



Connecting West Africa to the World

CASE STUDY



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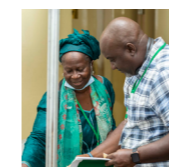
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Foreword



“West Africa Connect” is a strategic and timely platform for promoting access of West African SMEs to regional and international markets and supporting the development of competitive, inclusive, digitalized and sustainable value chains in the region.

Building on the successful experiences and lessons learned from the first two events, UNIDO is committed to deepen its support to the ECOWAS Commission. In particular, UNIDO looks forward to contributing to regional or national initiatives in West Africa focusing on inter-regional, intra-regional, or international trade, especially through the context provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement.

Furthermore, UNIDO recognizes that partnerships with other organizations, such as the International Trade Center, leverage the impact of such interventions, leading to significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

Mr. Ciyong Zou

*Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director
Directorate of Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Industrial
Development*

Boosting exports of West African SMEs: the promises of B2B matchmaking

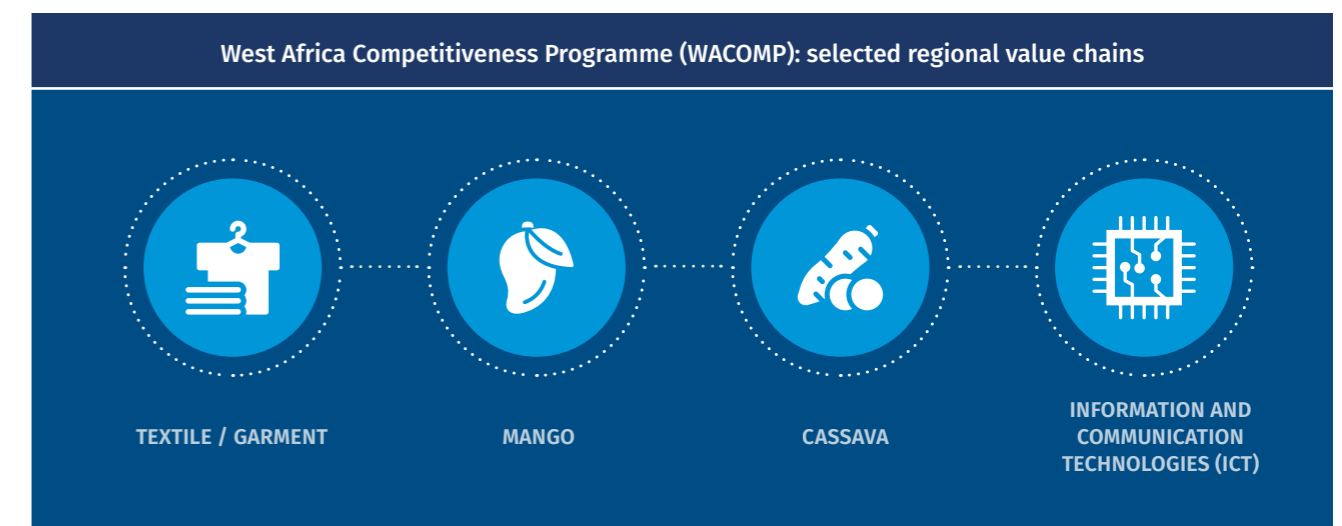
West Africa has both intra-regional and global trade potential, which is essential for sustainable economic development, poverty reduction and food security. However, this potential is not fully exploited as ECOWAS

exports are facing several obstacles, in particular for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Some of the trade barriers are listed below.

- ▶ Difficulties for West African SMEs to identify foreign market opportunities
- ▶ Limited information to analyze regional and international markets requirements
- ▶ Inability to contact potential overseas customers/partners
- ▶ Lack of managerial time, skills and knowledge of SMEs to engage in export activities
- ▶ Perceived low quality of products and services from West Africa
- ▶ Lack of finance to support export activities

In that context, **B2B matchmaking** activities have been identified as one of the high-impact solutions in West Africa to support SMEs in their efforts to access regional and international markets, with a focus on priority value chains for ECOWAS. B2B matchmaking offers **tremendous**

benefits for SMEs by facilitating interactions with procurement managers of large companies, establishing relationships with new business partners, increasing visibility/awareness and gaining insight in valuable market information.



Facilitating B2B networking to promote access to markets: WACOMP's interventions

Through the EU-funded West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has been collaborating with the ECOWAS Commission, ITC and

other partners to prepare, organize and deliver two major regional B2B matchmaking events named **West Africa Connect**, which took place successfully in 2021 and 2022.



First two West Africa Connect events confirm promising results



Improved capacities of West African SMEs operating in the textile/garments, mango, cassava and ICT value chains in terms of business development, export, market access and trade fair preparation.



Increased visibility of products and services offered by West African SMEs in the selected value chains.



Enhanced inclusion of West African SMEs in regional and global value chains through B2B matchmaking activities.



Enhanced capacities of the ECOWAS Commission and national BSOs/TPOs to organize similar regional B2B matchmaking events in the future.

West Africa Connect is a telling example of a bridge that connects businesses for long-term partnerships and building commercial transactions. Evidence of success can be seen through these numbers:



Participation of **479** West African SMEs and **44** regional/international buyers



256 B2B meetings conducted between suppliers and buyers



At least **27** partnerships/sustainable business relationships established



+20 commercial transactions secured



+50 keynote speakers involved



“Thanks to our participation at West Africa Connect 2021, our company has increased its visibility and concluded several contracts with other West African countries. Our garment products are now in Togo, Ghana and Burkina Faso. This initiative exposed us to many trade opportunities we never knew existed, and our example shows that such event has the potential to connect SMEs to the rest of the world”.



Bukola Ajani

Director, Mac Index Integrated Services
Nigeria



“West Africa Connect 2022 in Accra was an excellent opportunity to meet and discuss with other companies from the sector, and thus develop very interesting partnerships for some of our products (fresh and processed mangoes). The event also gave us the opportunity to learn about innovations for expanding our business.”



Aliou Traoré

Director, Danaya Commerce Et Service
Mali

Lessons learnt and key take aways



By providing the opportunity to **match, meet** and **trade** with regional and international buyers, West Africa Connect plays a key role in facilitating the inclusion of West African SMEs in regional and international value chains. The first two editions organized in 2021 and 2022 showed impressive results and could be replicated on a regular basis to support the development of value chains deemed of critical importance in the region.

Such initiative will require the leadership and strong involvement of the ECOWAS Trade Promotion Organisation (TPO) Network as well as national and regional institutions and stakeholders of the private sector. Organizers of future West Africa Connect events can build upon a **step-by-step guide** developed by UNIDO for the organization of B2B matchmaking events.

The B2B matchmaking event itself is, however, not the only activity to consider: **targeted trainings and support** are essential to equip women and men-led SMEs in West Africa with the required know-how and skills to engage efficiently in networking activities and increase their chances to seize new business opportunities and secure transactions with buyers. **Quality standards, certifications** and **green production** are also key areas of successful B2B connections.

Another major priority for West African SMEs in the coming years is the need to ensure their transition to the Fourth Industrial Revolution through **innovation** and the adoption of relevant **digital manufacturing technologies**. This is becoming an essential prerequisite to address market requirements and buyers needs.

Successful partnership with ITC



UNIDO teamed up with the **International Trade Center (ITC)** to ensure the successful delivery of **West Africa Connect** B2B events. The experience has demonstrated that such partnership is leveraging efficiency by combining expertise, knowledge and networks from both Organizations for the benefits of project partners and beneficiaries. Similar collaborative approaches can be replicated and further explored in the future when addressing issues related to West African trade, competitiveness, quality infrastructure, market access and other relevant industrial development topics.

match · meet · trade

What's next?

Building on successful experiences in 2021 and 2022, the ECOWAS Commission is willing to organize similar West Africa Connect events in the coming years. Based on the lessons learned from the first two editions, UNIDO

stands ready to replicate or scale up activities to support the ECOWAS Commission and other stakeholders in that journey and further promote market access for West African SMEs, including through strategic partnerships.



“West African SMEs have untapped potential and the West Africa Connect events allow them to demonstrate the quality of their products and services, which can lead to profitable business partnerships and increased export capacities. By connecting suppliers from the region with buyers both inside and outside the region, West Africa Connect promotes access to market opportunities and linkages with regional and global value chains”.



Kolawole Sofola
Acting Director-Trade, ECOWAS Commission

  
match · meet · trade





ABOUT WEST AFRICA CONNECT

West Africa Connect is an initiative of the ECOWAS Commission launched in the context of the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP), which is funded by the European Union. West Africa Connect provides a unique platform to facilitate B2B connections in selected value chains and promote access to markets for West African Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).



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To learn more visit the West Africa Connect website:
<https://westafricconnect.com>