinating office for the African subsidiaries of Access Bank Plc. Access Bank Plc., is a wholly owned subsidiary of Access Holdings Plc, a leading full-service commercial bank operating through a network of more than 700 branches and service outlets, spanning 3 continents, 25 countries and serving over 60 million customers.

Access Bank encourages and delivers sustainable economic growth that is profitable, environmentally responsible and socially relevant, helping customers to access more and achieve their dreams, a pan-African financial services group whose mission is to set standards for sustainable business practices, inspiring change, putting customers' needs at the center of all decisions, providing tailored financial solutions for SMEs, capacity-building, and digital market access to spur economic growth and create superior value for our stakeholders.

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