

**PRESS RELEASE**

EUR 5.5 Million EU-Funded Programme Launched to  
Empower  
2,000 Women Entrepreneurs Across Kenya

**RELEASE**

14 January 2026  
Nairobi, Kenya

*ITC and Ecologists Without Borders launch the EMPOWER Programme — a landmark initiative to close the gender gap in enterprise productivity, finance, and market access for women-led MSMEs in agro-processing and light manufacturing*

NAIROBI, 14 January 2026 — The International Trade Centre (ITC) and Ecologists Without Borders (EWB), in partnership with the European Union, today officially launched the Enterprise and Market Pathways for Women's Economic Resilience (EMPOWER) Programme — a EUR 5.5 million, four-year initiative targeting 2,000 women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across five Kenyan counties. The launch ceremony, held at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi, was attended by senior officials from the Government of Kenya, the EU Delegation, ITC, EWB, and representatives of women's business associations from across the country.

The EMPOWER Programme responds to a persistent structural challenge: despite constituting 51% of Kenya's population and contributing 60% of agricultural labour, women own only 1% of registered land and access less than 10% of formal credit. The gender gap in enterprise productivity between male-led and female-led firms stands at 34%, driven not by differences in ambition or effort, but by differential access to training, finance, and markets.

*"The EMPOWER Programme represents a bold and necessary investment in Kenya's most underutilised economic asset: the talent, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit of Kenyan women. ITC is proud to partner with Ecologists Without Borders and the European Union to deliver this programme, and we are committed to ensuring that every euro invested reaches the women who need it most and generates results that last."*

— Dr. Amara Diallo, ITC Director of Country Programmes, Africa

The programme will operate across five counties — Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Meru — chosen for their high concentrations of women-led enterprises, existing value chain infrastructure, and strategic importance to Kenya's manufacturing and export sectors. Over four years, EMPOWER will deliver structured business development services to 2,000 enterprises, establish five Women's Business Acceleration Hubs, launch a Women's Credit Guarantee Scheme in partnership with three commercial

banks, and facilitate 500 formal off-take agreements between women-led enterprises and formal buyers.

*"The European Union believes that gender equality is not just a moral imperative — it is the single most powerful driver of economic growth and social development. The EMPOWER Programme embodies our commitment to ensuring that Kenya's economic transformation is truly inclusive. We look forward to seeing 2,000 Kenyan women entrepreneurs grow their businesses, access credit, and connect to markets that were previously out of reach."*

— H.E. Henrietta van der Berg, EU Ambassador to Kenya

The launch event featured a panel discussion on women's economic empowerment, a live demonstration of the EMPOWER digital business registration platform, and testimonials from women entrepreneurs who participated in the programme's pilot phase in Kisumu County. Pilot results showed an average 28% increase in revenue among participating enterprises within six months of receiving BDS training — a promising signal for the full programme.

*"The EMPOWER Programme is a direct contribution to Kenya's Big Four Agenda, and specifically to our manufacturing pillar. We welcome ITC and Ecologists Without Borders as partners in this effort, and we commit the full support of the Ministry to ensuring that EMPOWER enterprises can access government procurement opportunities and benefit from our ongoing regulatory reforms to support the informal sector."*

— Hon. Grace Wanjiku, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Industrialisation, Trade and Enterprise Development

The EMPOWER Programme is aligned with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). It is also aligned with Kenya's Vision 2030, the Big Four Agenda, and the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III).

KEY FACTS: EMPOWER PROGRAMME

| Item                 | Detail                                                           |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total Budget         | EUR 5,500,000 (EU: EUR 4.4M   ITC/EWB co-financing: EUR 1.1M)    |
| Duration             | 48 months (January 2026 – December 2029)                         |
| Target Beneficiaries | 2,000 women-led MSMEs in agro-processing and light manufacturing |

|                       |                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Geographic Coverage   | Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Meru Counties                                                                  |
| Key Results           | 4,000 jobs created; 1,200 women access formal credit; 500 off-take agreements; 200 enterprises export to EAC markets |
| SDG Alignment         | SDG 5, 8, 10, 17                                                                                                     |
| Implementing Agencies | ITC (lead) and Ecologists Without Borders (co-implementer for market linkages)                                       |

## ABOUT ITC

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations. ITC's mission is to foster inclusive economic development and contribute to achieving the SDGs, especially SDG 8, by supporting the internationalization of enterprises in developing countries.

## ABOUT ECOLOGISTS WITHOUT BORDERS

Ecologists Without Borders (EWB) is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting sustainable economic development through green enterprise networks, environmental stewardship, and community-based value chain development. EWB operates in 35 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

## ABOUT THE EU

The European Union is the world's largest donor of development aid, providing over EUR 17 billion in 2024. The EU's development cooperation is guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the EU's Gender Action Plan III.

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## MEDIA CONTACTS

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