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CHINA INTERNATIONAL
IMPORT EXPO

虹桥国际经济论坛
HONGQIAO INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC FORUM

Trade HER Way:

How ITC Empowers Women Entrepreneurs
from Developing Economies into
International Trade at CIIE



*International Trade Centre
Transforming trade.
Changing lives.*



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INTRODUCTION

The China International Import Expo (CIIE) is a national-level platform hosted by China to promote global trade openness and inclusive economic cooperation. Since its inception in 2018, CIIE has been held annually in Shanghai, serving as a catalyst for cross-border partnerships and market integration. The trade fair features a Country Exhibition, Business Exhibition, the Hongqiao International Economic Forum, and specialized sectoral events, which together have facilitated over USD \$350 billion in cumulative intended deals as of 2023.

The CIIE's unique value lies in its role as a platform for empowering underrepresented groups in global trade particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from developing countries. In recent years, women entrepreneurs have emerged as key players within this ecosystem. Despite facing systemic barriers—such as limited access to finance, networks, and market intelligence—female-led enterprises have used CIIE to break into international value chains, driving job creation and strengthening community resilience.

This report, "Trade HER Way : How ITC Empowers Women Entrepreneurs from Developing Economies into International Trade at CIIE", documents how women-led businesses from the Global South have leveraged CIIE to transform challenges into growth opportunities. Supported by the Trade Promotion Between China and Other Developing Countries Along the Belt and Road Initiative, a project implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) and supported by the Government of the People's Republic of China, these entrepreneurs secured export contracts, attracted investments, and adopted sustainable technologies. Their experiences align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work), demonstrating that inclusive trade facilitation is key to equitable development.

Through case studies, this publication highlights:

- Strategies used by women entrepreneurs to navigate complex markets;
- CIIE's role in amplifying their visibility and competitiveness;
- Tangible impacts on income diversification, skills transfer, and women's economic agency.

As CIIE enters its eighth edition, this report emphasizes the imperative to mainstream gender-responsive approaches in South-South trade cooperation—ensuring that women are not merely participants, but architects of sustainable global trade.

SUCCESS STORIES OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AT CIE

CIE Story from Ecuador: Agroapoyo Barnana

CIE EXPERIENCE

María Isabel González, Vice President of Supply Chain and Sustainable Business at Agroapoyo Barnana, participated in CIE 2023 to explore China's growing market, leveraging Ecuador's recent free trade agreement to target agri-food opportunities. During the expo, the team conducted product tastings to refine textures and flavors based on direct consumer feedback, revealing key market insights: plantain snacks had low recognition (often confused with bananas), while cassava resonated better with Chinese consumers. Notably, they observed strong demand for natural snacks with clean labels. The event enabled valuable B2B connections, including strategic meetings with Tao Bao and Tmall to strengthen the company's digital market entry. To navigate complex import regulations, the team partnered with a local advisory firm. With labeling translated and Chinese custom registration completed, the company is now export-ready for the Chinese market.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Agroapoyo Barnana is a purpose-driven Ecuadorian enterprise producing innovative, healthy banana and plantain snacks with a farm-to-shelf commitment to environmental and social impact. As a leader in the natural snack segment, it is FSSC22000-certified and sources regeneratively grown ingredients through partnerships with 1,400 small Amazonian farmers. The company operates with a 28-

person production team and has established significant U.S. market penetration, distributing to over 14,000 points of sale including Whole Foods, Costco, and Walmart. Its product line features distinctively flavored, kettle-cooked chips—such as Cosmic Churro Plantain and Sea Salt Cassava—crafted with simple, gluten-free formulations, zero added sugar, and RSPO-certified palm oil. With a 12-month shelf life and paleo-friendly recipes, the brand stays true to its Amazonian roots while reaching for global markets.



China represents a transformative opportunity for Latin American agri-food innovation. Our participation confirmed the importance of adapting to local preferences, whether through label compliance or flavor profiles, while staying true to our mission of delivering natural, impactful snacks. Moving forward, we're energized to build lasting bridges: adjusting product labels, engaging consumers via WeChat, and amplifying our presence through Tmall and annual trade shows. True impact starts with local roots and a global vision—we're committed to sharing Ecuador's richness with China and growing value beyond borders.

---María Isabel González

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. María Isabel González

Email: migonzalez@agroapoyo.com

CIIE Story from Nepal: Best Himalaya Export Pvt Ltd

CIIE EXPERIENCE

Motivated by a dual mission to showcase Nepal’s artistic heritage and empower marginalized female artisans, Best Himalaya Export participated in CIIE 2024 to create global market access and promote ethical trade. Their handcrafted Tibetan singing bowls and felt products drew strong interest, with the team actively engaging in matchmaking events and exchanging contacts. The exhibition offered invaluable insights into Chinese consumer psychology and market trends, helping shape the company’s future strategies. Building on post-event connections, the company secured two partners from Yiwu—including a shop specializing in singing bowls—and has already shipped two orders (RMB ¥5,000 each) to China.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Best Himalaya Export Pvt Ltd is a socially driven enterprise specializing in handcrafted Tibetan singing bowls and felt/wool items (decor, toys, DIY kits). Anchored in fair trade principles, its mission centers on empowering rural Nepalese artisans—particularly women—through sustainable employment while preserving cultural craftsmanship. The company operates with 20 office staff and supports approximately 200 skilled artisans, combining traditional techniques with agile operations. Unique strengths include high-volume production without quality compromise, 24/7 communication, peak-season reliability, and rapid custom sampling (within 24 hours). With 13 years of experience, the brand prioritizes eco-friendly practices, customer satisfaction, and global cultural exchange, targeting markets in China, North America, Europe, and Australia.



Participating in the China International Import Expo provided us a vital platform to showcase Nepalese craftsmanship on an global stage. Through face-to-face interactions and matchmaking sessions, we gained practical insights into offline B2B dynamics and Chinese consumer preferences. These learnings—from deal-making nuances to understanding local demand—are already shaping how we adapt our approach. Moving forward, we're committed to serving this market more effectively, ensuring our products not only share Nepal's heritage but also create tangible opportunities for the artisans behind them.

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Usha Duwadi

Email: besthimalayasupply@gmail.com

CIIE Story from Rwanda: M&M Sozo Ltd

CIIE EXPERIENCE

M&M Sozo Ltd, led by Grace Mbabazi, participated in the Shanghai exhibition (November 2–18, 2024) with support from the ITC, aiming to build new market connections for Rwandan honey in China’s cosmetics, pastry, and wholesale sectors. Spanning Shanghai, Jinhua, and Yiwu, the two-week event focused on forging B2B partnerships, enhancing branding through storytelling, and improving global awareness of Rwandan honey’s purity. Key achievements included successful matchmaking sessions with potential buyers and increased visibility for women-led brands, though language barriers posed communication challenges. Post-exhibition, insights on technology and market access are set to inform modern beekeeping innovation in Rwanda, with plans to scale up professional production. Grace emphasized the importance of stronger pre-event coordination between ITC, the Rwanda Beekeepers Association, and national bodies to optimize future participation.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

M&M Sozo Ltd is a Rwandan beekeeping and honey processing enterprise founded by Grace Mbabazi, with its legal headquarters in Kigali and apiaries located across Huye, Gisagara, and Kayonza districts. The company specializes in 100% pure, raw floral honey and is committed to environmental sustainability through healthy bee cultivation practices. As a women-led venture, its mission is to become the leading supplier of high-quality hive products while supporting local ecosystems. Currently focused on packaged honey as its core offering, M&M Sozo combines competitive pricing with rigorous quality standards to reach diverse markets.



Our debut at China's exhibition was a milestone—fruitful for our team and pivotal for Rwandan honey's global journey. Through ITC's SheTrade initiative, we connected with international buyers and amplified our story, proving purity resonates across borders. While language hurdles highlighted the importance of language preparation, the matchmaking sessions unveiled immense potential. Moving forward, we'll channel these insights into modernizing Rwanda's beekeeping sector, ensuring every hive strengthens both our environment and economy.

---Director General Grace Mbabazi

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Grace Mbabazi

Email: info@sozohoney.rw/mmsozold@gmail.com

CIIE Story from Zambia: Namayo Jewellery

CIIE EXPERIENCE

Namayo's participation in the CIIE was driven by the critical need to overcome long-standing market access barriers, particularly the high costs of international expos that had constrained growth. With ITC's support, the Expo became a transformative gateway to the Chinese market. Key outcomes included direct networking with African peers, forging strategic partnerships, and gaining valuable insights into China's e-commerce ecosystems such as Alibaba, Tmall and local social media platforms. Pre-expo training on Chinese business customs proved instrumental in facilitating deeper engagement with consumers and buyers. Real-time interactions revealed market preferences and unlocked tangible opportunities—culminating in concrete buying leads and a lasting partnership with a Hong Kong-based distributor, extending Namayo's reach beyond China.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Namayo Jewellery is a Lusaka-based social enterprise empowering marginalized women through sustainable bead-weaving livelihoods. Founded on a mission to boost economic diversity and gender equality, the brand employs five formerly unemployed artisans who handcraft over 30 unique designs that fuses traditional techniques with contemporary aesthetics—featuring vibrant beads and 24k gold-plated finishes. Each piece helps fund essentials like education and housing, directly impacting 50 lives since 2023. Aiming to become a global African jewelry icon, Namayo leverages e-commerce platforms like Alibaba to penetrate the Chinese market. A recent

partnership secured through the CIIE with a Hong Kong distributor is accelerating this vision, enabling cross-border distribution and amplifying the brand's socio-economic impact.



CIIE was more than an exhibition; it was a gateway to global possibilities for Namayo. It transformed our understanding of market access and deepened our commitment to empowering women—one bead, and one life, at a time. This experience has crystallized our path forward: leveraging partnerships and digital channels to share African artistry with the world while creating ripples of change where it matters most.

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Nyawa Chipalabela

Email: sales@namayojewellery.com

CIIE Story from Kenya: Naskia Handmade

CIIE EXPERIENCE

Caroline Njoki's debut at CIIE 2023 marked a transformative milestone for Naskia Handmade in Africa. Driven by the goal of securing international recognition for indigenous Kenyan crafts in Asia's thriving markets, the event revealed the immense potential of global trade networks, inspiring her community of women artisans and stakeholders to carve out a niche in China. Post-CIIE outcomes exceeded expectations: exports to China and broader Asia surged by 74% year-on-year, eight B2B partnerships were secured across three Chinese regions, and four Chinese delegations travelled to Kenya for cultural exchanges with grassroots collectives. These achievements, alongside active efforts to establish a concept store in Shanghai, underscore how the CIIE unlocked unprecedented growth while affirming the global appeal of sustainable African craftsmanship.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Naskia Handmade in Africa, founded by Caroline Njoki, is a Nairobi-based women-led social enterprise curating contemporary African crafts—from jewelry and clothing to décor—sourced ethically from artisans across East, Central, and Southern Africa. Operating through a boutique concept store and a lean team of 10 women, the brand bridges tradition and modernity, commercializing Africa's cultural heritage while

supporting sustainable livelihoods. With exports reaching eight countries across North America, Europe, and Asia, Naskia's vision now centers on expanding its Asian footprint—anchored in China and fueled by a culturally engaged, values-driven consumer base.



Show up to learn; show up to build; always show up. This exhibition proved that when African craftsmanship meets global platforms, magic happens—not just in export numbers, but in cross-cultural dialogues that uplift entire communities. Our journey from Nairobi to Shanghai embodies resilience, and we're just beginning.

---Caroline Njoki

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Caroline Njoki

Email: naskiasales@gmail.com

CIIE Story from Cambodia: New Idea Enterprise

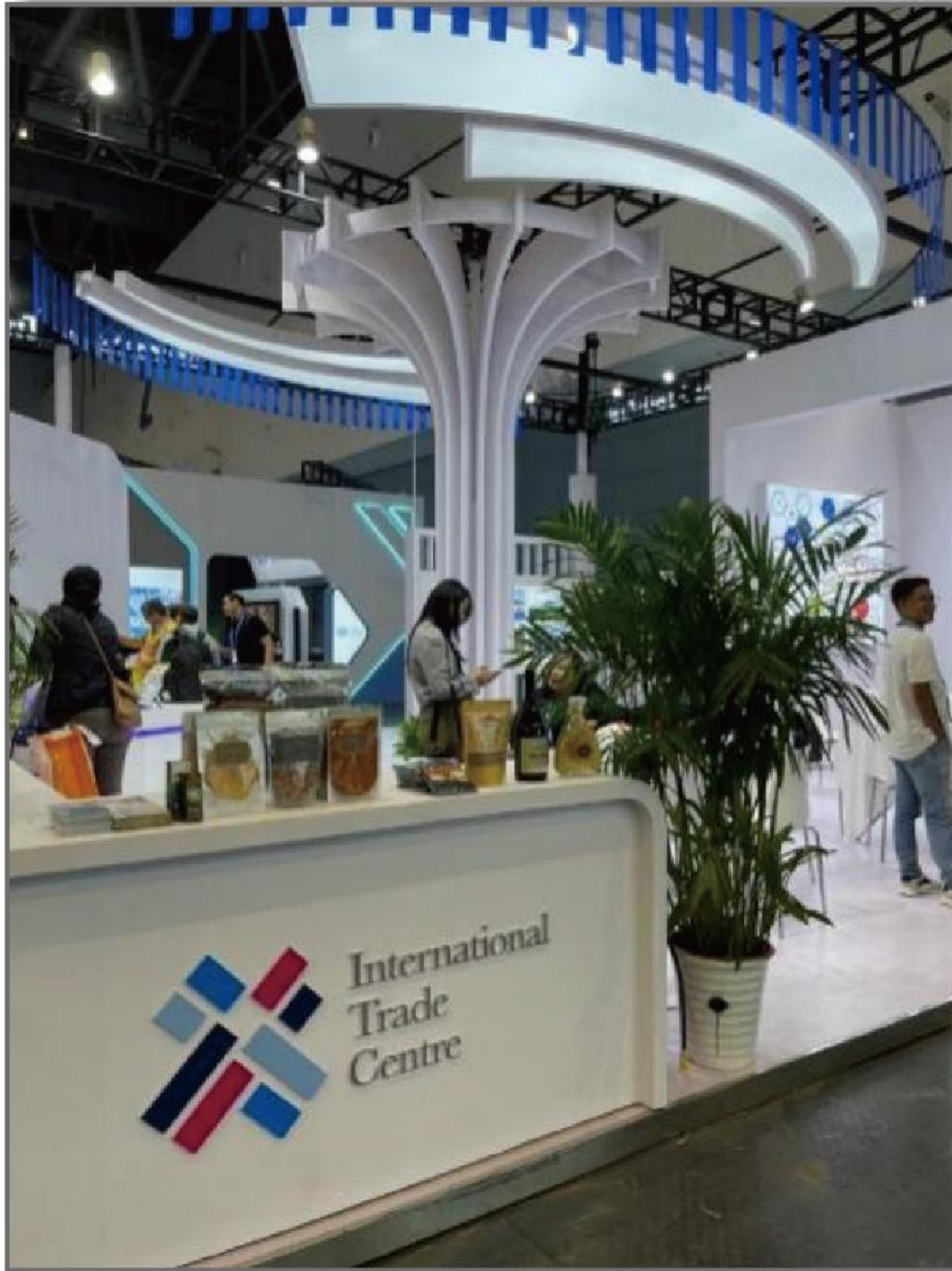
CIIE EXPERIENCE

Vouchleng Lim's participation in the CIIE was guided by a strategic goal: to introduce New Idea Enterprise's natural banana products to the Chinese market while exploring export pathways and partnerships. Although no direct buyers were secured during the expo, the experience offered invaluable insights into consumer expectations and competitive dynamics. Networking with industry contacts highlighted the critical need for product localization and deeper market research to navigate China's vast and competitive landscape. Key challenges included identifying reliable partners and adapting to local preferences—lessons that have since refined the company's future entry strategy. Moving forward, New Idea plans to deepen market research, leverage digital platforms, and maintain visibility through trade events to build a sustainable presence in China.



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

New Idea Enterprise is a Cambodian agro-processing venture specializing in natural banana-based products such as banana candy and banana sugar. With a mission to showcase local agricultural richness through sustainable, high-quality goods, the company operates with a dedicated 10-member team committed to ethical sourcing and community-focused practices. Their unique strengths lie in blending traditional ingredients with product innovation to develop globally distinctive flavors. As it targets expansion across Asia and Europe, New Idea sees China as a key growth market and is actively pursuing omnichannel distribution strategies.



Participating in CIIE gave me invaluable insights into China's market potential. While our path forward requires persistence, the experience has sharpened our approach and reinforced our commitment to building meaningful connections. Every interaction taught us that success here demands adaptability—and we're more determined than ever to share Cambodia's banana innovation with Chinese consumers.

----Vouchleng Lim

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Vouchleng Lim

Email: kumneth.thmey2013@gmail.com

CIIE Story from the Philippines: Bebebalm, Inc.

CIIE EXPERIENCE

Carol Ong's participation in the CIIE as a mother-entrepreneur was fueled by her mission to gain international recognition for Bebebalm – a natural skincare line born from addressing her own child's eczema. With ITC's support, this micro-enterprise overcame initial financial constraints to stand alongside global industry leaders, turning a distant dream into a pivotal growth opportunity. Key milestones included securing a strategic partnership with CAMEX China for year-round product display, receiving media coverage in Chinese outlets, and joining the SheTrades network. While finding a distributor remains an ongoing journey, Carol embraced the learning-curve: practicing negotiations, refining pricing strategies, and navigating cross-cultural connections with fellow entrepreneurs. Her post-CIIE ambitions now include global expos, inspired by a deeper self-belief: "I came in to get awareness for Bebebalm; I came out with awareness of what I can become."



COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Bebebalm Inc., founded by "Mommy Carol" Ong and "Daddy Doc Mike," revolutionizes family skincare with Philippine herbal remedies modernized for babies, kids, and mothers. Their natural rescue products, addressing eczema, itch relief, and hair care, are driven by a mission to "give a little comfort to save the day" for growing families. Operating with a small but dedicated, female-majority team of five, Bebebalm delivers outside community impact: supporting medical missions in marine

sanctuaries, collaborating with coast guard volunteers on coral propagation, and donating skincare products to children of migrant workers. Targeting discerning urban mothers, the brand combines ethical formulation with heartfelt purpose.



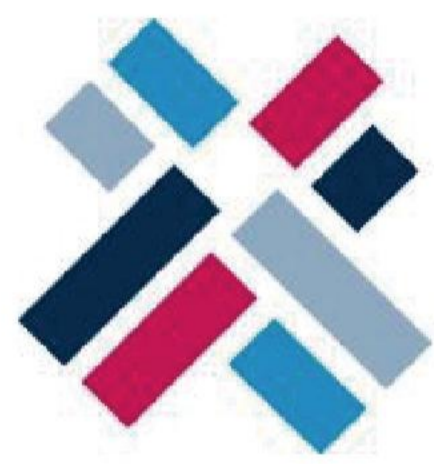
CIIE taught me that micro-entrepreneurs belong on the world stage. Through ITC, I discovered not just new markets, but new dimensions of my own potential. Every handshake at that pavilion – whether with CAMEX partners or fellow mompreneurs – whispered that our mission to comfort families can cross oceans. World domination? It starts with showing up.

----Carol Ong

CONTACT

Entrepreneur: Ms. Carol Ong

Email: hello.bebebalm@gmail.com



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Trade HER Way: ITC's Bridge to China's Market at CIIE

How ITC Empowers Women
Entrepreneurs from Developing
Economies into International Trade