

# Gender

## 31,000 Women-owned SMEs get support

By Maclean Kwofi

**A** FIVE-year West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) has ended with a significant impact on improving the businesses of 31,000 women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country.

The women-led SMEs represented more than 63 per cent of the 48,849 businesses that benefited from the project which had continuously

improved their competitiveness to access national and international markets.

With a budget of €6.35 million, the initiative aimed to improve the competitiveness of the cassava, mango, pineapple, cosmetics and personal care products value chain.

The project also ensured that more than 500 SMEs could be linked to financial institutions to access appropriate and affordable credit schemes of up to GH¢4 million.

The WACOMP was implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and funded by the European Union

(EU).

### Proof of investments

The Ambassador of the European Union to Ghana, Irchad Razaaly, at the closing ceremony in Accra stated that WACOMP would forever stand as proof that investment in SMEs, agro-business and private sector development was a win for the local entrepreneurs, the government and Ghanaians.

He said WACOMP aimed to enhance value-addition and create conditions to increase the access of Ghanaian businesses to regional and international markets.

From ensuring sustainable and green manufacturing practices to awarding matching grants, he said the EU left no stone unturned in its quest to support Ghana's agribusiness sector.

"By promoting sustainable development, fostering a culture of innovation and enhancing the business environment, we have laid a solid foundation for continued growth and prosperity in the region.

"Over the past five years, WACOMP supported over 100 projects, benefiting thousands of entrepreneurs, small businesses and communities across the region," he added.

### Excellent results

The Project Manager of UNIDO, Ebe Muschialli, said the project had so far achieved excellent results, thanks to the very comprehensive and innovative approach of WACOMP Ghana.

She said the impact on Ghanaian SMEs had been tremendous and would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of all the national partners and the precious support of the Ministry of Industry and the EU.

Ms Muschialli said the EU-funded WACOMP was a partnership initiative between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the EU.

She said it contributed to regional economic integration and underscored the EU's commitment to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

with West Africa.

"In Ghana, the programme was implemented by UNIDO in coordination with the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI)," she added.

Using UNIDO's five Cs for competitiveness which include coordinate, compete, conform, connect and credit, WACOMP improved production, quality compliance, competitiveness and market access of SMEs in the cosmetics, personal care, cassava and fruits sectors.

### High-quality goods

The Chief Director of the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI), Patrick Yaw Nimo, stated that numerous Ghanaian businesses had enhanced their capabilities to produce high-quality goods through the WACOMP.

He said the businesses were previously struggling to compete globally due to limited guidance on implementing processes and meeting market standards.

### New standards

Thanks to the project, 16 new standards have been developed and promoted to enhance the quality and consumer protection of cosmetics and personal care, cassava products both in and outside Ghana.

Also, the Cosmetics Laboratory of the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) and the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) are now accredited for ISO 17025, allowing Ghanaian products to be exported with the required certifications.



• Irchad Razaaly (inset), EU Ambassador to Ghana, addressing participants in the event