



UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES:  
**SME STORIES**  
IN SOUTH-SOUTH  
TRADE FACILITATION  
**AT CIIE**



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United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)  
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## JOINT FOREWORD

The past few years have reinforced the urgency of building economic resilience, amid rising costs of living, the painful aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak or resurgence of conflicts, and the impacts of climate change. This economic resilience relies on greater regional integration and South-South trade and investment—otherwise, the Sustainable Development Goals will remain far out of reach.

The Third South Summit Outcome Document, endorsed by Heads of State and Government of the Member Countries of the Group of 77 and China in January 2024, sets out clearly why these goals matter now, more than ever. Among its outcomes, leaders highlighted the critical role of South-South trade and triangular trade cooperation, alongside greater connectivity and policy synergies, in making a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous world possible.

For South-South trade and triangular cooperation to achieve their utmost potential, we must empower the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that underpin the global economy. By ensuring these firms can engage in connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade, they will be better positioned to create better-paying jobs, support social inclusion, tackle inequality, and foster environmental sustainability.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) has collaborated with the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) of China to support nearly 300 MSMEs from over 30 developing countries, including many from landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), in participating at the China International Import Export Expo (CIIE) since its inception in 2018. By providing trainings and facilitating their access to South-South trade platforms, ITC has supported these firms in becoming more competitive, capitalizing on the vast opportunities offered by the Chinese market.

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), under its flagship programme, the Global South-South Development Centre (GSSDC), has partnered with the Government of China to promote and advocate for South-South and triangular trade cooperation, through various capacity training, knowledge exchange and policy advocacy initiatives.

This compendium of SME stories and experiences makes clear that empowering small businesses to trade delivers concrete results. It demonstrates how events like the CIIE open new opportunities for deepening South-South and triangular trade, in a way that can help build a more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future. We hope this publication will inspire further action and cooperation among all stakeholders committed to sustainable development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This compendium of stories is a collaborative effort by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the International Trade Centre (ITC). It was developed under the guidance of UNOSSC Director Ms. Dima Al-Khatib, Trust Fund Director Ms. Xiaojun Grace Wang, and ITC Asia and Pacific Office Senior Programme Manager Mr. Tianyu Mao.

Ms. Duanmei Hu, ITC China National Coordinator, provided data collection and initial drafting support. The UNOSSC team, including Ms. Dingding Sun, Mr. Jingchuan Mu, Ms. Muriel Obon, Ms. Haoyun Su, Ms. Tahmina Anvarova

and Mr. Mithre J. Sandrasagra contributed to the conceptualization, survey design, data collection and analysis, technical coordination, substantive review and finalization.

This compendium is the first in a series of knowledge products dedicated to sharing experiences and examples of South-South trade cooperation, with future special issues and editions to be added, and can serve as a useful resource for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners interested in exploring the potential of South-South trade for promoting sustainable development.



Visitors at the Togo Pavilion in the National Exhibition area at the 6<sup>th</sup> CIIE in Shanghai

## INTRODUCTION

CIIE is a national-level import expo hosted by China to promote global trade and investment.

Since 2018, the expo has been held as scheduled every November in Shanghai, China, and is now celebrating its seventh edition in 2024. CIIE consists of Country Exhibitions, the Business Exhibition, the Hongqiao International Economic Forum, specialized supporting activities and cultural exchange activities. The Business Exhibition is a platform for overseas enterprises to showcase their goods, technologies and services, thus facilitating exchanges and cooperation among world exporters and buyers. Historical data from previous China International Import Expos shows an overall increase in the contract amounts, reaching \$57.83 billion in 2018, \$71.13 billion in 2019, \$72.62 billion in 2020, \$70.72 billion in 2021, and \$73.52 billion in 2022. These statistics underscore CIIE's role in enhancing global market connectivity and facilitating unimpeded trade.

CIIE provides a platform for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) from developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs) to showcase their products, thus stimulating local economic development. In 2021, CIIE invited numerous MSMEs from LDCs, providing a significant impetus for their economic growth. According to CIIE data, over 100 exhibitors from LDCs and nearly 100 from landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) participated in CIIE 2023.

UNOSSC has partnered with the International Trade Centre to develop "Unlocking Opportunities: SME Stories in South-South Trade Facilitation at CIIE". This compendium focuses on showcasing

MSMEs from LLDCs that have participated in CIIE with support from ITC, fostering equitably and mutually beneficial South-South economic and trade cooperation. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8, this publication showcases a series of experiences and stories of SMEs in how South-South trade facilitation mechanisms, like the CIIE, have supported their business growth, ultimately promoting job creation and sustainable economic growth in order to generate a positive social impact and enhance prosperity in their own country contexts.



ITC's booth at the 6<sup>th</sup> CIIE in Shanghai



A total of 154 countries, regions, and international organizations participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> CIIE.



ITC supported 64 MSMEs from 29 developing countries to participate CIIE in 2023, including 33 MSMEs from 15 least developed countries (LDCs).

## DUKA ENGINEERING AND TRADING PLC

Country: Ethiopia

### OVERVIEW

Similar to many SMEs in Africa, Duka Engineering & Trading PLC from Ethiopia has faced several challenges during its operation and development, such as lack of information, regulatory hurdles, financial constraints, and cultural differences.

In 2023, with the support of the International Trade Centre (ITC), Duka participated in the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo (CAETE) in June and the China International Import Expo (CIIE) in November.

Through participation in these events, Duka has seen the following benefits:

- **Market Understanding:** The company gained insights into the dynamics of international markets, including consumer preferences and competition, and is now able to establish relationships with suppliers, customers, and partners in new markets.



Farmers working in soybean drying ground

- **New Export Opportunities:** With a better understanding of international markets and regulatory standards, Duka explored new export opportunities. A contract for sesame seeds, with a quantity of 10 full container loads totaling \$350,000, was signed with a Chinese buyer during the expo.



Coffee farmers at work



Mr. Kulager Abedecho at the matchmaking session during CIIE

- **Increased Investments:** The visibility and business partnerships facilitated by ITC's networking platforms attracted new investors. Duka signed a distributor agreement for roasted coffee, estimated at \$400,000 for one 20-foot container.
- **Technology Transfer:** Exposure to international markets opened avenues for technology transfer. Duka can adopt new technologies or processes to enhance efficiency and productivity.
- **New jobs and increased revenues for workers.**

### ABOUT THE SME

Duka Engineering & Trading PLC primarily focuses on exporting Ethiopian agricultural products such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds and spices. The company aims to introduce high-quality technology and brand to the country, adding value to its products while maintaining affordability without compromising on quality, by engaging loyally and fairly with its clients and continuing professional growth and development.

Duka Engineering and Trading PLC has a total of 60 employees, consisting of ten permanent staff members, including seven women and three men, and 50 temporary workers, including 35 women and 15 men. The company was founded by three shareholders, of whom two are women and one is a man.

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## KEDEMT COFFEE TRADING PLC

Country: Ethiopia

### OVERVIEW

Kedemt Coffee Trading PLC is a coffee roasting company specializing in value-added products in Ethiopia. In 2023, Ms. Dagmawit Aynalem Abebe, Founder of Kedemt Coffee, was invited to participate in the Seminar of the Business Study Tour for SMEs of Belt and Road Developing Countries in China in 2023 (Phase II). The 12-day seminar included four days of training in Beijing, six days in Shanghai as an exhibitor at the 6th CIIE, and a two-day field trip in Shanghai.



The participants of the seminar in Beijing

“Participation in such programs broaden our understanding of the Chinese market’s potential. We recognize the intense growth in the coffee market and the emerging trend of Gen Z becoming coffee connoisseurs, posing both a threat and an opportunity for us. This realization has urged us to take proactive steps to enter the market promptly. During the program, we established connections with over 20 potential buyers, and the conversation is still going on. Some of them have visited Ethiopia, where we met in Addis Ababa. Hopefully, we will be able to close deals in the coming months and turn this network to net worth.”

—Ms. Dagmawit Aynalem Abebe, Founder of Kedemt Coffee Trading PLC, Ethiopia



Presenting the certificate after a successful seminar in Beijing

### ABOUT THE SME

Kedemt Coffee Trading PLC is a coffee roasting company specializing in value-added products. It prioritizes consistency, comfort, and convenience for its clients and partners, considering these three pillars as fundamental values of its company. Its integration process involves closely working with micro-agribusiness farmers to cultivate environmentally friendly, organic coffee suited to diverse climates and environments.



Ms. Dagmawit Abebe at CIIE 2023

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## DYTECH LIMITED

Country: Zambia

### OVERVIEW

Before 2021, Dytech Limited, a Zambian honey company, encountered several challenges including lack of adequate export knowledge, limited access to markets in China, and insufficient digital marketing tools for its operations.

Between 2021 and 2023, Dytech Limited received support from the ITC to participate in CIIE for three consecutive years. In June 2023, Mr. Alan Chanda, Director of the company, was invited to participate in the Seminar of the Business Study Tour for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) of Belt and Road Developing Countries in China (Phase I). The seminar, funded by China and jointly implemented by ITC and the Academy for International Business Officials of the Ministry of Commerce of China (AIBO, MOFCOM), lasted ten days. It included five days of training in Beijing and five days in Changsha, where Mr. Chanda



Workers wearing beekeeping suit

served as an exhibitor at the 3rd China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo (CAETE).

Participation in these China expos has empowered Dytech to establish a robust network of Chinese contacts spanning packaging, branding, marketing, and online sales channels to sell its honey products, particularly through platforms such as Alibaba and JD.COM. Securing two distributors during CIIE marked a significant achievement, and ongoing discussions with additional potential partners in China indicate promising future collaborations.

This newfound network enables Dytech to concentrate on its priority growth strategy, ensuring rural farmers can focus on honey production without concerns. Furthermore, Dytech aims to extend its support to an additional 5,000 rural farmers, increasing the total to 10,000 while maintaining a 40% representation of women. Enhanced production capabilities also bring opportunities for new investments and technology transfers.

The company aims to manufacture 320,000 beehives over two years, reaching a peak production capacity of 8,000 tons for export to China.

Through its involvement with CIIE and CAETE, Dytech Limited experienced the following benefits:

- Number of employees increased from eight to 24, and growing.

- The number of farmers involved is set to rise from 1,500 to 5,500, leading to the creation of approximately 200 indirect jobs each harvesting season, predominantly for women producers who hire male youths to harvest honey every six months.
- Dytech MOU signing ceremony for 260 tons of SweetHarvest Wild Honey-branded bottles in China.
- Additional partnerships coming up for the current year will drive growth and expansion, including the establishment of eco double beehives across 100,000 hectares of forests, creating 400 more indirect jobs over the next three years.
- Dytech plans to employ ten women to support its new department for manufacturing beekeeping suits, catering to the increasing demand from rural farmers and the wider public. Additionally, ten individuals will be recruited for the carbon credits and technology team focusing on drone technology.

### ABOUT THE SME

Dytech is a multiple award-winning agritech social impact enterprise operating in rural Africa, with a network of 5,000 farmers, 40% of whom are women and 60% primarily youths. The company is dedicated to transforming lives through its designed innovative beehive, ZamHive®, which has significantly boosted productivity from 15kg to 75kg per season. Designed with two decks, ZamHive® beehive has an average production uplift of 250%, utilizing eco-friendly materials made from unwanted wood waste and offcuts.

Dytech purchases honey from hardworking African producers at rates exceeding 150% of

typical crop prices per kilogram. Honey products are sold in 150 selected shops and three major chain stores in Zambia, as well as exported to markets such as South Africa, Egypt, Germany, and soon to China.

The majority of profits are reinvested in ZamHive® beehive production and partner expansion to support wildlife conservation and ecosystem sustainability.



Dytech new packaging:  
100% recyclable plastic squeeze bottles

### CONTACT

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## MEIYI GROUP LTD

Country: Rwanda

### OVERVIEW

The Meiyi Group Ltd, a company focused on developing, promoting, and selling Rwandan products worldwide had initially encountered various challenges in entering the Chinese market. Like many small businesses in Rwanda, it faced obstacles such as navigating legal procedures for importing Rwandan products to China, clearance processes, translation, receiving payments, gaining visibility and connecting with Chinese customers. With the ITC support, we were able to overcome these challenges and gained a deeper understanding of the Chinese market.

In 2023, Meiyi Group Ltd received support from ITC to participate in the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo in June and CIIE in November. ITC provided significant support to Meiyi Group Ltd and other Rwandan small businesses, cooperatives and their families by facilitating imports, assisting with company registration in China, providing access to the Chinese market, aiding in distribution, and offering guidance on Chinese market regulations. Additionally, ITC provided personnel from Meiyi Group Ltd with official training, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce of China, covering various aspects of the Chinese economy and online market.

Through ITC support, Meiyi Group Ltd was able to shift its focus to promoting and selling finished products rather than raw materials, thus increasing the financial returns for workers' families. This helps add higher value to the products and fosters



Nshuti Uwase receives a training diploma from ITC and MOFCOM at CAETE.

the development of product brands for Africa in the Chinese market.

During the CIIE in Shanghai, Meiyi Group Ltd secured a purchasing agreement with a company in Beijing, aiming to achieve \$1 million in trading by 2024. Meiyi Group has also signed a contract and commenced cooperation with an online radio trading platform in Shanghai, further promoting Rwandan products.

The company has established itself in the premium coffee market in China with Café de Maraba, renowned as the best coffee in Rwanda and highly appreciated by coffee enthusiasts. The product garnered significant attention and sold out quickly at a relatively higher price at various trade fairs, including the CIIE and CAETE, indicating strong potential in China with positive feedback from customers regarding its rich and high-quality taste.

“Thanks to the continuous efforts of ITC, we successfully navigated and mastered the Chinese market, overcoming initial challenges. Participation in two Chinese national-level exhibitions enabled Meiyi to expand its B2B and B2C operations in China. As a result, we were able to secure a purchasing agreement with a Chinese partner, aiming to achieve \$1 million in trading by 2024. The South-South cooperation between China and Rwanda has proven to be mutually beneficial for both countries. Meiyi serves as a prime example of the immense potential of collaboration in South-South trade and market development, with ITC playing a pivotal role in it.”

—Mr. Nshuti Uwase Aime Bienvenue,  
Founder/ CEO, Meiyi Group Ltd.

In recent months, Meiyi has expanded its business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) operations in China, attributing much of this success to participation in CIIE and CAETE.

### ABOUT THE SME

Meiyi Group Ltd is a multidimensional Rwandan company focused on developing, promoting, and selling Rwandan products worldwide. Its portfolio primarily includes agricultural products, with coffee and tea at the forefront. It has taken the initiative to promote finished products produced in Rwanda. These products are uniquely produced by Rwandan local women cooperatives, supporting the livelihoods of more than 50,000 people in rural areas. As more than 70% of the Rwandan population are farmers, with half being women, its mission aligns with empowering local communities and fostering economic growth.



At a 2023 CIIE contract signing ceremony

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## TUMAR ART GROUP LLC

Country: Kyrgyzstan



Making wool felt products

### OVERVIEW

The TUMAR Art Group, established in 1998 and dedicated to the production and promotion of arts and crafts in Kyrgyzstan, received support from ITC to participate in the China International Import Expo (CIIE) in 2018, 2019, and 2023.

Participation in CIIE enabled TUMAR to secure customers from China, thus expanding the export geography of its products. The increase in exports has consistently contributed positively to the company's economic growth. TUMAR recruited 10% new staff, all of whom were women, resulting in a 7% increase in workers' income.

### ABOUT THE SME

The company believes in showcasing the original beauty captured by Kyrgyz artisans in household items, clothing, and accessories, aiming to establish these products as a globally recognized stylistic brand. TUMAR actively

“Participation in the exhibition proved invaluable for marketing and promotion of TUMAR's goods in the Chinese market. It provided insights into the preferences and tastes of Chinese consumers, and facilitated understanding of effective advertising strategies. Thanks to ITC, TUMAR also had the opportunity to network with entrepreneurs from various countries. We have become very close during this time and probably with many of them, our friendship will develop into business relationships.”

— Ms Nazgul Esenbaeva,  
Chief Commercial Officer, Tumar Art Group LLC

promotes the modern interpretation of arts and crafts, emphasizing the natural features of its products made from materials such as wool felt, cotton, and silk.

TUMAR prioritizes the creation of objects that combine aesthetics with functionality. The Art Group also collaborates with independent artists and companies that make jewelry, woodwork, leather, and metal products using their own special technologies.

The Art Group aims to promote initiatives that create unique contemporary art objects and develop crafts in Kyrgyzstan. The company strives to minimize pollution at every production stage. Its goal is to make natural products available to more people, and to contribute to maintaining ecological balance and reducing the negative impact of industry on the environment.



Workers making wool felt products

- **Number of production workshops:** nine in-house workshops and six partner workshops.
- **Number of employees:** 176 people permanently employed, with an additional 60 people engaged in partner projects. 70% of the workforce comprises women with 30% being men, and 60% are young workers aged 20-30.
- **Production:** 95% felt-based products; 85% designated for export.
- **Export countries:** USA, Canada, Germany, Finland, Russia, Kazakhstan, the UK, Belgium, Korea, Japan, among others.

### CONTACT

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## JOY HORN CRAFTS

Country: Uganda

### OVERVIEW

Joy Horn Crafts, a manufacturing company specializing in crafts production from raw materials such as horns in Uganda, received support from ITC to participate in the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo in 2023 and China International Import Expo in 2022 and 2023. This support provided access to the vast global market, particularly in China, leading the company to transition from a struggling production house to a thriving craft-producing enterprise. The increased revenues generated from these ventures revitalized the company's production capacity, enabling the acquisition of additional skilled staff to enhance the production process.

As a result of restructuring and revitalization efforts, Joy Horn Crafts has significantly improved its export readiness status and has embarked on exporting horn crafts to China. The online training by ITC equipped the company's staff, particularly Mr. Timothy Ssenkandwa, the Head



Mr. Timothy Ssenkandwa receiving a training certificate at the ITC booth during the Expo

of Operations, with comprehensive knowledge on exporting to and conducting business in China. The company staff is now well-versed in China's tax system for imports and is familiar with the necessary documentation required to facilitate exports to China, which has given the team confidence to send more products to China.

During CIIE 2023, Joy Horn Crafts sold products for RMB17,000 onsite and met a potential client with whom they discussed a distribution partnership for the China market.

### ABOUT THE SME

The company specializes in the production of a diverse range of luxury crafts items, including jewelry, homeware, kitchenware and various utility products. Its product line encompasses items such as bangles, necklaces, massage sticks, chopsticks, and wine bottle holders, among others.

With a production capacity of one ton per product, the company can effectively meet market demand, and their workforce of 20 individuals, consisting of both operational and managerial staff, ensures efficient production and management activities.

The team comprises five women and fifteen men, including ten youths and five skilled adults. Emphasizing eco-friendliness, Joy Horn Crafts prioritizes the use of cow horn, an organic material that is biodegradable and does not harm the environment.

“The CIIE that Joy Horn Crafts attended in November 2023 in Shanghai was a profoundly exhilarating experience, marking their entry into a vast market in China. We managed to make sales at the expo and attend business matchmaking meetings that connected us to potential partners interested in trading crafts made from horn. Despite not being directly related to their line of business, many of these partners expressed keen interest in collaboration.

The CIIE affirmed the immense potential of the Chinese market, motivating Joy Horn Crafts to establish a presence through partners and introduce their horn products into the Chinese market.

Access to markets in cities like Changsha and Shanghai has given us a motive to maintain high-quality standards to meet the expectations of the Chinese consumers.”

— Mr. Timothy Ssenkandwa, Head of Operation, Joy Horn Crafts, Uganda



Mr. Timothy Ssenkandwa at the Expo, introducing horn products to visitors

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## INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE (ITC)

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint organization of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC was founded in 1964. It is the only international agency in the United Nations system fully dedicated to strengthening the international competitiveness of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). ITC is committed to contributing to inclusive and sustainable economic development and to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

## UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION (UNOSSC)

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1974, was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to advocate for and coordinate South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system-wide basis.

UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. The UNOSSC Strategic Framework is presented every four years to the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS.



*Exhibitor booths of Kyrgyzstan, Comoros, and Malawi at the 6<sup>th</sup> CIE in Shanghai.*





### **For more information**

United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC): [www.unsouthsouth.org](http://www.unsouthsouth.org)

International Trade Centre (ITC): [www.intracen.org](http://www.intracen.org)

China International Import Expo (CIIE) Bureau: [www.ciie.org](http://www.ciie.org)

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