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**Governments urged to help small businesses fulfil their international potential**

The failure of many small businesses to develop international trade opportunities is a major challenge for governments and business owners says ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), which has published a paper outlining the essential measures to enable them to enjoy more success.

[*Tapping into SME international potential*](http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/acca/global/PDF-technical/small-business/pol-tp-tisip.pdf) has been issued by ACCA’s Global Forum for SMEs (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises) and makes recommendations for increasing SME presence in international trade.

It calls on governments to recognise that the internationalisation of SMEs is not only about export, but also takes the form of import, foreign direct investment , international sub-contracting and technical co-operation, and says that policies, and business support networks need to reflect this.

Governments, international institutions and business associations should also work to have a better understanding of the part played by SMEs in global supply chains and encourage their activity.

The paper also calls on governments to work together to remove barriers to cross-border trade to enable small firms to access international markets.

Initiatives by the European Union, the Caribbean Community, the Association of Southeast Asian Nation and the Southern African Development Community should be used as a policy vehicle to enable SMEs to take their products and services to wider markets.

Governments should co-ordinate their efforts to create infrastructures relating to standards, intellectual property rights, financial market, dispute resolution and regulation to enhance global trade, and SME participation in it. There is also a need for Governments to focus on the domestic business environment and look at tariffs and other potential barriers.

There is also a need for SMEs to make better use of advisers, such as accountants. ACCA, for example, has a global network of members who could make those connections.

With research showing that the banks’ specialist export products are heavily under-used by SMEs, possibly because they do not meet their needs, and with banks not always being good at cascading information on the niche products to all managers and branches, both governments and financial institutions need to ensure that the export finance offered is relevant to SMEs, as well as being affordable.

There is also a need for governments to understand how SMEs grow in their domestic markets first before seeking to develop elsewhere, and there is a need for policy makers and SMEs to look at how, by working together in networks or clusters they can pool resources, expertise and experience for developing international opportunities.

Mark Gold, Chairman of ACCA’s Global Forum for SMEs, said: “While there is a common misconception that international trade is only for larger businesses, the reality is that many SMEs are successful in cross border activity. However, many feel excluded from the opportunities that export and import can bring, which is why we have developed this paper calling on governments, policy makers, financial institutions and advisers to think small first to enable SMEs to think big.”

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**Notes to Editors**

1. ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global body for professional accountants. We aim to offer business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to people of application, ability and ambition around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management.
2. We support our **162,000** members and **426,000** students in **173** countries, helping them to develop successful careers in accounting and business, with the skills required by employers. We work through a network of over **89** offices and centres and more than **8,500** Approved Employers worldwide, who provide high standards of employee learning and development. Through our public interest remit, we promote appropriate regulation of accounting and conduct relevant research to ensure accountancy continues to grow in reputation and influence.
3. Founded in 1904, ACCA has consistently held unique core values: opportunity, diversity, innovation, integrity and accountability. We believe that accountants bring value to economies in all stages of development and seek to develop capacity in the profession and encourage the adoption of global standards. Our values are aligned to the needs of employers in all sectors and we ensure that through our qualifications, we prepare accountants for business. We seek to open up the profession to people of all backgrounds and remove artificial barriers, innovating our qualifications and delivery to meet the diverse needs of trainee professionals and their employers.