

Businesswomen tackle obstacles with ICTs

London

ASSISTING women entrepreneurs in overcoming business obstacles using information and communications technologies (ICTs) is the focus of a project being launched by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN) in four African countries.

Under the two-year initiative - named Link-IT - four volunteers recruited through the Secretariat's Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) will be posted to Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. They will assess the needs of women entrepreneurs, help set up business networks, develop websites, and provide ICT training based on initial needs assessments.

The volunteers - from The Gambia, India, Kenya and Sri Lanka - have expertise in business, management, industry and ICT.

"The project is part of the Secretariat's efforts to assist member countries in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. By working on increasing the participation of women in business as well as helping them perform better, we hope to contribute towards poverty alleviation," said Julius Kaberere, Chief Programme Officer at the Secretariat's Governance and Institutional Development Division, which runs CSAP.

Starting next January, the volunteers will gather data on existing frameworks for businesswomen in the four countries. They will create databases of women entrepreneurs, support groups, non-governmental organisations and government departments. Country meetings will be convened to discuss constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and a report produced with recommendations on how to overcome the obstacles.

The volunteers will also help set up a network of businesswomen, government representatives and NGOs with local and international links.

They will assist in developing websites and conduct ICT training for women entrepreneurs, including a segment on the innovative use of ICT solutions for business. Entrepreneurs will also receive training in expanding business, networking for business, and building links with markets.