

Donors' Statement for JAG on 25 November 2020 (Draft)

Secretary General Kituyi, Deputy Director General Agah, Executive Director Coke-Hamilton, distinguished Ambassadors

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to deliver a statement on behalf of donors -- Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. We are grateful to ITC for holding the 54th Joint Advisory Group meeting despite the current restrictions.

We commend ITC for its significant role in assisting the trade of developing countries and economies over half a century. ITC has not only been enhancing the international competitiveness of MSMEs, but also consistently tackling a wide range of economic, social and environmental problems.

Today, every individual, every company, and every country is placed in a very challenging situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. ITC is no exception. Despite this difficulty, ITC has continued to provide assistance to the most vulnerable in developing countries using a variety of digital tools. We fully appreciate its persistent efforts to help improve our economy and society.

Looking back at the activities of ITC in 2019, we commend the organization on the scope of its achievements. We welcome the six focus areas for assistance contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals and positive outcomes in each area. Especially in the area of "Connecting to International Value Chains," we would like to highlight the ecomConnect programme, which continues to add substantial value to MSMEs, even under this ongoing restricted environment.

ITC also committed itself to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by developing innovative instruments including the African Trade Observatory. Realizing the implementation of AfCFTA would largely expand economic

opportunities for all players in this region, and we believe that this is a crucial area for ITC going forward.

We also welcome the activities of the Innovation Lab with its first three-year strategy targeting three main domains: culture, projects, and partnerships. Innovation is always a key to dramatically elevate the effectiveness of projects, and we strongly hope that ITC will keep adding greater value to the beneficiaries in collaboration with various partners.

The expansion of outreach to the public both online and offline also drew our attention. In particular, ITC increased its total video views on social media by 41% and the volume of its printed publications by 37%. The public's understanding of ITC and its assistance is essential to maintain and enlarge its activities in the long term, so please continue its good work in this respect.

As supporters of ITC, we welcome ITC's achievement in 2019 of an approximately 32% increase in its extra budgetary funding from donors. We are pleased to know that ITC has steadily expanded its resources and enlarged its assistance for beneficiaries.

Taking this opportunity, we would like to emphasize three main points for the future work of ITC. There is always room for improvement to provide better assistance.

First, we encourage ITC to keep listening to the needs of beneficiaries. As the number of projects, donors, and subject areas expand, it gets harder to hear the actual voices of people in need. However, assistance must always be demand-driven and provided in order of priority. Please also make sure that ITC's programs are always coherent with its mission of creating "trade impact for good."

Second, we encourage ITC to enhance communication with current and future partners. Communication with other trade and development organizations could provide more synergies, which lead to more effective and efficient assistance.

Communication with businesses could create new partnerships and/or funding sources for specific programs. Communication with academics could offer a better quantitative and qualitative method of measuring the impact of projects.

Third, we encourage ITC to further help developing countries improve their capacity and infrastructure for digital trade. E-commerce is key to recovery from the current economic downturn and further economic development in the post COVID-19 era. However, as we often hear in international fora, many developing countries lack sufficient capacity to enjoy the benefits of e-commerce. We should not leave any country behind from global development, and we highly expect ITC to help equip these countries with better digital environments. This is also an area where ITC can collaborate more with other organizations, including the WTO as a forum to create new rules and UNCTAD as another provider of trade-related assistance, together with businesses as actual players in the digital economy.

In closing, we express our appreciation to Executive Director Coke-Hamilton, her management team, and all the experts at ITC for their unwavering commitment to helping develop businesses in developing countries. We trust that, going forward, you will further increase your contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic development.

At this meeting, Japan hands over the role of donor coordinator to the Netherlands. We express our gratitude to ITC and other donors for your support and cooperation throughout our term. Japan will continue to contribute to the global economy in cooperation with ITC and other organizations and countries.

Thank you.