

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE NETHERLANDS TRUST FUND (NTF) PHASE IV-EXPORT SECTOR COMPETITIVENESS PROGRAMME

Final Evaluation Report

Prepared for
International Trade Centre

April 2022



LE GROUPE CONSEIL BAASTEL

This evaluation report makes reference to the following SDGs:



Le Groupe-conseil baastel Itée

Rue de la Loi, 28 - 1000 Brussels, Belgium

92, rue Montcalm, Gatineau QC, Canada

P: +32 (0)2 893 0032

E: alexandre.daoust@baastel.com

W: www.baastel.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	IV
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation	1
1.2 Evaluation Process and Methodology.....	1
2. NTF IV PROGRAMME	6
2.1 Background and Rationale.....	6
2.2 Objectives of the NTF IV Programme	7
2.3 NTF IV Programme Theory of Change and Logical Framework	7
2.4 NTF IV Projects.....	14
2.5 Programme and Project Governance	14
3. FINDINGS.....	15
3.1 Relevance	15
3.2 Coherence.....	23
3.3 Effectiveness	28
3.4 Cross-cutting issues	40
3.5 Efficiency	43
3.6 Impact.....	48
3.7 Sustainability	54
4. LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICE	59
5. CONCLUSIONS	60
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	62

ACRONYMS

AGUIPEX	Agence guinéenne de Promotion des Exportations
ASEPEX	Agence sénégalaise de Promotion des Exportations
ATIS	Alliance of Trade in Information Technology and Services
B2B	Business to Business
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
BSO	Business Support Organization
CBI	Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries
CBT	Community-based Tourism
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DEI	Division of Enterprises and Institutions
DER	Délégation à l'entrepreneuriat rapide
ED	Executive Director
ET	Evaluation Team
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FT	Fair Trade
FTR	Foreign Trade Representative
GoU	Government of Uganda
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTAU	Information and Communication Technology Association of Uganda
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
IO	Intermediate Outcome
IR	Inception Report
IT	Information Technology
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITES	Information Technology-Enabled Services
LDC	Least Developed Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MRU	Mano River Union
MSC	Most Significant Change
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
MTM	Myanmar Tourism Marketing
MOC	Ministry of Commerce

MOHT	Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (Myanmar)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRTI	Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute
NITA-U	National Information Technology Authority - Uganda
NPC	National Project Coordinator
NTF	Netherlands Trust Fund
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OH	Outcome Harvesting
OPTIC	Organisation des Professionnels des technologies de l'information et de la communication au Sénégal
OS	Online Survey
PAP 2	Plan d'Actions Prioritaires 2
PMB	Produce Monitoring Board
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
PTC	DiamniadioTechnopark
QAA	Quality Assurance Advisor
RBM	Results-based Management
ROI	Return on Investment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEC	Sector and Enterprise Competitiveness Section
SECO	Swiss State Secretariat of Economic Affairs
SG	Steering Group
SLIEPA	Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TISI	Trade and Investment Support Institution
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UEPB	Uganda Export Promotion Board
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UMTA	Union of Myanmar Travel Association
VA2T	Value Added to Trade
VC	Value Chain
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose, Objective, and Scope of the Evaluation

1. The Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) Phase IV - Export Sector Competitiveness Programme, was a four-year (2017-2021) programme implemented in six least developed countries (LDCs), including Guinea, Liberia, Myanmar, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. The NTF IV Programme was funded by the government of The Netherlands with a total budget of USD 10,288,701 and was implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC).
2. The evaluation was commissioned and managed by the ITC Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) and carried out between July 2021 and April 2022 by a team representing the independent consulting firm Le Groupe-conseil baastel ltée. The evaluation was designed to assess NTF IV performance against the intended outcomes and intermediate outcomes of each project, as set out in their logical frameworks. It also sought to determine the extent to which the projects contributed to the overall programme theory of change (ToC). The evaluation examined the NTF IV programme relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, value for money, and sustainability.
3. The evaluation covered all NTF IV projects contributing to the programme between 1 October 2017 up to 30 June 2021.

Brief Overview of the Methodology

4. The evaluation was framed in the first instance by theory-based contribution analysis which assessed the extent to which the four NTF IV projects that made up the programme contributed to achieving its intended outputs, intermediate outcomes, outcome, and impact. The evaluation also provides specific recommendations geared to inform subsequent phases of the NTF programme (including NTF V, launched in July 2021).
5. The Baastel team applied the evaluation methodology in a manner that was participatory and iterative, flexible, utility-focused, gender-sensitive, and equity-focused, as well as using a mix of data collection methods.
6. The evaluation started with an inception phase, during which the inception report and data collection tools were agreed upon and developed. During the subsequent data collection phase, the evaluation team (ET) carried out an in-depth document review, an online survey that garnered 62 usable responses, 85 key-informant interviews, 5 focus group discussions, and direct observation in the field. Data was then carefully analysed and triangulated to produce this draft report. The draft report presents all elements of the evaluation report and is commented on by ITC's Independent Evaluation Unit, followed by the NTF IV programme managers. Once these two sets of comments have been integrated by the ET, a final evaluation report of sent to the ITC.

Limitations

7. Several limitations affected the evaluation process, but the ET was able to adopt mitigation strategies to ensure they did not undermine the quality of data collection or the final product. The political turmoil in Myanmar that halted project implementation in its final months also hindered evaluation activities, but the ET's international and national consultants were nevertheless able to contact individuals closely associated with the project and ITC staff. The COVID-19 pandemic required most data collection to be conducted remotely everywhere except in the Mano River Union (MRU) region to protect consultants and stakeholders alike; however, evaluators reached stakeholders by phone, videoconferencing, and email. In some cases, contacting stakeholders was initially slowed because NTF IV field staff were not aware of the need to support the ET by introducing the evaluation process and facilitating contacts. After the ET explained the process, coordination ran more smoothly. In the end, a representative number of stakeholders were reached in each country.

8. Limited programme-level information on results and on Programme Management¹ created challenges for the ET in assessing how programme management processes contributed to overall implementation, but available evidence was used to support some findings in this area. Finally, NTF V had already been launched when this evaluation was being conducted, which meant that its programme management teams did not have access to the findings and recommendations of this evaluation to inform the programme design. Nonetheless, NTF V management made it clear, in reaction to the circulation of the first draft of the evaluation report, that “[management can] make improvements and slight changes in processes while [the programme is] already underway with NTF V, so the learnings of the evaluation will still be taken into account.”

Findings

9. **The overall rating of the NTF IV Programme is satisfactory².** NTF IV successfully built on lessons and achievements from NTF III as well as previous phases to make significant progress towards programme and project outcomes. This was commendable, particularly in light of the major challenges that emerged over the project lifecycle, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Myanmar’s political crisis. It reflected a strong commitment by programme staff and other stakeholders to taking the real needs of various categories of beneficiaries into account to ensure delivery of high quality, relevant programme activities and outputs. By taking forward partnerships and learning from this phase, the programme is well-placed to continue contributing to improved livelihoods in the target countries and sectors where NTF V is continuing its work (namely, Senegal and Myanmar). Nevertheless, although the programme design was set to address the multi-stakeholder ecosystem surrounding the MSMEs as well as the latter themselves to ensure their competitiveness, the approach was less holistic than planned overall.

Relevance: ET rating - Satisfactory

Conclusions on Relevance

10. Overall, the answers provided to the key evaluation questions linked to relevance were positive and the ET considers that the programme and, in particular, its projects, were relevant in their context to a satisfactory degree. There were some alignment issues between the programme and the projects with the SDGs and the integration of cross-cutting themes.
11. Programme relevance was evident in NTF IV’s overall alignment with national plans and priorities in its sectors of intervention, as well as its responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders and the contexts in which they work. Stakeholders welcomed the programme’s participatory and consultative approach, which contributed to the relevance of project-level activities and approaches. However, delaying scoping missions to identify stakeholder needs and analyse sector contexts until after the programme had started meant that valuable, up-to-date input was not available during programme and project design.
12. Nevertheless, weaknesses in needs assessment and scoping during the design phase may have led to some missed opportunities – for example, in the development of activities tailored to achieving results related to cross-cutting issues such as gender, youth, environment, human rights, and social protection. Nonetheless, the evaluation found that programme and project management was sufficiently flexible to make adjustments “en route,” based on consultations that took place after implementation started. This flexibility was critical to ensuring the relevance of the initiative.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Relevance

- It was found that the programme design and its implementation were aligned with national policies, strategies, and sector plans.

¹ Programme management was separately financed, with a budget of USD 974,950.

² Further details on the six-point rating system for evaluation can be found in the [ITC Evaluation Guidelines](#).

- The NTF IV objectives and design, adapted from the programme to the projects' levels, responded well to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities. ToCs were developed at the project level—with some weaknesses—and a common results chain was established at the programme level. The evaluation established a programme ToC based on these elements because aside from the results framework, none existed.
- Many respondents from the public sector, BSOs, and SMEs, who were consulted during the evaluation reported that project support was aligned with their needs and priorities as well as their level of "maturity." Others, despite an overall positive appreciation of the support provided, felt some of the support was not fully adapted to their reality. Design phase consultations did not always include all actors and sometimes took place when the project was already underway, so projects continued adapting their approaches after implementation had started.
- The details of implementation such as the process for selecting partners, beneficiaries, sites, etc.) were planned during the project lifecycle, in a participatory manner, involving BSOs and some government and SME representatives. In a few instances, some politicization was noted during the planning period.
- Overall programme management played a positive role in ensuring the relevance of the programme and of each project. Beyond the selection process, the SG under NTF IV continued to make an important contribution to ensuring individual projects were on track to reach their results. However, the ET found that, as for much of how the programme was organized, even the programme management was very focused on the project level.
- In Uganda and Myanmar, where NTF IV was implemented in the same sector as NTF III, the lessons learned from the preceding phase usually created a solid foundation for the projects.
- Alignment with SDGs was noted although this was not reported on fully. SDG alignment, which was greater for some SDGs and targets than others, was modest but in keeping with programme scope and budget. Cross-cutting themes received unequal treatment at the planning stage, a missed opportunity for stronger programmatic results.

Coherence: ET rating - Moderately Satisfactory

Conclusions on Coherence

13. Internal coherence was generally strong considering the work with CBI and some other ITC projects. However, in terms of external coherence, although there are some exceptions, generally speaking, coordination with other donors and partners was limited.
14. The programme demonstrated strong internal coherence, as exemplified in its coordination with CBI initiatives to take advantage of potential synergies and combine forces where possible across all the projects. The Letter of Intent signed between ITC and CBI to ensure that MRU results attained under the NTF IV programme would be sustained via parallel projects in the cocoa sector implemented by CBI was a good example. Looking ahead, continued efforts to capitalize on complementarities of this kind will be important for maximizing achievements and coordination of all related initiatives. However, concerning the internal coherence at ITC, besides the SheTrades that was well integrated in Senegal and Uganda through relatively small projects, few other examples exist. For example, although the ITC project Alliance for Action was mentioned as a project that was to be integrated into the NTF IV MRU project, there was very little evidence of its coordinated implementation. Based on the review of the draft evaluation report, NTF IV management referenced a few examples of additional internal coherence. The ET found in a few documents the mention of other ITC branches' team members having provided input in the development of some projects' outputs.
15. The evaluation did not find evidence of *systematic* efforts during planning and design to identify external actors in the targeted sectors and countries and develop strategies for working with

them. The ET refers to external actors outside the programme and projects' realm. In other words, actors other than beneficiaries, partners, BSOs and public sector representatives such as external donors and implementing agencies. However, various isolated examples were noted in which the programme collaborated with others, for example on sector platforms and government or donor entities and initiatives. However, reflecting the absence of systematic programme or project strategies to leverage or contribute to the efforts of other actors³ – or to address the complex institutional, policy, and regulatory ecosystems in which the work was carried out – the tangible benefits of such collaboration were variable. Clearer and more official coordination with other development partners would likely have added value to the NTF IV projects through, among other pathways, generating more results in the private sector in a more efficient manner, by coordinating more closely with projects focusing on institutional capacity building.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Coherence

- The collaboration and coordination between ITC and CBI were praised by a large majority of respondents and the two agencies' approaches were considered complimentary. The same applies to the linkages between ITC's NTF IV and SheTrades in Senegal and Uganda. Although the two latter projects worked independently rather than in a fully coordinated manner, the outputs of both projects generated a win-win situations for stakeholders in the two initiatives.
- The use of a programmatic value chain approach supported internal coherence in two main ways: first, it ensured that all projects (including the CBI projects) would follow a similar approach, proven effective in previous NTF phases, and secondly that such an approach could be adapted to various value chains in different countries.
- Despite some positive examples, overall, there was limited evidence of external coherence between NTF IV and programmes or projects of other donors and agencies in the targeted countries.

Effectiveness: ET rating - Satisfactory⁴

Conclusions on Effectiveness

16. Each project performed somewhat differently in the context of each of the four intermediate outcomes. In other words, broadly, the programme and its projects have a preponderance of positive results (mainly for the MSMEs) with some shortcomings in certain areas, different for each project, but with some stronger linkages with the work done with public institutions as well as with the integration of cross-cutting issues.
17. The evaluation found that the NTF IV projects were broadly effective, producing planned outputs and contributing to planned outcomes summarized in the programme reconstructed ToC, in terms of increasing MSME competitiveness. In general, programme performance was strongest in relation to BSOs and even more in relation to MSMEs, under IOs 3 and 4 who benefited from activities such as training and other efforts to strengthen their capacity and increase their market opportunities through increased contact with buyers and improvements in productivity and quality.

³ In other words, complementarity, harmonization, coordination with others, and the extent to which the intervention is adding value while avoiding duplication of effort

⁴ The ET had initially rated Effectiveness of the overall programme at Moderately Satisfactory. In the first version of the report, the ratings were divided by intermediate outcomes and although the last two intermediate outcomes had a Satisfactory rating, the first two had Moderately Satisfactory; because of this, and also because little information is available on the programme management project, the overall rating was judged as Moderately Satisfactory. However, even though there are still some missing details, after considering some additional information and written arguments made by NTF IV programme management (e.g. additional output results reached with public sector partners in Senegal and Uganda, which can be found in the Audit Trail in Annex 10) the ET agreed to adjust the rating to Satisfactory.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Effectiveness

- All lines of evaluation evidence showed that the NTF IV programme was effective overall, producing planned outputs and contributing to planned outcomes summarized in the programme reconstructed ToC, in terms of increasing MSME competitiveness. Self-reported data shows the programme achieved most of its targets for the expected results and also contributed to some of ITC's corporate indicators.⁵
- However, the ET was unable to fully match the project-specific targets in the NTF IV programme proposal with the overall programme reporting in the final report.

Intermediate Outcome 1

18. There is evidence that, with some support from the NTF IV programme, policies and plans were developed and approved by policy makers and regulators to enhance the ecosystem and support the competitiveness of targeted SMEs.
19. However, results achieved for this IO were more limited than for other IOs, in part because COVID-19 affected this IO most (via slower and lower government responsiveness). Relatively weaker performance was observed on Intermediate Outcome 1, which related to enhancing the business environment for SME investment and exports, through institutional support. This was partly a result of the slowdown and diversion of government priorities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but may also have reflected weaker causal pathways from project-level activities to the expected project outcome. In other words, much of the projects' efforts went to the private sector (i.e., IOs 3 and 4) and although the results chain at the programme level presented a more holistic, ecosystem approach to implementation, this did not translate as strongly at project-level implementation.

Intermediate Outcome 2

20. Concerning intermediate outcome 2, broadly speaking, results were achieved as planned with the BSOs, key partners in the ecosystem to closely support the private sector, and the MSMEs particularly in their quest to become more competitive in the international market. Still, although more was accomplished with BSOs than with the public sector (IO 1), compared to MSMEs' related level of results, there were some shortcomings in IO 2.
21. Clear guidance for the enhancement of BSOs' service portfolio was noted by some respondents although the evaluation found some examples of shortcomings. The pace of progress on results achieved with the BSOs improved following the midterm self-evaluation. Enhanced governance of BSOs was noted in certain cases. However, it is not clear that the BSOs are fully equipped to fully support the MSMEs as was the case with the support of the projects. NTF IV adapted its approach to providing support during the COVID-19 pandemic (adopting online methods).

Intermediate Outcome 3

22. Broadly speaking, the ET concludes that the NTF IV projects successfully contributed to IO 3 and produced the most results under this intermediate outcome. The combined support from CBI and ITC led to enhanced competitiveness thanks to SMEs' improved understanding of the context they operate in (markets, value chain, management as well as overall ecosystem). Participating SMEs are better positioned to reach international norms and standards.
23. Project efforts on gender equality helped raise participating SMEs representatives' awareness on the issue and led, in a few instances, to change, such as the involvement of women in company boards.

⁵ ITC, November 2021. Draft Final Report. P. 17 – 20. Table replicated in Annex 7. It is to be noted that not all indicators mentioned in the Evaluation ToRs are reported in the report.

Intermediate Outcome 4

24. The ET also concludes that the NTF IV projects successfully contributed to IO 4. Overall, the projects covered the entire value chains, up to international markets. IO 4 was closely linked to IO 3, since, as business decisions improve and MSMEs and farmers become more competitive, they can position themselves better in their international sector value chains. Interaction between the two IOs shows some of the dynamics in the overall ToC. The evaluation found good results in terms of connectedness with international markets (e.g., through fairs and events). This also included, in certain circumstances, regional connections, which were considered important by many. Some concrete results were achieved in the form of new contracts or business deals, although some stakeholders noted that this was actually a missing final step.

Cross-Cutting Issues

25. In all projects, the integration of cross-cutting issues suffered from a lack of attention at the design stage, although this was compensated to varying degrees during implementation. Gender equality received the most emphasis, along with youth inclusion, but evaluation evidence in this area was relatively limited, in part due to the lack of gender-specific and sex-disaggregated monitoring indicators. It is not to say that there were no indicators, only that there were few, and that some that were supposed to be informed by disaggregated data, were not. In some cases, projects focused most on encouraging women's participation in numerical terms rather than promoting gender-specific results or fostering transformative change. Nevertheless, there was evidence of project work with women farmers and women-led SMEs in the different sectors and women participating on IT SME boards. The lack of a specific, programme design linked gender equality strategy based on a dedicated gender analysis at country and sector levels limited the extent to which the programme was able to address the gender dimensions of its planned outcomes. The situation was similar for other cross-cutting themes such as human rights and environmental considerations, which were also not systematically embedded in the programme.
26. The programme put more emphasis on gender equality and youth than other cross-cutting themes. In all projects, the ET found indicators of positive results in promoting economic opportunities for women and youth. However, the evaluation found few activities oriented to gender-specific or youth-oriented results and based on sector- or context-specific analysis. Disaggregated monitoring mainly focused on the numerical participation of women and youth.
27. A lack of environmental impact assessment of targeted economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism were noted by the ET. Human rights analysis focused on certain specific aspects of the project context. However, overall, this analysis was limited, whether in the design documents or programme reporting.

Efficiency: ET rating - Satisfactory

Conclusions on Efficiency

28. From the evidence provided in the report, the ET has found that the projects were implemented relatively efficiently. However, it was difficult for the ET to fully assess the efficiency of the programme coordination as available financial data is presented in a way that makes it difficult to understand what is being spent where and at which level.
29. NTF IV was delivered efficiently, with appropriate management structures and systems, appropriate use of resources, and generally smooth financial and administrative processes. Flexibility emerged as the most positive feature of the programme management approach. A capacity to adapt activities and approaches to new information, such as the results of the stakeholder consultations, and changing circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the political crisis in Myanmar was important for maintaining stakeholder support and delivering relevant results. Linked to this was the decentralized approach to management which created significant decision-making space at the project level – despite some issues related to the multiple layers of management. Nevertheless, programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and processes appear to have been a bit complex relative to the utility of the information they produced. Reporting was informative, but project-level data was not always clearly

aggregated at the programme level and SDG reporting was limited. More streamlined processes, better baseline data, and more meaningful and disaggregated indicators might have better supported programme managers and other stakeholders in using implementation experience to support ongoing planning and adaptation.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Efficiency

- The strongest element linked to the efficiency of programme governance and management was its overall flexibility. A notable example was NTF IV's adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to its ability to change its approach quickly, with support from stakeholders.
- The decentralized, project-level management was appreciated by the majority of respondents. However, there were also some weaknesses:
 - It was noted that there were many layers of management: Programme level management, ITC project level management, and national coordinators. This led to confusion about the different roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved.
 - In a few instances, some respondents mentioned to the evaluators that there was a bit too much reliance on international technical support.
 - Some delays in implementation in certain projects.
- While for the most part the NTF IV monitoring and reporting system provided sufficient and appropriate information, mainly by project, to support adaptive management, the evaluation found that the connections between project activities and the overall logic model were not always clear. The lack of baseline data at the programme outset also complicates efforts to assess performance based on monitoring data.
- Project and programme management processes permitted a constant feedback loop on activities. This is considered good practice, but evaluation evidence indicated that it was somewhat time-consuming.

Impact: ET rating - Satisfactory

Conclusions on Impact

30. A programme like the NTF IV is not expected to necessarily achieve impact-level results after four years. However, the intention is to put in place the building blocks for impact to eventually materialize and, in this case, for inclusive and sustainable development to occur partly thanks to NTF IV. As described below, the ET considers that, within the context of what the programme was supposed to accomplish (its targets) and taking into consideration the Covid-19 Pandemic, the NTF IV programme contributed to improved livelihoods for farmers, MSMEs, and individuals, particularly women and youth.
31. The varied programme achievements at output and outcome level contributed to impact level progress for farmers, SMEs, and individuals. Change pathways leading to impact-level results were not always clear, and it should be kept in mind that it would be overly ambitious to expect significant and measurable livelihood improvements to result from project activities within the programme timeframe. Nevertheless, across sectors and countries, the projects did build skills, generate knowledge and awareness, create jobs, and strengthen market opportunities which contributed to or hold the promise of contributing to, improved livelihoods and higher incomes in target groups, including for women and youth. At the same time, the scalability of contributions to impact is not entirely clear. Within each project, the number of people benefited is relatively low compared to the expected community-level impact.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Impact

- The evaluation found some evidence that the NTF IV programme contributed to improved livelihoods for farmers, SMEs, and individuals, including women and youth.
- Job creation, which contributes to improving community livelihoods, was mentioned by many respondents as a programme impact.
- The COVID-19 pandemic had a clear negative effect on the livelihoods of the targeted stakeholders and the level of project-related livelihood improvement from baseline, therefore, needs to be seen in the context of this downward trend
- NTF IV enhanced BSO services portfolios, but some respondents noted limited human and financial resources to ensure these would be sufficiently scaled to achieve results at higher levels (the multiplier effect not assured).

Sustainability: ET rating - Moderately Satisfactory

Conclusions on Sustainability

32. The programme's ecosystem approach, evident in IOs 1 to 4, strengthened sustainability by encouraging the development of a supportive enabling environment including a range of interconnected stakeholders with improved capacities. However, as evidenced above, more was achieved with the MSMEs comparatively to the other ecosystem stakeholders and partners (i.e., BSOs and public institutions and decision makers). In certain circumstances, the lack of sufficient financial resources or time affected the programme's ability to scale (e.g., concerning certification) and hence ensure results would be perpetuated over time and to additional stakeholders.
33. Overall, there is good potential for programme results to be sustained over time, thanks to the multi-stakeholder approach involving key actors including government and BSOs along the value chain, in the majority of projects. In addition, project-level outputs from training and other activities are useful and leave behind capacities that should endure and continue producing benefits over time – such as increased familiarity with international tourism standards or knowledge of how to meet quality standards for cocoa export. The training of trainers and cost-sharing approaches, in particular, have promise for sustainability. However, in the absence of these approaches as well as lack of human and financial resources to support project stakeholders in replicating training and other support provided by NTF IV over time and at scale, the sustainability of results is uncertain. By building in realistic strategies to address this – and related issues of external coherence – from the outset, including clear exit strategies, future programming may be able to ensure more robust and lasting results.

Findings supporting the conclusions on Sustainability

- Good building blocks to ensure the sustainability of the results have been put in place by the projects (e.g., ToT, cost-sharing with stakeholders for missions).
- However, there were sustainability issues in some of the projects, such as insufficient financial support to replicate the results over time and some lack of exit planning.
- SMEs' enhanced understanding of the markets leading to improved strategic planning and more stable growth was noted.
- Multi-stakeholder involvement was an important sustainability component of the programme (IOs 1 to 4) – Ecosystem approach. However, much of the programme and projects' focus was on the MSMEs and somewhat less so on the other stakeholders within the ecosystem.

- Certification (e.g., ISO, Fair Trade, and organic production) are elements that will help sustain achieved results although many of these processes are still in progress and they were not accessible to all (linked to business maturity).
34. Table 1 below presents the key findings of the evaluation for each of the OECD-DAC criteria assessed, with their associated ratings, along with the conclusions and recommendations linked to these.

Table 1: Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Findings	Analysis and Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>Overall, there was good alignment with national plans and priorities in NTF IV's sectors of intervention, and good responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders and the contexts in which they work. The programme's participatory and consultative approach was also welcomed. However, delaying scoping missions to identify stakeholder needs and analyse sector contexts until after the programme's start meant that valuable, up-to-date input was not available during programme and project design. Some respondents, despite an overall positive appreciation of the support provided, felt that some of the support was not fully adapted to their reality. Design phase consultations did not always include all actors and sometimes took place when the project was already underway, so projects continued adapting their approaches after implementation had started.</p>	<p>A strong design and planning phase, based on exhaustive consultations and a result-based management mindset takes time but renders implementation so much more effective and efficient. Setting the stage early in the process, before the official start of the programme's lifecycle allows to map out all potential stakeholders, from all spheres of the different sectors' business ecosystems, including the public sector and external actors, not directly involved in the projects as partners but relevant to their implementation, so that the management teams can work on building their buy-in.</p>	<p>1. <u>For NTF V Steering Committee:</u></p> <p>Consider for future NTF programme iterations, a longer programme lifecycle of five or even six years, to allow for a full participatory design phase before programme activities begin. An agreement could be signed to finalize the design phase during the first year (inception period). The programme document could be finalized and approved at the end of this period, at which time proper implementation would begin.</p> <p>This recommendation is important, given the importance of assessing needs and priorities through background research as well as extensive consultation to support the relevance (as well as coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability) of programming.</p> <p>2. <u>For NTF V Programme Coordinator</u></p> <p>Specifically in terms of the already started NTF V Programme, ensure that by the end of the inception phase (by January 2022), ITC programme and project managers and their partners have achieved the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map out other, external projects and programmes with which it could coordinate activities with the same beneficiaries or capitalize on complementarity. • Establish official project management structures and teaming arrangements within ITC, as well as identifying and mobilizing internal ITC services (e.g., SheTrades and AIM for Results) to mobilize useful collaboration and synergy in an organized and timely fashion, through financed service delivery; • Conduct in-depth gender, human rights, and environmental analysis, with results clearly presented in evidenced documentation (e.g., strategies) and used to inform the design of programme and project results, indicators, baseline (or midline), targets, and activities.

Findings	Analysis and Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>The NTF IV programme demonstrated strong internal coherence, and in a few instances, there was some coordination with external partners (external coherence). However, the latter coordination was relatively light: There was some information and data sharing; partners were kept informed of activities; some common online discussion platforms were used to interact but there were no in-depth collaborations with other projects or programmes that would have allowed for a leveraging effect to take place and complementarity to unfold leading to more exhaustive, combined results.</p>	<p>Looking ahead, continued and increased efforts to capitalize on complementarities, similar to those noticed with CBI, will be important for maximizing achievements and collaboration between all related initiatives. Clearer and more official and extensive coordination with other external development partners would likely have added value to the NTF IV projects, by allowing projects focusing on institutional capacity building to take the lead on these aspects while ITC would have a narrower implementation approach on the private sector, which is its area of expertise. This would require an extended planning phase to ensure coherence, both internally and externally.</p>	<p>3. <u>For NTF V Programme Coordinator:</u></p> <p>By the end of the inception phase (January 2022), develop official and concrete partnerships with other programmes and projects that work on policy dialogue and institutional strengthening to allow ITC to focus on its particular areas of strength (i.e., working with the private sector) while remaining connected to, and gaining opportunities to inform efforts at policy and institutional level, for better coverage of this segment of the ecosystem.</p>
<p>Although it is clear that the projects have achieved strong results, it is difficult for outside observers to fully link these results with what has been achieved at the programme level. The degree of complexity that comes with the implementation of the projects in the different regions, countries, and sectors is not captured in the results chain developed by the programme. The programme does not seem to be much more than the sum of the four projects.</p>	<p>A clear programme identity helps decision-making and facilitates the coordination of the projects among each other. NTF IV, like many other ITC projects, integrated a value-chain logic within each project, meaning it tried to address as many actors of the value chain as possible as well as those involved in the ecosystem supporting the MSMEs of the value chain. However, the logic behind the structure of the results chain and the explanations concerning the horizontal and vertical logics were not fully comprehensive and the links between each project and between the projects and the programme were not detailed. This resulted in reporting that was very focused on project results. In many circumstances, indicators at the project level did not allow to aggregate data from the projects to the programme level in a logical manner. In other circumstances, some common indicators were actually difficult to apply in particular projects' contexts.</p>	<p>4. <u>For NTF V Programme Coordinator:</u></p> <p>By the end of the inception phase (January 2022), develop, ideally through an inclusive and collaborative process, a full ToC at programme level, which clearly sets out expected change pathways and illustrates how each project contributes to results at the programme level.</p> <p>Risks and assumptions should also be assessed both at programme and project levels, and specific analysis of political risks should draw on historical information. Indeed, critical conditions for the realization of outcomes should be laid out, and detailed and continuously reviewed mitigation strategies should be determined. Linked results statements and indicators should be fully explained and established before the programme proceeds from inception to full implementation to ensure shared understanding and ownership of expectations amongst all relevant stakeholders.</p>

Findings	Analysis and Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>Although generally speaking, the projects were implemented efficiently, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process was considered somewhat complex relative to the utility of the information they produced. It was not always possible to compare data sets from the different NTF IV projects.</p> <p>In many cases, the baseline data was zero. This makes sense for some indicators but not for all. In the case of projects that were rolled over from NTF III, data was not transferred to the baseline of NTF IV.</p> <p>Changes were observed in the types of indicators used from one reporting phase to another. Some indicators initially identified were not informed during implementation.</p> <p>The midterm evaluation, conducted by ITC programme management, was focused on the projects.</p> <p>Official financial reporting was available and aligned to ITC standards. However, the data was not detailed so that external partners could understand how budget and expenses were distributed for example by outcomes or outputs nor what the programme financial status was.</p>	<p>Based on self-reporting, NTF IV projects generally speaking surpassed their targets, many times by a lot. Obviously, this is a positive sign that the projects progressed well. However, this situation also demonstrates that the targets were not as ambitious as they could have been. Actually, they were set without a reference to what exactly was the situation before the projects' started.</p> <p>Setting clear targets, based on pre-set indicators and detailed baseline study and data sets a clear framework in which decision-making can then be supported by data collected in a harmonized manner and through a pre-determined process. In the present case, this framework did not fully allow to have an overall picture of the direction the programme was taking.</p> <p>Midterm evaluations, well-grounded within a strong M&E framework, are central to programme steering and can greatly contribute to improving the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of a programme like NTF IV. For the programme evaluated here, although a midterm evaluation did take place, it is noticeable that the opportunity to fully leverage the results of the process was not ceased.</p> <p>Financial data reporting is important for transparency and accountability purposes. Interested parties want to understand where the funds are being spent very specifically. In addition, it is important to have a clear view of the budget and expenses at both programme and project levels.</p>	<p>5. <u>For NTF V managers fulfilling RBM roles:</u></p> <p>5.a. More time and resources should be invested in the development of robust, useful, and user-friendly RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme and project management, monitoring and reporting, and adaptive management. This would be based on the more extensive design to be achieved at the end of the inception phase (January 2022), as suggested in Recommendation 1.</p> <p>Baseline data should be used to set realistic yet ambitious targets and both baseline and targets should be available before programme and project implementation starts. Setting targets based on clear baselines – that draw on comprehensive needs assessment and situational analysis during the inception phase, and through ongoing bilateral discussions with local stakeholders – is fundamental to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment based on unwarranted expectations. Reliable data available from NTF IV should be used to set baselines whenever possible.</p> <p>5.b. Simple programme and project level reporting tools should be systematically designed and used at every stage of the reporting cycle, including baseline data and monitoring data compared to targets. Monitoring data should be presented at both project and programme levels, as well as for programme management, and the links between indicators at the two levels should be clearly explained so that data aggregation can be traced back by external readers. SDG reporting requirements should also be made clear.</p> <p>6. <u>For NTF V Steering Committee</u></p> <p>Conduct a formative (learning-oriented) midterm evaluation for NTF V, which should be carried out by an external, independent evaluation team and planned well in advance. Such an external midterm evaluation, conducted in close collaboration with stakeholders to promote</p>

Findings	Analysis and Conclusions	Recommendations
		<p>learning and ownership, will allow to identify any needed course corrections.</p> <p>7. <u>For NTF V ITC staff responsible for financial and administrative management of future programmes and projects:</u></p> <p>To enable robust demonstration of value for money, establish protocols to generate more detailed financial reporting, linked to detailed budget lines at the end of the inception phase (January 2022). For example, financial data should be available by intermediate outcome and by type of investment (e.g., international or national consultants), at project level as well as aggregated to programme level.</p>
<p>Although the programme had pre-set a context in which projects would use a multi-stakeholder approach to support the competitiveness of the MSMEs so that after the end of the NTF IV programme, the results could continue progressing, the larger portion of the results achieved were in the last two intermediate outcomes in which the targeted group was the private sector.</p>	<p>The overall objective of supporting the public institutional partners, as well as the BSOs, linked to the targeted sectors is to ensure that these ecosystems' actors can perpetuate similar support after the programme's end. However, even in this context, it is always important to set a path for the end of the programme's lifecycle to ensure training, capacity building, and technical support is anchored in organizational memory and that the result of the organizational strengthening is structured enough to withstand staff turnover, political changes (leading to changes in priorities) and other unforeseen challenges and obstacles that might occur in the short and medium terms.</p>	<p>8. <u>For NTF V managers:</u></p> <p>It is recommended to build in sustainability mechanisms based on the improved planning achieved by the end of the inception phase (partly through enhanced coherence with complementary actors), identify barriers to and enabling factors for sustainability as they emerge, and work to flexibly address and/or build on these during implementation. The low-hanging fruit to implement this recommendation would be to clearly define exit strategies, at programme and project levels, and update them on a regular basis considering the changing circumstances. These mechanisms should be operational before the midterm evaluation suggested in recommendation 6.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

35. The Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) Phase IV - Export Sector Competitiveness Programme, was a four-year (2017-2021) programme implemented in six least developed countries (LDCs), including Guinea, Liberia, Myanmar, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. The NTF IV Programme was funded by the government of The Netherlands with a total budget of USD 10,288,701 and was implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC).
36. In accordance with the programme agreement and a subsequent agreement between the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ITC, ITC's Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) commissioned and managed the evaluation, procuring the services of the independent consulting firm Le Groupe-conseil baastel ltée. The evaluation team (ET) was comprised of Alexandre Daoust, Team Leader; Laurene Garneau, Economic Issues and Gender Mainstreaming Expert; Mark van Dorp, Evaluator, Private Sector Development and Value Chains Expert; Melissa MacLean, Evaluator, Gender Expert, Communication Specialist and Quality Assurance Adviser; and national consultants Peter Ghombo (Mano River region); Ye Min Thant (Myanmar); Maimouna Savana (Senegal); and Josephine Apajo (Uganda). The evaluation was carried out between July 2021 and April 2022.

1.1 Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

37. The evaluation was designed to assess the performance of each of the projects that made up the overall NTF IV programme (including four country-based projects and one management project), against the intended outcomes and intermediate outcomes set out in each country project logical framework. It also sought to determine the extent to which the projects contributed to the overall programme theory of change (ToC). The evaluation examined the NTF IV programme and projects' relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, value for money, and sustainability. The main users of this evaluation will be ITC, Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implementing partners, and key stakeholders identified in a participatory manner during the inception phase.
38. The evaluation is framed by a theory-based contribution analysis, which assessed the validity of the programme ToC, as described in section 2, and the extent to which the individual NTF IV projects contributed to achieving its intended outputs, intermediate outcomes, outcome, and impact. The evaluation also provides specific recommendations geared to inform subsequent phases of the NTF programme (including NTF V, launched in June 2021.)
39. The evaluation covered all NTF IV projects contributing to the programme between 1 October 2017 up to 30 June 2021.

1.2 Evaluation Process and Methodology

Evaluation Principles and Approaches

40. The evaluation methodology was guided by the following principles and approaches:
- **Participatory and iterative:** Given the range of stakeholders,⁶ it was necessary to consult widely to gather information from a relevant and representative sample. A participatory, consultative, and iterative approach was adopted to promote national ownership of the findings and recommendations at project and programme levels and ensure learning throughout the process. The ET worked in close cooperation with ITC's IEU and with the NTF IV project managers.
 - **Flexible:** Each national context is different and required its own approach. The contextual analysis conducted during the inception phase helped identify the most appropriate

⁶ Stakeholders include producers, MSMEs, policymakers and regulators, BSOs, trade/business support providers, international private sector market partners, project partners, implementing partners and funders.

methodology for each country. The process was adapted based on emerging needs and inputs from key stakeholders, with guidance from the senior international consultants.

- **Utility focused:** The evaluation process ensured that data-gathering, stakeholder consultation, analysis, reporting, and recommendations were relevant to the objective of assessing the performance of the project and programme outcomes and drawing lessons and recommendations for subsequent phases of the programme.
- **Gender-sensitive and equity-focused:** The ET assessed the extent of meaningful, active, and empowering participation by women and youth in the interventions. The team's understanding of best practices in gender equality and women's economic empowerment, as well as the 2030 Agenda commitment to 'Leave No One Behind,' informed all engagement with stakeholders and data at all stages of the evaluation.
- **Mix of methods:** A mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques ensured a comprehensive, robust, and evidence-based understanding of the programme, supporting the triangulation of information sources and perspectives. These informed insightful and reliable findings and conclusions, and the development of relevant, useful lessons and recommendations.

Evaluation Process: Data Collection, Analysis Methods, and Reporting

Inception phase

Step 1: Start-up Meetings and Preliminary Document and Literature Review

41. The ET launched the evaluation process with an online discussion with the IEU and the NTF IV programme and project management team members on 8 July 2021. Subsequent meetings during the inception phase addressed additional issues and gave the ET a thorough understanding of the evaluation object and scope, deliverables, and respective roles.
42. Early in the process, the ET conducted a preliminary desk review to inform the development of the Inception Report (IR) and detailed evaluation matrix. Documents in the review included:
 - Phase IV Agreement with CBI;
 - Progress and/or annual reports (to CBI);
 - Annual financial reports;
 - Technical information (such as training content);
 - Past evaluations;
 - Meeting notes;
 - Monitoring database/data repertoires; and
 - Secondary or background information linked to NTF IV in one way or another.

Step 2: Inception Report and Development of Data Collection Tools

43. The draft IR included the following elements: Evaluability assessment and contextual analysis; Revised methodology and workplan; Analysis of risk and mitigation measures; Evaluation matrix; Sampling approach; List of participants for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs); Data collection tools (i.e., interview guides, observation forms, survey questionnaire); Analysis of the projects' ToC and reconstruction of the programme ToC; and Dissemination strategy. The IR presented in detail the approach the ET would use to assess the programme and the projects and the extent to which the results were achieved. The review and approval of the IR confirmed that this approach was endorsed by key stakeholders, validated indicators at the outcome level, and outlined the use of the evaluation matrix.

44. A draft version of the IR was submitted to the IEU, who shared it with key stakeholders for their review. A final IR, revised as necessary based on the comments received, was submitted, along with an annex showing how the comments were addressed. Once approved, the final IR served as the roadmap for the evaluation.

Data Collection Phase

Step 3: In-depth Desk Review

45. Prior to interviews, FGDs, and direct observation, the ET conducted an in-depth desk review. This allowed the subsequent processes to be used to support and/or provide alternative views to the data collected from documentation – a process that forms the core of the triangulation process. Data from the document review was systematically classified by evaluation questions and indicators.

Step 4: Interviews and FGDs with Key Stakeholders and Beneficiaries/ Online survey

46. The ET relied to the extent possible on the ITC, especially the project management team, for support in contacting selected respondents.⁷
47. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** 85 semi-structured KIIs were carried out, tailored to the different categories of stakeholders based on interview protocols designed during the inception phase. The semi-structured format allowed the team to ask a variety of stakeholders some of the same questions to facilitate triangulation but also explore other topics arising in the interview process or specific to given interviewees. Some interviews were conducted in person by the national experts, while others were conducted remotely by the international and national experts.
48. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** For a variety of reasons, it was only possible to carry out five FGDs: four in the MRU with stakeholders representing the cocoa sector and one in Uganda with start-ups' representatives. In Myanmar, the risk associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity related to military activities following the February 2021 military coup, and significant internet connectivity issues made it impossible to conduct FGDs. COVID-19 restrictions and connectivity issues also affected opportunities for FGDs in Senegal and Uganda. Connectivity problems made it impossible for participants to connect in Senegal and Uganda, only two individuals were able to participate. These context-specific and interactive discussions were intended to help build an understanding of factors that facilitated or impeded project and programme results; however, the ET was able to gain similar insights from KIIs in cases where FGDs were not possible⁸.
49. **Online Survey (OS):** 62 stakeholders of the 190 that were invited to participate responded to the OS⁹ (a 33% response rate; please see Table 2 below for more details). Some of these were also consulted through KIIs or FGDs. The OS was undertaken to gather perspectives from a larger sample than could be reached via KIIs or FGDs, given the number, diversity and geographic dispersion of programme stakeholders. Survey questionnaires, suitable for smartphone users, were developed in English and translated into French for three types of stakeholders: MSMEs and BSOs; project teams, funders, and other partners; and other stakeholders (such as associations, government representatives, policy makers, and regulators, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], and private sector actors). The questionnaire for BSOs and MSMEs was also translated into Burmese.
50. **Direct observation:** The national experts conducted three site visits (in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Senegal) to validate project results through direct observation.¹⁰ This allowed them to study the MSMEs in their natural setting, gaining a richer understanding of their nature, activity patterns,

⁷ A complete list of interviews and FGD respondents is available in Annex 4.

⁸ This situation was discussed with the ITC staff and the proposed approach agreed upon.

⁹ Baastel has a professional (paid) Qualtrics account allowing for the use multiple features useful for complex OS.

¹⁰ Site visits were not carried out in the other countries. In Myanmar, political instability and insecurity prevented travel; in Guinea, the relatively late start of project implementation limited the value added of direct observation; and in Senegal and Uganda, the COVID-19 situation made travel inadvisable and visiting IT companies was not considered to offer strong added value since the results for these beneficiary firms are intangible rather than visible.

problems, successes, and other features than would have been possible through document review and interviews alone. Based on the indicators in the evaluation matrix, the ET created observation record forms to standardize the process and ensure the collection of useful information.

Table 2: Data collection by method

Countries	Methods of data collection			
	KIs	FGDs	Direct Observation	Online Survey
Uganda	26	1		14
Myanmar	17			11
Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Mano River Union)	29	4	2	16
Senegal	11		1	16
Other ¹¹	2			5
Total	85	5	3	62

Step 5: Sampling strategy and process

51. **Purposive sampling** ensured appropriate representation of stakeholders and beneficiaries, considering both country-specific projects and the overall programme. The sampling strategy drew on the desk review, stakeholder mapping, and consultations that took place during the inception phase. Despite the constraints (identified in section 1.2.3) and the broad scope of the evaluation, 91 stakeholders were consulted —more than the 80 planned in the inception phase. Most ITC and CBI NTF IV programme management and staff were interviewed. Business support organizations (BSOs), MSMEs, and other stakeholders such as government counterparts, NGOs, and associations were also consulted. Given the difficult security situation in Myanmar and restricted UN relations with the government,¹² interviews there were conducted mainly with MSMEs and individual service providers.

Table 3: Data collection by type of stakeholder

Countries	Type of stakeholder				Total
	BSO	MSMEs ¹³	Other stakeholders ¹⁴	Project team	
Uganda	5	13	4	2	24
Myanmar	3	6	4	4	17
Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Mano River Union)	11	11	5	7	34
Senegal		8	2	2	12
Other ¹⁵			1	1	2
Total	19	38	16	16	89

52. For the OS, each of the three questionnaires was distributed to the corresponding type of stakeholders. The survey invitations were sent to all stakeholders on the list provided by the ITC; in other words, the ET used a census sample. Initially set for two weeks, the survey deadline was extended to four weeks. The ET benefited from the project team support in each country to motivate stakeholders to complete the survey.

¹¹ Government counterparts, Donors, including Dutch embassies in the targeted countries, NGOs, association, policy makers and regulators, etc.

¹² UN guidelines in force during the evaluation period prohibited UN staff from interacting or communicating with Government of Myanmar representatives.

¹³ In Myanmar, beneficiary MSMEs include individual services providers. For Uganda as well as other countries, start-ups are also included

¹⁴ Government counterparts, funders (including Dutch embassies in the targeted countries), NGOs, associations, policy makers and regulators etc.)

¹⁵ The person interviewed is involved in more than one country/region

Table 4: Online survey statistics

	BSO and MSMEs	Project team and Partners	Other stakeholders	Total
Audience size	139	19	32	190
Responses	39	14	9	62
Response rate	28%	74%	28%	33%

Reporting Phase

Step 6: Data Analysis

53. Once data was collected, it was analysed and triangulated, leading to the development of findings based on valid, inclusive, and reliable evidence. Any identified data gaps were addressed through follow-up data collection. The gender and equity lens adopted for the evaluation provided a consistent angle on all findings and conclusions, and other cross-cutting issues (youth engagement, green growth and environment, and social responsibility) were also reflected.
54. After the preliminary analysis, an online validation and learning workshop was organized. The ET presented the preliminary findings to key stakeholders, who provided some feedback to inform the reporting stage.

Step 7: Draft and Final Report

55. In developing the draft evaluation report, the ET rated the overall programme performance against each evaluation criterion on the six-point scale included in the ITC evaluation guidelines.¹⁶ The ratings by criterion were then combined to generate a composite rating for the overall project.
56. Qualitative data was presented as evidence to support the findings using the following simple benchmarks:
 - “All respondents said” = 100%
 - “A majority of respondents said” = more than 75%
 - “Many respondents said” = more than 50%
 - “Some respondents said” = between 25 and 50%
 - “A few respondents said” = less than 25% but more than one person

Limitations

57. **Situation in Myanmar:** Beginning in February 2021, political turmoil led to increased insecurity across the country and hindered project implementation, also hindering the evaluation. People in the Kayah region — where the project was particularly active — have been affected most, with thousands forced to flee and find refuge elsewhere. Despite the situation, the evaluation team’s international and national consultants were in contact with individuals closely associated with the project and ITC staff. The ET agreed with ITC NTF IV staff to follow UN guidelines and thus did not contact public servants. Beneficiaries and some partners were available for consultations. This included individual service providers in the tourism sector, such as tour guides, who were considered as MSMEs.
58. **COVID-19 Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic evolved quickly in all countries, requiring most data collection to be conducted remotely everywhere except in the MRU region. This did not affect the quality of the information collected but it made data collection much more time-

¹⁶ International Trade Centre (2018). [ITC Evaluation Guidelines](#), Geneva: ITC, p. 39.

consuming and, as noted, created obstacles to conducting FGDs. Evaluators contacted stakeholders and beneficiaries by phone, videoconferencing, or email, depending on the situation. Connectivity issues in Myanmar and Senegal complicated data collection but this was mitigated through renewed intensity in ET communications to ensure potential respondents were reached and the use of more KIIs to compensate for FGDs and direct observation that were not possible.

59. **Contacting stakeholders:** In some circumstances, the support expected in introducing the ET and contacting stakeholders was not initially clear to all project staff. In addition to reaching out to stakeholders themselves through various means, the ET therefore also had to explain to NTF IV staff the help that was needed and interviews with some stakeholders could not be organized. After the ET explained the process, coordination ran more smoothly. In the end, this did not affect the evaluation results as a representative number of interviews was held in each country.
60. **Evaluating the programme-level results:** Only limited information was available on programme-level results and on Programme Management¹⁷ beyond some documentation on inception phase decision making (such as selection of countries and sectors) and budget data. The annual and end-of-project reports did not include sections on programme management. Meeting minutes contain some relevant information, including some information that gives a sense of how the programme reported back to the donor and other stakeholders, but most of the detail in the minutes is at the project level, with little reference to programme management. KIIs and the OS did not provide sufficient information for the ET to assess how programme management processes contributed to overall implementation.
61. **Timing of the evaluation:** When the data collection for this final evaluation was being conducted, the NTF V programme had been launched and its inception phase activities started. As a result, the NTF V programme management teams did not have access to the findings and recommendations of this evaluation to inform the programme design. This timing reduces the effectiveness of ITC's M&E function and affects the efficiency and timely use of its resources, as support to improved future programming and implementation. Nonetheless, NTF V management made it clear, in reaction to the circulation of the first draft of the evaluation report, that "[management can] make improvements and slight changes in processes while [the programme is] already underway with NTF V, so the learnings of the evaluation will still be taken into account."

2. NTF IV PROGRAMME

2.1 Background and Rationale

62. The NTF IV - Export Sector Competitiveness Programme is the fourth in a series of programmes funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and implemented by ITC in cooperation with CBI. The NTF IV agreement was signed in September 2017. The total budget for programme implementation, including management, was USD 10,288,701. NTF IV builds on the successful cooperation between ITC and CBI over a long sequence of programmes: NTF I (July 2005 - June 2008), NTF II (April 2009 - June 2013), and NTF III (July 2013 - June 2017).
63. The purpose of NTF IV is to increase the competitiveness of producers and exporters in selected sectors, especially in priority developing countries. NTF IV outcomes and impact are intended to contribute to meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), such as promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth (Goal 8); full and productive employment to grow out of poverty and incorporate most disadvantaged and poor groups like women, youth, and persons with disabilities through country-owned sustainable business development (Target 8.5); gender equality (Goal 5); and responsible production and consumption (Goal 12).
64. During the implementation of NTF IV, an important change took place concerning institutional and financial arrangements at the funder level. Funds were no longer disbursed by CBI as in the previous phases, but instead directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. One reason for this change was to avoid a dual role for CBI as both fund manager and implementation

¹⁷ Programme management was separately financed, with a budget of USD 974,950.

partner. In addition, programme steering arrangements for NTF IV were leaner than for NTF III. Although the CBI Managing Director and the ITC Executive Director still met annually to discuss developments and overall collaboration and synergies outside NTF IV,¹⁸ they were no longer, as they had been under NTF III, part of the Steering Group (SG) which handles strategic oversight. Moreover, the focal point at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was no longer involved in the process.¹⁹

2.2 Objectives of the NTF IV Programme

65. The expected impact of the NTF IV programme is: “Inclusive and sustainable development with improved livelihoods of communities/farmers/small and small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)/households (particularly for women and youth) through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth created to grow out of poverty through sustainable business and employment (SDG 1, 8.5).” Its expected outcome is to make MSMEs more competitive through improved value chains and through enhanced ability to meet market requirements and sustainably create value.
66. The programme includes projects in ITC and CBI jointly selected priority countries, presented in Table 5.

Table 5: NTF IV Country Projects and Focus

Country	Project Focus	Project budget USD
Myanmar	Tourism (follow-up of support under NTF III)	2,892,688
Senegal	Information Technology (IT) / Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES)	1,707,094
Uganda	IT/ITES (follow-up of support under NTF III)	1,761,581
Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Mano River Cocoa [MRC])	Value chain development of cocoa and associated crops	2,892,688

67. Programme funds were also allocated to a separate Programme Management project with a total budget of USD 974,950.

2.3 NTF IV Programme Theory of Change and Logical Framework²⁰

Programmatic Approach

68. NTF IV is guided by the programmatic approach of ITC’s Value Added to Trade Programme (VA2T) and its associated theory of change (ToC). VA2T itself was shaped by lessons learned from NTF III, including the need for a holistic approach. The VA2T ToC focuses on building the environment for broad improvements in MSME competitiveness by influencing policymakers and regulators, BSOs, international private sector market partners, and MSMEs and producers in their supply chains. Building on experience from NTF III, the NTF IV project teams adapted these components for each country through a comprehensive project development process.
69. The main beneficiaries of the NTF IV programme are MSMEs.²¹ NTF IV works with exporting, export-ready, and export-aspiring MSMEs, the networks of producers in their supply chains, and

¹⁸ NTF IV Programme Document

¹⁹ Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) IV, Midterm Self-Evaluation, Final version, May 2020

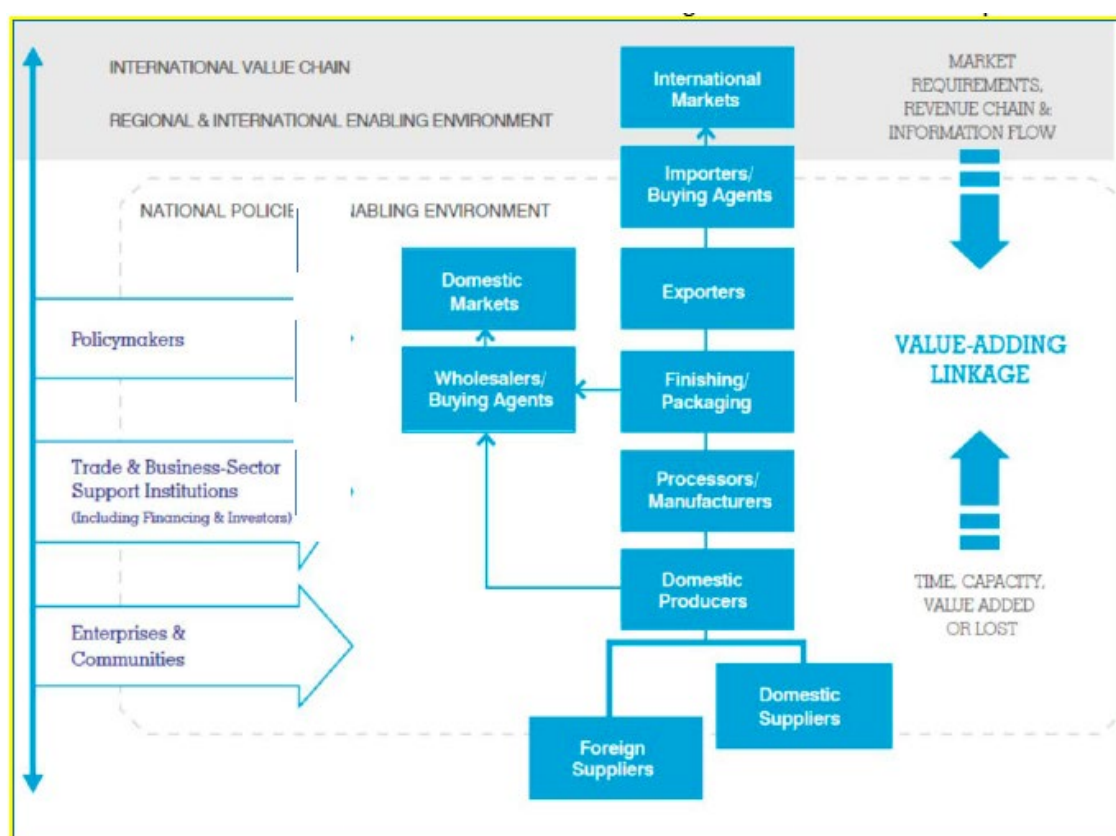
²⁰ Further details of the NTF IV ToC are presented in Annex 2.

²¹ ITC defines MSMEs in terms of number of employees: Micro: 0 to 4 employees; Small: 5 to 19 employees; and Medium: 20 to 99 employees. (ITC, 2021. *MSME Competitiveness Outlook: Empowering the Green Recovery (Covid-19 Response)*. P. 3). MSMENTF IV also included start-ups as MSMEs, which benefited from some of the country level projects.

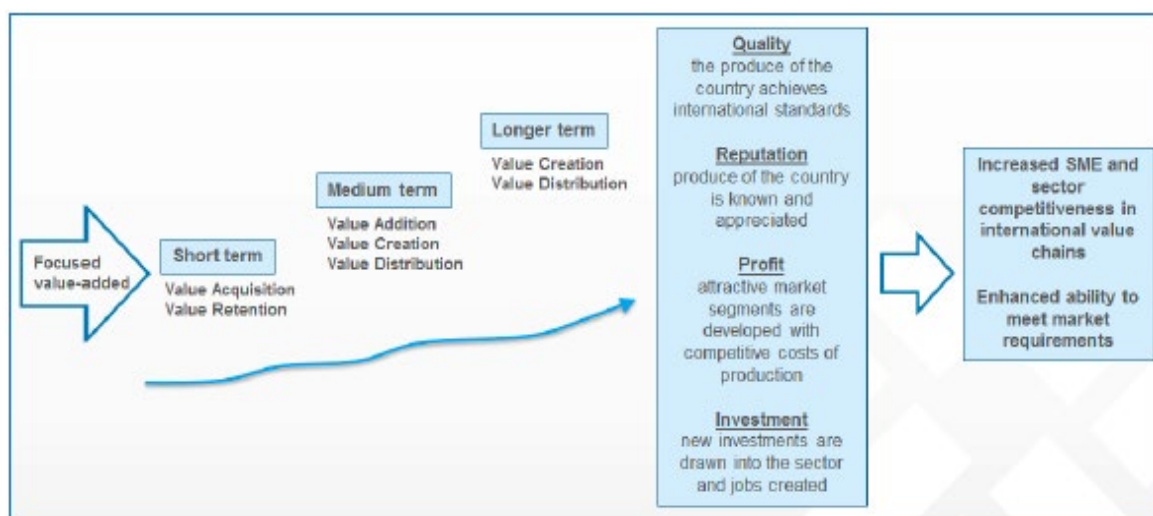
the service providers that support them. An integrated value chain approach was used to enhance value addition at the country level. The approach included solutions to improve the business environment for MSMEs, strengthen the service delivery of BSOs, build platforms for wide-scale change, create competitive business strategies, reinforce quality and efficiency of supply and production, implement operational and managerial sustainability practices, drive innovation, and connect MSMEs to market opportunities. Drawing on this approach, the evaluation looked at how MSMEs were defined at the project level, given the different definitions used in each context, as well as assessing project spinoff and multiplier effects on MSMEs that were not direct beneficiaries, and on other actors along the value chains or supporting the enabling environments.

70. Figure 1 below is an overview of an ITC-generated stylized version of a value chain model that underpins the NTF IV approach, illustrating how value can be added at different levels. It reflects the importance of working with enterprises, support services, and policy makers to address the enabling environment.

Figure 1: Value Chain Development Model



71. As a basis for wider change, NTF IV worked with international buyers and local stakeholders to build roadmaps for increased competitiveness and value addition over the short-, medium-, and long-term (shown in Figure 2 below). To foster broader improvement in MSME competitiveness, the programme sought to influence stakeholders along value chains in developing a supportive environment for enterprises. These stakeholders included policymakers and regulators, BSOs, trade/business support providers, international private sector market partners, and the networks of producers and other MSMEs in the relevant supply chains.

Figure 2: VA2T Roadmap to Value Addition

72. As illustrated in Figure 2, the VA2T approach takes a multi-layered view of value addition along the entire value chain, and designs interventions around five value options: value acquisition, value retention, value addition, value creation, and value distribution. Based on experience in NTF III, NTF IV employed this same tiered approach to working with enterprises, recognizing their differing maturity levels and potential for growth. At all tiers, NTF IV targeted high potential MSMEs to drive a large portion of economic growth and job creation and produce critical demonstration effects across sectors. These lead enterprises and farmers were expected to contribute to initiating drivers of change across their sectors and pull other enterprises along, thereby lifting the performance of the entire sector.
73. To contribute to gender equality (SDG 5), NTF IV was closely linked to ITC's SheTrades initiative at the country and global levels. SheTrades aims to connect three million women to markets through a global network of partners and global advocacy, national platforms promoting a holistic seven-pillar approach to women's economic empowerment, and a global web and mobile application allowing women to connect to partners and showcase their businesses.

NTF IV Results Chain

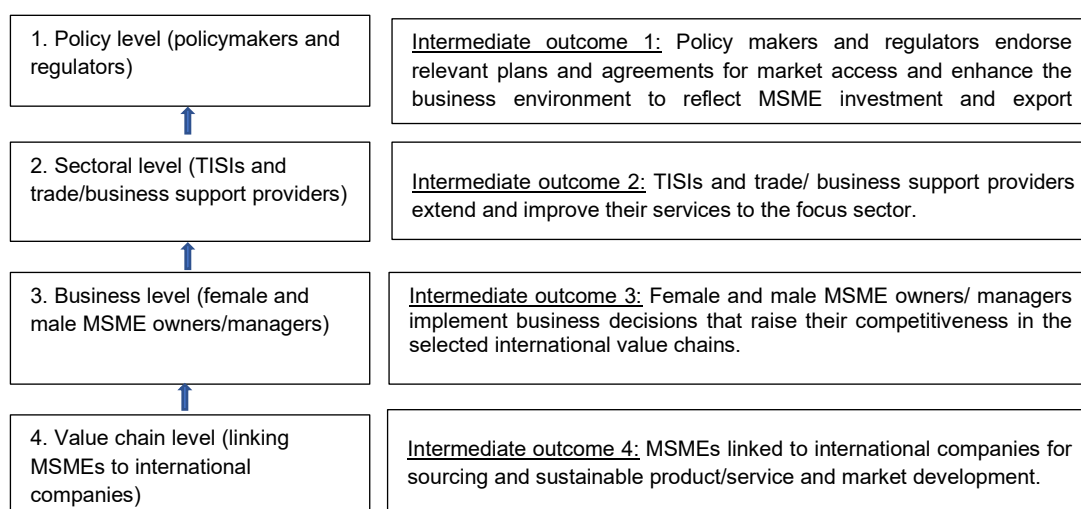
74. The programme results chain, shown in Figure 3, below, was based on a simplified version of the results chain described above, with impact, outcome, intermediate outcomes, outputs, and indicators focusing on behaviour change of key value chain actors. At the project level, the results chains were adapted to each country/sector combination. Some baseline, midterm, and end line surveys covering elements of the logical framework were conducted for each project with the exception of Myanmar where recent political events made this impossible.
75. The programme results chain was linked to ITC's overall strategic framework and programmatic approach. At the outcome and impact levels, NTF IV is aligned to CBI performance indicators including:
- MSMEs are export-ready and adhere to relevant social responsibility standards;
 - MSMEs are connected;
 - MSME export to European and emerging markets is sustainable as well as inclusive; and
 - Sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
76. The four country-level projects were linked to joint advocacy at the programme level, with a special focus on women, and an additional project was funded for overall programme management.

77. Through the programme Steering Group, CBI and ITC selected four country/sector combinations to make up the four projects, using jointly defined criteria including country requests, market demand, CBI/ITC and Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs priorities, feedback from Dutch Embassies and other funders on how assistance could best be prioritized, and the comparative advantages of ITC and CBI. A results framework for each project was aligned with the NTF IV programme results framework. Each project also included a specific focus on women, linked to SheTrades for Senegal and Uganda and via other approaches in the two other projects, to ensure women's participation as beneficiaries and in various project activities. A large part of the export-directed assistance was provided through the CBI parallel project.

NTF IV Programme Logical Framework and Indicators

78. The NTF IV programme regularly collected project-level data against elements of the logical framework, shown in Figure 3, to report on outcome and impact progress, including at baseline, midterm, and end line. Below figure 3, the different programme-level intermediate outcomes (IOs), which were adapted to each project, are described through the outputs they are linked to.

Figure 3: NTF IV Programme Results Chain



IO 1: Policy makers and regulators endorse policies and plans to improve market access and enhance the business environment for MSME investment and export objectives in the selected sector

79. Outputs planned to contribute to this outcome include:
- Advisory services on sector strategy, roadmaps, and action plans developed as part of Alliance for Action (A4A)²² (or other platforms) for sector development provided;
 - Coordination platforms for sector development such as Alliance for Action and SheTrades National Platforms established and/or strengthened; and
 - Sector-level strategies for enabling entrepreneurship in selected sectors developed, including National and/or sector-level branding and quality strategies.

IO 2: Trade and Investment Support Institutions (TISIs) and trade/business support providers extend and improve their services for the focus sector

²² Alliance for Action was integrated only in the Mano River project.

80. Outputs planned to contribute to this outcome include:

- A sector strategy, roadmap, and action plan implemented, facilitated, and monitored;
- Sector TISIs provided with increased capacity for service delivery to MSMEs, including competitive intelligence and business diagnostics, and expert networks/associations with increased capacity for service delivery to MSMEs in areas such as food safety counselling and certified trade advisory;
- Specialized agencies provided with increased managerial and operational capacity, and sector TISIs provided with increased capacity to establish market linkages, including co-delivery of Business to Business (B2B) events;
- TISIs provided with increased knowledge and skills on MSME support programmes in relevant areas of value addition such as quality, marketing and branding, production and supply chain, development of human and intellectual capital and entrepreneurial skills; and
- TISIs provided with increased knowledge, skills, and managerial capacity based on SheTrades TISI methodology on improving understanding of services to women-owned and led MSMEs.

IO 3: Female and male MSME owners/managers implement business decisions that raise their competitiveness in the selected international value chain thus increasing growth as well as create decent jobs and apply Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles.

81. Outputs planned to contribute to this outcome include:

- Functioning of Alliance for Action platforms supported, for example, by having facilitated information sharing and networking, at the national or sub-national level;
- Capacities of MSMEs strengthened through training and/or coaching in the following areas:
 - Marketing, product development, performance measurement, quality, sustainability, traceability, bankability/financing, entrepreneurship, and other relevant functional areas.
 - Managing buyer relationships/market linkages in business planning, including working within procurement systems of international buyers.

IO 4: MSMEs are linked to international companies for sourcing and sustainable product/service and market development.

82. Outputs planned to contribute to this outcome include:

- Alliance for Action and SheTrades national platforms, as well as other platforms at market-level to link both men and women-owned/led MSMEs to buyers activated;
- Capacities of MSMEs to improve supply chains through training and/or coaching (in relation to IO 3) supported;
- Support by suppliers to market partners mobilized, including as part of the Alliance for Action and SheTrades networks, and working through traders and 1st and 2nd tier subcontractors;
- Transparency in the supply chain built and enhanced performance monitoring applied through tools such as sustainability exchange;
- Support by market and industry partners to MSMEs mobilized, as part of Alliance for Action and SheTrades Invest and through other means, with strategies and steps to provide funding to partner MSMEs; and

- Business linkages facilitated through:
 - Market orientation tours – MSMEs visiting buying/investing markets;
 - Inward buyer/investor trips;
 - Market partners visits to exporting country/region;
 - Business-to-business meetings and trade fair participation;
 - Direct business linkages.

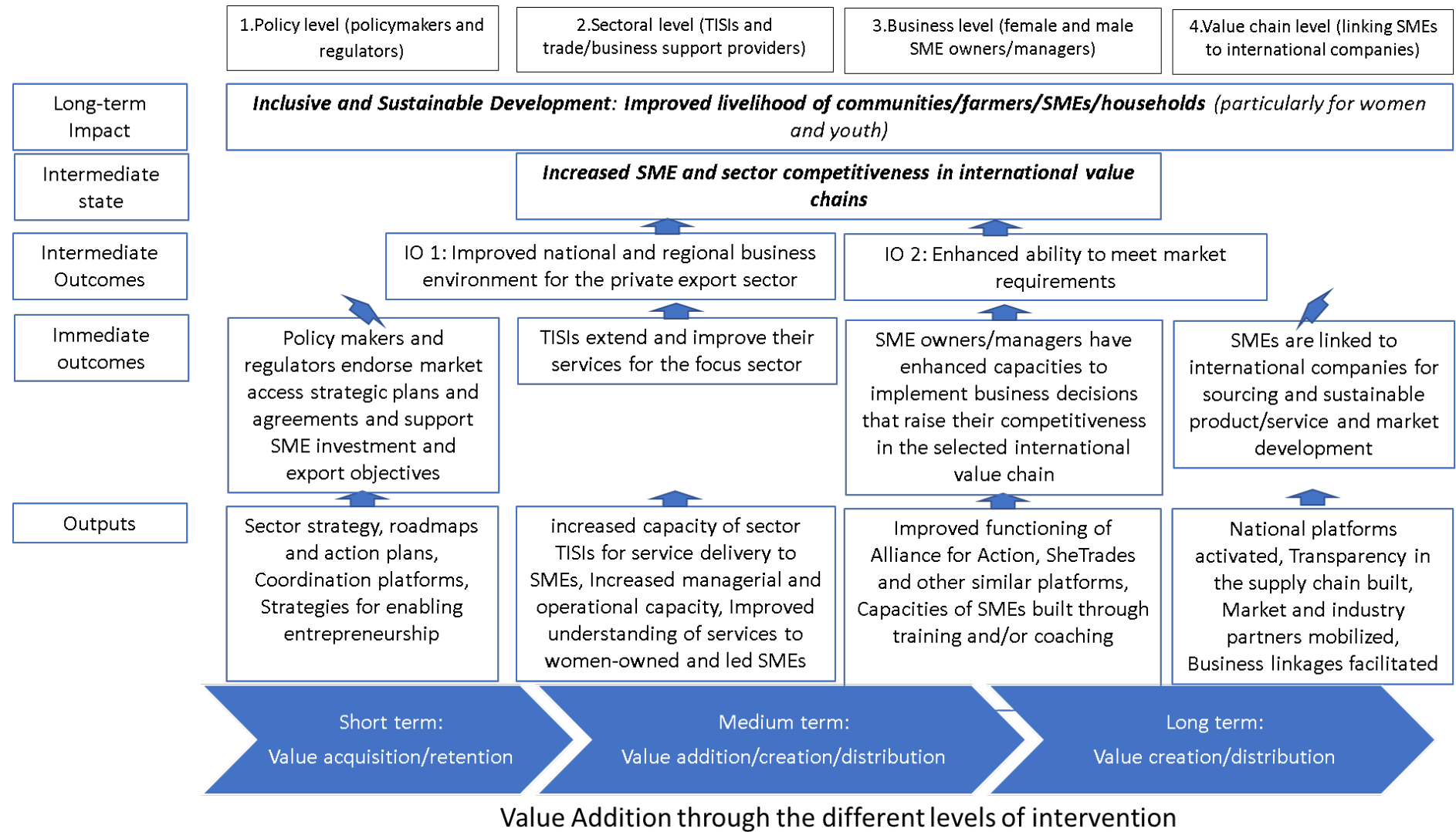
83. Risks and assumptions were specified only at the project level.

The NTF IV Programme Theory of Change (ToC)

84. To better comprehend the key areas in which the evaluation would seek evidence of impact, and as a basis for developing detailed evaluation questions, during the inception phase, the ET explored the implicit ToC behind the design of the NTF IV programme. Figure 4, below, is the ET's simplified presentation of the intervention logic based on the ToC elements and change pathways, visualizing the vertical and horizontal logic that provides coherence to the ITC approach²³.

²³ The reader can find more details on the assessment of the programme's results chain and revisiting of the ToC in the evaluation's inception report.

Figure 4: Logic Embedded in the NTF IV Programme Theory of Change



2.4 NTF IV Projects

85. Two of the four NTF IV projects continued country/sector combinations that began under NTF III: Myanmar Tourism and Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) Uganda. The other two focused on country/sector combinations that were new to NTF, namely IT and ITES in Senegal, and Cocoa and Associated Crops in three of the Mano River region countries (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). For the Uganda IT and ITES projects, which built on the experience and results linked to NTF III activities, project teams pre-designed elements that were finalized through stakeholder consultation once NTF IV began. For the Myanmar tourism project, which also built on the NTF III experience and results, ITC and CBI worked together, using a participatory approach for consultations with stakeholders in potential communities for the project.
86. For each field-based project, programme-level intermediate outcomes were translated into project outcomes and intermediate outcomes, with a detailed set of outputs, indicators (including baseline and targets), means of verification, and risks and assumptions. Further details of each country project are provided in the evaluation terms of reference (ToR) in Annex 9. For each project, a results chain, logical framework, results management plan, and risk management plan were elaborated at the project start. However, theories of change adapted to the reality and dynamics of each context – which would have shown the ET how ITC understood the specific conditions and dynamics affecting each project – were not fully developed at the project level. The risks and assumptions for each project are presented in the tables in Annex 3.²⁴

2.5 Programme and Project Governance

87. The joint ITC and CBI NTF IV Steering Group (SG) ensured the strategic management of the programme. However, as noted above, NTF IV's SG was leaner than the one that provided strategic management to NTF III. Instead of having a formal Executive Committee (EC) as part of the governance structure, the two EDs/CEOs, the Dutch Permanent Representative, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were to meet annually to discuss international developments and overall collaboration and synergies outside NTF IV. A stricter division of roles between the SG and the Quality Assurance Advisor (QAA) was also implemented with a view to enhancing efficiency, with the SG responsible for monitoring the programme and synergies on a strategic level and in the field, and the QAA focused on results-based management (RBM), including training project staff, but with no role in field supervision. The SG was to provide overall strategic guidance and decision-making. For example, the NTF IV Programme proposal (2017) indicates that the SG had the responsibility to decide on country and sector selection, approve project designs, confirm engagement of strategic stakeholders at the design stage and approve the start of project implementation. SG members were to meet at least twice per year with additional meetings decided at ad hoc and to conduct regular monitoring visits to the field.
88. The SG consisted of the ITC Director of Enterprises and Institutions and a high-level management representative from CBI. Representatives of the Dutch Mission in Geneva and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were to attend if available. The ITC Chief, Sustainable and Inclusive Value Chains, and the CBI Special Representative International Relations were to attend the Steering Group meeting in an advisory capacity.

²⁴ The source of this information are the project documents for each country/regional project (as part of the Logframe matrix in the Appendix of each project document).

Box 1: NTF IV Governance Structure: ITC and CBI

Steering Group (SG): ITC and CBI senior management provide strategic direction with participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Programme and Project Teams – ITC staff deliver projects and manage results

Quality Assurance Advisor (QAA) – provides independent advice to Steering Group and programme manager on results frameworks, builds local capacity on M&E of the implementation and results, provides feedback on reporting with regards to RBM

89. At the field level, National Project Steering Committees (PSCs) oversaw the ITC-implemented NTF IV projects as well as parallel CBI-implemented projects in the same sector. These committees were composed of government counterparts in each country (such as ministries of commerce), the relevant private sector representative (such as the relevant industry association), and a representative each from the CBI and ITC. The SG could also participate in PSC meetings.
90. At the programme level, NTF IV management consisted of a Geneva-based Programme Manager and an Administrative Assistant. The Programme Manager oversaw implementation and coordination of all projects and interacted with the SG and the QAA, ensured the NTF IV team implemented SG guidance, undertook, when possible, regular monitoring missions to the field, represented the programme in PSC meetings and was responsible for progress reporting.
91. Finally, the Project Management Team oversaw day-to-day activities, management and tracking of budget and resources, administrative oversight, and relationships with partner organizations in the countries. The Project Management Team was composed of Project Managers based at ITC headquarters in Geneva and National Project Coordinators recruited in each country.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Relevance

92. **ET rating for relevance: Satisfactory.** Overall, the answers provided to the key evaluation questions linked to relevance were positive and the ET considers that the programme and, in particular, mainly its projects, were relevant in their context at a satisfactory level. There were some alignment issues between the programme and the projects of the NTF IV with the SDGs and the integration of cross-cutting themes are where things were somewhat less satisfactory.

To what extent does the programme align with and support national development plans and priorities?

93. The evaluation found that **NTF IV programme design and implementation were aligned** with national policies, strategies, and sector plans.

To what extent do the NTF IV programme objectives and design respond to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities?

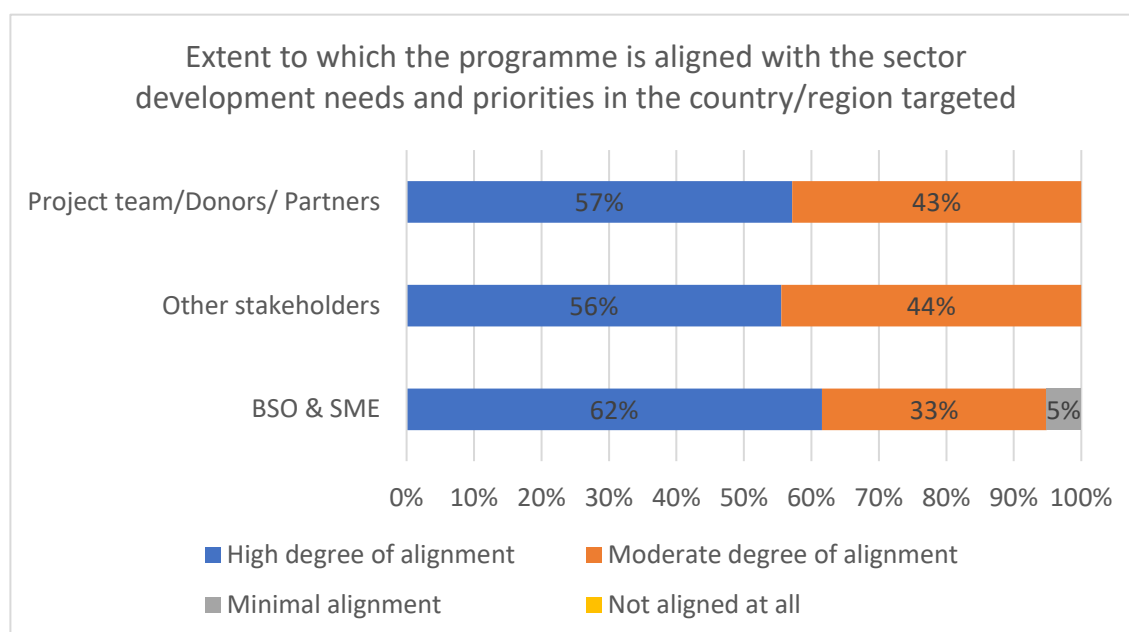
94. The NTF IV objectives and design, adapted from the programme to the projects' levels, **responded well** to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities. Indeed, many respondents²⁵ from the public sector, BSOs, and MSMEs who were consulted for the evaluation reported that the support provided was aligned with their needs and priorities as well as their level of "maturity." Others, despite an overall positive view of the support provided, felt some of it was not fully adapted to their reality. The evaluation found that although

²⁵ To quantify the qualitative information collected during the KIs and FGDs, the ET, as mentioned in Chapter 1 above, used the following terminology which was applied throughout the report (it can be applied to sub-sets of types of respondents when specified): "All respondents said" = 100%; "A majority of respondents said" = more than 75%; "Many respondents said" = more than 50%; "Some respondents said" = between 25 and 50%; and "A few respondents said" = less than 25% but more than one person.

design phase consultations took place, they did not always include all actors and in some cases took place when implementation was already underway. Projects continued adapting their approaches after implementation began. Programme-level management played a positive role in discussing the evolution of project design and implementation in its regular SG meeting. For example, it addressed risks arising in Uganda and Senegal early in the project implementation to find mitigation strategies.

95. Implementation details such as the process for the selection of partners, beneficiaries, sites, etc.) were planned during the project lifecycle, in a participatory manner, involving BSOs and some government and MSME representatives. In a few instances, some politicization was noted during the planning period.
96. In the two countries, Uganda and Myanmar, where NTF IV was implemented in the same sectors as covered by NTF III (Uganda and Myanmar), the lessons learned from the preceding phase usually for the most part created a solid foundation for the projects.
97. Evaluation evidence, including survey results shown in Figure 5, confirms the relevance of the projects. The majority of survey respondents felt there was a high or moderate degree of alignment with sector development needs and priorities in the country or region targeted by NTF IV. A majority (95%) percent of BSOs/MSMEs stated that the degree of alignment was high (62%) or moderate (33%), while a few (5%) felt that alignment was minimal. All other stakeholders, including the project team, funders, and other partners, felt alignment was high or moderate.

Figure 5: Alignment to needs and priorities of the country/region



98. In the survey responses, the following strengths were mentioned most often:
 - NTF IV was relevant to national development plans (in all regions and all sectors);
 - Training was relevant to the needs of BSOs and MSMEs;
 - The project prepared participants well for the export market and the global start-up ecosystem.
99. There were also some weaknesses mentioned:
 - Programme design should have involved more consultation with beneficiaries;
 - No direct financial support was provided for project partners;

- The programme supported businesses at different stages of maturity, so it was difficult to offer the best services and activities to each segment.
100. Overall programme management played a positive role in ensuring the relevance of the programme and of each project. Indeed, the SG under NTF III selected the country/sector combinations for the individual NTF IV projects with inputs received from the EC and Dutch embassies in the field – although it should be noted that the EC was no longer fully integrated into the governance structure under NTF IV. Beyond the selection process, the SG under NTF IV continued to make an important contribution to ensuring individual projects were on track to reach their results. This is reflected in the minutes of the SG meetings, which took place at least twice a year as planned. However, the minutes show that most SG discussions addressed project-level issues. The January 2021 SG meeting minutes state, “The SG congratulated the team for the good results and requested [the programme management team] update the way results are presented to reflect better the overall outcomes and impact achieved under the programme²⁶” suggesting that members felt reporting did not sufficiently demonstrate the contribution of project results contributed to the overall programme.
 101. **MRU:** This project was well aligned with and complemented the national plans of the governments of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, where the cocoa sector is a key sector. For example, in Guinea, the NTF IV project was aligned with a presidential initiative already in place to strengthen the agricultural sector (including cocoa), linked to the national development plan. Focusing on the cocoa sector was a good choice because of its potentially significant impact on poverty reduction, especially in the “Guinée forestière” zone, where poverty rates are very high. NTF IV has “awakened” the cocoa sector in Guinea, which previously had no cocoa sector policy, strategy, or plan. It supported the development of national standards for the sector²⁷ and addressed needs in its value chain, especially the need to strengthen the capacity of cocoa producers and their organizations.
 102. **Myanmar:** The project aligned with Myanmar’s Responsible Tourism Policy (2012),²⁸ particularly by supporting capacity building at the national and local levels, developing quality products and services, building the image of the country, branding Myanmar as a tourism destination, and contributing to the distribution of socioeconomic benefits at the local level through community-based tourism. It further aligned with the Myanmar 2013 Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism (CIT).²⁹ The project also supported Myanmar’s National Export Strategy³⁰ for the tourism sector, namely by attempting to address some challenges related to the supply side (limited product supply and insufficient human resources), the business environment (lack of awareness of the importance of tourism), and market entry (lack of national branding and inadequate international marketing capacity).
 103. **Uganda and Senegal:** The IT and ITES projects in these two countries are analysed together because they are very similar and operate under similar circumstances. They were managed by the same project manager with a similar implementation approach which in some cases was fully replicated from one project to the other. The projects were aligned with the relevant national policies in both countries. The project outcome statement, “Export competitiveness of Ugandan IT and ITES sector is increased at firm and TISI level,” was aligned with the Uganda National Development Plan II³¹ ICT Sector objective of strengthening ICT competitiveness to produce low

²⁶ NTF IV SG Minutes_JAN2021. P.1

²⁷ Institut Guinéen de Normalisation et de Métrologie (IGNM) (Décembre 2020), Rapport Technique Relatif à l’Adoption de Six (6) Normes Nationales sur le Cacao Durable et Traçable dans le Domaine Agroalimentaire

²⁸ Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (2012). *Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy*. Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. With the support of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. Yangon. Accessed online: https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/Myanmar_Responsible-Tourism_Policy-en-red-ocr-tu.pdf

²⁹ Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. *Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism*. Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. With the support of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. Yangon. Accessed online: <https://tourism.gov.mm/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Community-Involvement-Tourism-in-Myanmar.pdf>

³⁰ The Republic of the Union of Myanmar. *National Export Strategy (2015-2019)*. Myanmar Ministry of Commerce. With the collaboration of the International Trade Centre. Nay Pyi Taw. Accessed online: https://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracenorg/Content/Redesign/Audience/policy_makers/2015-2019%20Myanmar%20-%20National%20Export%20Strategy.pdf

³¹ The Republic of Uganda (2015). Second National Development Plan (NDPII) 2015/16 – 2019/20 para 423 Kampala: National Planning Authority, npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/NDPII-Final.pdf

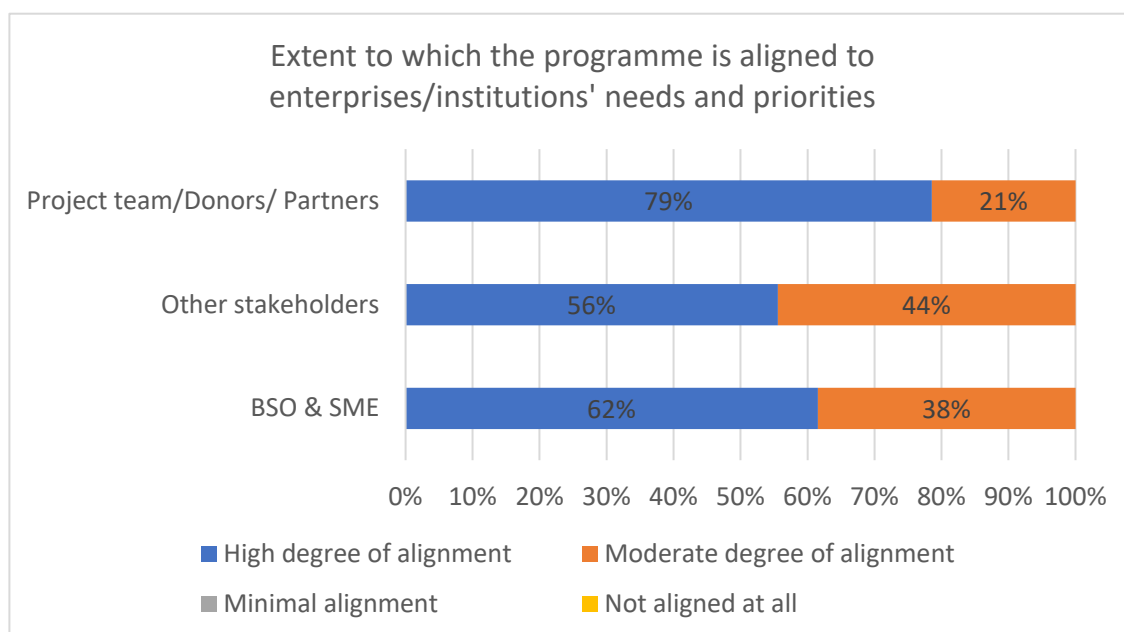
volume high-value goods to boost the country's exports and foreign exchange earnings. The NTF IV project was also aligned with the 2014 National Information and Communications Technology Policy for Uganda, which states, "ICTs shall be exploited to contribute to sustainable production and consumption patterns and reduce traditional barriers, providing an opportunity for all to access local and global markets in a more equitable manner."³² Both the overall ToC and the specific IOs of "Improved national and regional business environment for private export sector" and "Enhanced ability to meet market requirements" accord with the policy. The same applies to Senegal, where the project was aligned with the Government of Senegal's national development policy and its IT Sector National Policy 2025, among others.³³

104. Each project adapted to its own context the wording of the overall programme results chain, partly linked to the VA2T approach (as illustrated in Figure 2). The ET mentions "partly" because some of the actors mentioned in the VA2T approach were not targeted by the projects (e.g., Finishing, manufacturers). Each of the projects identified risks and assumptions in a logic model, providing basic frameworks which were considered as "light" project-level ToCs. Each of the four intermediate outcomes (IO) at the programme level was linked to the different types of stakeholders targeted by the programme: policy makers and regulators (the public sector) to IO 1, BSOs to IO 2, and MSMEs to IO 3 and 4. These IOs were common to all projects. This was a positive programme design feature that supported a holistic approach, reflecting the objective of working with MSME ecosystems rather than focusing on MSMEs only.
105. Generally speaking, apart from some good examples of gender related indicators as well as a few on youth, the project logic models, and programme level result-based-management (RBM) tools lacked in-depth attention to cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, youth participation in the economy, and environmental considerations. Some of the indicators that were supposed to present data in a disaggregated manner by gender were not informed accordingly. Risks and assumptions were assessed, and in conflict-prone countries like Myanmar, which do not have a signed peace agreement, it is advisable to at least identify potential risks associated with the location chosen by the project. Kayah, in particular, continues to face sporadic incursions of the Myanmar army. ITC used a sensitivity assessment for Kayah, which was completed for NTF III and still used to design NTF IV. The assessment provides useful information, and it would have been useful to indicate how such assessment influenced the design of NTF IV. Such information would have further supported assessing the effectiveness of the project. Programming frameworks guide funding organizations in effectively manoeuvring in many fragile countries where development assistance takes place successfully. While NTF IV implementation was successful in various ways, as this evaluation shows, the ET considers that additional contextual analysis – of cross-cutting issues and issues related to conflict settings – could have produced a robust approach more relevant to the specific places and stakeholders it engaged.³⁴

³² Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, 2014. *National Information and Communications technology Policy for Uganda*

³³ Gouvernement du Sénégal, Oct. 2016. *Stratégie Sénégal Numérique 2016 - 2025*, MPT,

³⁴ As indicated in the evaluation, the project team in Myanmar had access to a solid impact analysis conducted by [Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business](http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Report%20Responsible%20Tourism%20Development%20in%20Kayah%20State%20Peace%20Negotiations%20Aug%202014.pdf) on the tourism sector in the country. Chapter 3 of that analysis addresses those specific issues of conflict in ethnic minority states. The following reference would have also been helpful: Hanns Seidel Foundation (2014). *Responsible Tourism Development in Kayah State: Stakeholder Dialogues*. Accessed online: [http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Report Responsible Tourism Development in Kayah State Peace Ne xus Aug 2014.pdf](http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Report%20Responsible%20Tourism%20Development%20in%20Kayah%20State%20Peace%20Negotiations%20Aug%202014.pdf).

Figure 6: Alignment with the needs and priorities of enterprises and institutions

106. Figure 6 shows that all survey respondents felt the programme was aligned to a high or moderate degree with the needs and priorities of beneficiary enterprises or institutions. Among BSOs and MSMEs, 62% indicated a high degree of alignment and 38% a moderate degree. In the “other stakeholders” category, 56% indicated a high degree of alignment and 44% moderate, while 79% of the project team, funders, and other partners indicated a high degree of alignment and 21% a moderate degree. Notably, none of the respondents reported minimal or no alignment. Supporting these survey results, many interviewed representatives also reported that the projects were relevant to their needs and expressed their appreciation for the technical assistance provided by the project.
107. As discussed in Chapter 2, the heart of NTF IV was a holistic, value chain approach inspired by VA2T, working with a range of actors such as national policy makers (IO 1), BSOs (IO 2), MSMEs, and individuals (IO 3 and 4) in the sector ecosystems. Analysis of sector contexts and the needs of different stakeholders was therefore critical. This was included in the programme proposal, but the analysis was based on scoping missions that were not conducted until the first year of implementation (since the proposal was finalized during the first year of implementation, in 2017) – that is after the programme had started. The process, conducted in parallel to launching events and implementation activities, included discussions with national stakeholders from public and private sectors and analysis of policy documents, desk research, and recent studies. Cross-cutting needs related to child labour, women’s empowerment, and the need to make the different sectors more attractive for youth were only minimally addressed, with analysis of environmental sustainability mainly confined to the MRU project.³⁵
108. **MRU:** This project aimed to address economic and development challenges faced by Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea by rebuilding and reinforcing productive and trade capacities across the cocoa and cocoa derivatives value chain. Adopting a phased approach, interventions focused on Sierra Leone first, building on and consolidating activities started under a bridge project.
109. According to the MRU proposal, the decision to begin in Sierra Leone was motivated by the challenging post-conflict environment. The idea to start early in consideration that implementation

³⁵ MRC related note: As noted in the situation analysis in the project proposal, in West Africa, approximately 25% of cocoa plantations are run by women. In a sector where land rights, extension services, credits and certification are already difficult to obtain, access of women to these key components is even more limited. Underrepresented in farmers’ groups, women are heavily engaged in cocoa production but without a decision-making role that reflects their engagement.

there could become complicated by this situation. However, the midterm self-evaluation concluded that this phased approach had limited utility, and market and value chain assessment (VCA) could have been launched in all three MRU countries at the same time, adapted to each national context. In response to this recommendation, the ITC project manager changed course and started VCA work in Liberia and Guinea while the VCA in Sierra Leone was still ongoing – an important improvement that ensured each country could move forward on its own terms without delay.

110. MRU project partners who were interviewed were generally satisfied with project training on cocoa farm management, marketing, quality control, organic/fair trade certification for export, and linkage to buyers/exporters, feeling it responded to the needs of the BSOs and producers. In Sierra Leone, project partners confirmed that they were consulted during the inception phase about their needs, which were reflected in the programme design. However, in Liberia and Guinea, most project partners stated that they were not consulted during the inception phase. Some partners in these two countries felt the project approach was copied from Sierra Leone without taking their specific national contexts into account. However, most partners indicated that this changed a few months into the project, when they became fully involved in decision making – for example, regarding training content and participants.
111. The MRU project aimed to produce more and better cocoa and improve marketing. The evaluation found that the project approach responded to needs with respect to improving the quality of cocoa, but there was insufficient time to work on marketing. However, the project also addressed an additional need — for improved capacity by producers to organize themselves as cooperatives, a key condition for banks to provide finance. It is important to take into account that the implementation of the project did not take place simultaneously in the three countries. Activities in Guinea were not initiated until late in the project.
112. Although project plans included a steering committee in each country, this appears to have materialized only in Sierra Leone. None of the respondents interviewed in the other two countries were aware of a steering committee or other NTF IV governance structures. One respondent observed that “if there was a steering committee, it was very dormant.”
113. **Myanmar:** NTF IV in Myanmar continued the NTF III focus on tourism, and more specifically community-based tourism (CBT). It aimed to enhance results achieved in Kayah State and replicate successes in other regions of the country with tourism potential. Lessons learned from NTF III benefited NTF IV, namely by confirming: the existence of new, non-traditional tourism destinations in Myanmar, the importance of strengthening the effectiveness of the tourism value chain approach not only in Kayah but also in other states like Tanintharyi, the need for better collaboration between the public and private sectors, and the need to use a training of trainers (ToT) approach from the beginning of the project.
114. The project placed the greatest emphasis on supporting regional tour guide associations since they were more active than other BSOs. The project objectives and design were relevant to the needs and priorities of national policy makers such as the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT). By extension, it also aligned with the objectives of the Myanmar Federation of Tourism (MFT), a grouping of private sector associations which endorsed Myanmar’s National Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020).³⁶ NTF IV, like NTF III, continued to be aligned with the needs and priorities of participating communities, promoting community-based tourism (CBT) that would respond to their needs for increased employment opportunities, including income-generating activities for women and youth. CBT, in particular, was in line with the interests of traditional communities and ethnic minority populations. All KII respondents appreciated the project for supporting the development of tourism products that allowed ethnic minorities in Myanmar, including youth, to showcase and conserve their culture and traditions.

³⁶ The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2013). *Myanmar Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020)*. Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. Accessed online: <https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/docs16/Myanmar%20Tourism%20Master%20Plan%202013-2020-red.pdf>.

115. **Uganda:** This project was supported by the Sector Export Plan and the Country Marketing Plan that NTF III helped develop. Because it was built directly on the work of NTF III in Uganda, the main weaknesses and needs of BSOs and MSMEs in the IT and ITES sector were already well understood when it began. Despite the contributions of NTF III, BSOs continued to be fragile and fragmented and lacked solid service portfolios. MSMEs in the country did not meet international market standards and expectations and their professionalism remained weak. There was also a significant gender gap in ICT and MSMEs and entrepreneurs were insufficiently connected to international markets. However, project baselines did not fully reflect knowledge of these realities.³⁷
116. The design of the project in Uganda was participatory and inclusive, fostering a collaborative working partnership between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the ICT ecosystem, especially the private sector, centred around the needs of the MSMEs and start-ups. The project adopted a cost-sharing approach to delivering its activities to help ensure it was demand-driven. The project was collaboratively designed by GoU and NTF III stakeholders, who jointly assessed the successes, lessons learned, and constraints of the preceding project and agreed on the NTF IV project's approach and key objectives, milestones, structures, and areas of intervention. This produced a blend of innovations that benefited parties both at policy and institutional implementation levels.
117. **Senegal:** Many MSME respondents in Senegal indicated their satisfaction with the alignment of project support with their needs and priorities, although some mentioned that it was not sufficiently oriented to ensuring their MSMEs would reach new markets. This corresponded to the varying levels of maturity of the participating enterprises. MSMEs were categorized as “gold”, “silver”, or “bronze”, based on their level of maturity and export readiness — or “growth” and other phases — more start-up type companies, and the support provided in Senegal (and Uganda) was adapted accordingly. This was an important success factor, although some of the more advanced (“gold”) MSMEs would have appreciated a greater emphasis on increasing exports. In other words, they had higher expectations. Overall, however, the satisfaction levels were good.³⁸
118. In both **Uganda and Senegal**, MSMEs and start-ups that participated in the project were selected following a widely advertised call for expressions of interest. Applications were objectively reviewed by institutional partners and the selection process was vigorous and participatory. The evaluation found that the IT projects were very focused on the MSMEs and start-ups, with, to a lesser extent, some good links to BSOs and somewhat less work done with public institutions. In other words, other actors in the ecosystem such as BSOs and national policy makers were less involved in these projects (mainly for Senegal) than in the other two.
119. **While the evaluation noted alignment with SDGs, this was not reported on fully** (see the section on Impact). **SDG alignment, which was greater for some SDGs and targets than others**, was modest but in keeping with programme scope and budget.
120. Based on interviews, reports, and the survey, the evaluation found that the NTF IV programme likely contributed to **SDG 1 – Ending Poverty**, since some individuals who participated in the programme reported increased income; however, the link with this SDG is indirect. Moreover, in the absence of either a fully developed baseline (many indicators were zero³⁹) or a report on beneficiary income levels, the evaluation was unable to determine the degree to which the projects contributed to reducing poverty or whether and how it helped people reach or surpass the daily USD 1.25 poverty benchmark. Nor was it possible to clearly assess the degree to which any increased income linked to the project is sustainable.
121. All lines of evaluation evidence indicated that **SDG 5** on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls – and in particular, **Target 5.5** (Ensure women's full and effective participation

³⁷ ITC (2017). NTF IV programme. Programme Proposal for Consideration by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. August 2017. P. 43

³⁸ For some examples, see: ITC, NTF IV Uganda – EXPORT MARKETING TRAINING FOR GOLD MSMEs Innovation Village Kampala, 3 – 5 October 2018.

³⁹ ITC (2017). NTF IV programme. Programme Proposal for Consideration by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. August 2017. P. 29

in business and trade and equal opportunities) -- was relevant to the needs and priorities of participating countries. These issues were addressed to a moderate extent by the programme and, especially, by project implementation approaches. Many of the participating women indicated that the technical assistance provided by the projects not only provided them with more skills but also increased their feelings of agency – that is, of greater capacity to decide on and undertake a wider range of actions.

122. However, the programme and the projects missed an opportunity to contribute more to **SDG 5** by not developing gender-transformative indicators and associated activities, based on in-depth gender analysis of specific country contexts. Moreover, not all relevant indicators were not systematically disaggregated by sex and the evaluation found that reporting emphasized the number of female participants, rather than tracking changes related to gender equality and empowerment. More on gender equality can be found in section 3.4 below.
123. The programme was well aligned with **SDG 8** on promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth including CSR (corporate social responsibility) and, in particular, **Targets 8.2** (Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading, and innovation), **8.3** (Encourage formalization and growth of MSMEs), and **8.5** (full and productive employment with decent salaries and working conditions).
124. While the evaluation was able to establish SDG alignment in the general terms noted above, a more robust assessment of contributions was limited by the fact that reporting data did not always specifically address the SDGs.

To what extent were cross-cutting dimensions (human rights and gender equality; inclusion of youth; green growth and social responsibility) reflected in the design of the programme?

125. Cross-cutting themes **received unequal treatment at the planning stage**, a missed opportunity for stronger programmatic results.
126. The programme planning document recognized some cross-cutting themes, referring to various degrees to social responsibility, the inclusion of women and youth, and inclusive economic growth. The ET analysed performance indicators at programme level as a proxy for the relative importance accorded to these themes for supporting results along the chain, noting that more emphasis was given to the inclusion of women and youth than to any other cross-cutting theme.⁴⁰ At the planning stage, NTF IV also clearly established the intention of contributing SDG 5 on gender equality and linked with SheTrades at the country and global levels. Indicators related to sustainable and responsible business practices associated with Alliance for Action came next (implemented in the MRU context), while there was just one indicator on environmental sustainability. The planning document clarified that while climate-resilient practices related only to the Sierra Leone project, sustainable business practices would be considered in all projects. There was no direct mention of human rights.
127. The ET considers that the programme could have benefitted from elaborating at the planning stage on how it would support greater business social responsibility through specific approaches and exploring further how it could contribute a positive impact on environmental sustainability, specifically in sectors related to natural resources such as tourism and cacao. In a nutshell, NTF IV had the potential to either have a greater impact or better demonstrate the extent to which it had an impact.
128. As further discussed in the section on cross-cutting themes below (3.4), other methods of verification used by the ET at the project level, including KIIs and the survey, show that cross-cutting issues were addressed to a significant degree in all projects during implementation. However, at the planning stage, analysis and discussion on these themes were limited.

⁴⁰ Some indicators were disaggregated by sex and others were designed to measure progress towards gender equality; for example, at the impact level, increase in the number of women entrepreneurs and women-led households benefitting from increased exports and increase in the number of youths benefitting from increased exports.

3.2 Coherence

129. **ET rating for coherence: Moderately satisfactory.** Internal coherence was generally strong considering the work with CBI and some other ITC projects. However, in terms of external coherence, although there are some exceptions, generally speaking, coordination with other donors and partners was limited.

Regarding internal coherence, what is the compatibility of the NTF IV Programme within ITC and with CBI?

130. According to the OECD, internal coherence addresses the synergies and interlinkages between the intervention and other interventions carried out by the same institution/government, as well as the consistency of the intervention with the relevant international norms and standards to which that institution/government adheres⁴¹. Specifically, in line with the NTF IV evaluation ToR⁴² and Inception Report, the ET used the guiding questions on internal coherence to assess the compatibility of the NTF IV Programme within ITC and with CBI. The ET also had to look at synergies and interlinkages with other interventions carried out by ITC or CBI.
131. The evaluation found that the **ITC and CBI projects were coherent with each other**. The collaboration and coordination between ITC and CBI were praised by a large majority of respondents, who considered the two agencies' approaches complimentary – although the ITC and CBI projects in MRU and Myanmar were somewhat less fully integrated than those in Senegal and Uganda.⁴³ The linkages between ITC's NTF IV and SheTrades in Senegal and Uganda were also considered strong.⁴⁴
132. The use of a programmatic value chain approach supported internal coherence in two main ways: first, it ensured that all projects (including the CBI projects⁴⁵) would follow a similar approach, proven effective in previous NTF phases, and second that such approach could be adapted to various value chains in different countries.
133. ITC and CBI shared materials and workplans, creating significant synergy between the two programmes. Cooperation between ITC and CBI was considered satisfactory in all projects, although there were some initial problems in some cases (see below, for example, in the MRU project). CBI developed a parallel project to each of the NTF IV projects and these were implemented in close coordination to take advantage of strong complementarities, in particular in terms of export readiness and market access.⁴⁶ For example, in Myanmar, there was a well-established alignment of roles and responsibilities, with CBI focused on destination marketing and coaching of tour operators as well as institutional strengthening of national tourism associations (MTM, UMTA) while ITC focused on value chain development, strengthening sub-national, state-level tourism associations, and technical aspects of export marketing and branding. An initial idea was to set up joint national/regional steering committees to oversee the ITC and CBI projects, guide their implementation, and ensure maximum benefit for all countries involved. This materialized but not always with the same level of success.
134. When the project team, funders, and other partners were asked about the programme's complementarity with other sector-related interventions, they stated that the programme was complementary either to a large extent (64%) or to some extent (36%). Respondents in the "other

⁴¹ OECD (2021). *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*. Accessed online https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/543e84ed-en/1/3/4/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/543e84ed-en&_csp_535d2f2a848b7727d35502d7f36e4885&itemI=oeecd&itemContentTypes=book#section-d1e2935

⁴² ITC, Terms of Reference for Final Evaluation of NTF IV programme.

⁴³ As NTF IV is implemented in close collaboration with CBI and since both implementing agencies are funded by the same donors, working in the same countries and sectors, the ET considered this part of the internal coherence.

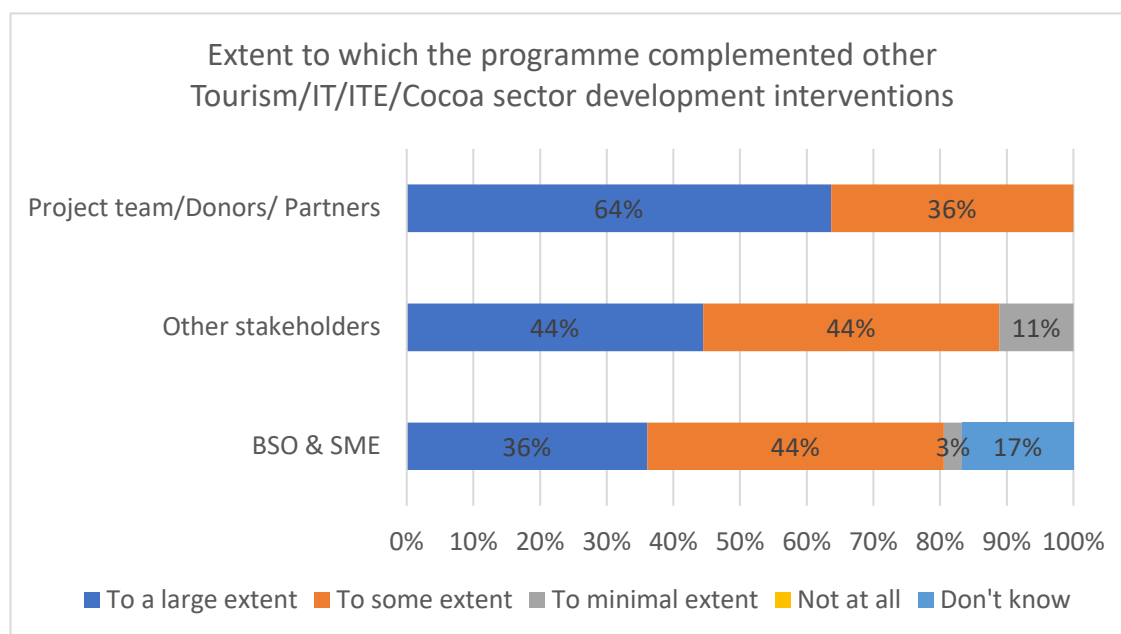
⁴⁴ SheTrades was not implemented in the other two countries.

⁴⁵ The CBI projects normally addressed the access to European markets in each project, but some further description of each particularity is provided in the analysis below.

⁴⁶ For example, in Mano River region, CBI's technical assistance to (aspiring) exporters in the cocoa sector focuses on ensuring that internal and product processes comply with European market standards, providing support to calibrate their tailor-made export strategy to the European market, and capacitating them to build and maintain a network on the European market. In cooperation with ITC, the local BSOs are being capacitated to improve their services to the (aspiring) exporters. The project is targeted at the high quality, fine flavour cocoa market; <https://www.cbi.eu/projects/cocoa-mano-river-union>

stakeholders”⁴⁷ category were also largely positive in their assessment, with 44% stating that the programme was complementary to a large extent and 44% to some extent. However, 11% considered that there was only minimal complementarity. For BSOs and MSMEs, 36% considered the programme complementary to a large extent, 44% to some extent, 3% to a minimal extent, and 17% of MSMEs did not know.

Figure 7: Complementarity



135. **MRU:** The CBI project, focusing on creating export markets and making companies export-ready, ran parallel to the ITC project, which had a stronger technical assistance focus. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, a Business Export Coaching process was implemented by CBI, with the support of ITC. The project organized training events and workshops in which trends and opportunities for exporting cocoa to the European market were presented to the project partners, and CSR risks and opportunities in the cocoa export value chain were analysed.⁴⁸ In 2020, CBI also launched a similar project in Guinea.
136. In MRU, the steering committee, which was to include CBI representatives, only materialized in Sierra Leone. In Liberia and Guinea, no steering committees were set up and coordination was more informal. This minimally affected the coordination although the informal approach still ensured basic complementarity between ITCs and CBI's work.
137. In January 2021, following an assessment of implementation delays due to COVID-19 and other factors (such as the frequent personnel changes at the beginning of the project), and recognizing that limited time remained to deliver on selected results, a Letter of Intent was signed between ITC and CBI to ensure the sustainability of the MRU results in relation to CBI's parallel projects (Source: Letter of Intent between ITC and CBI, January 2021). Some of the expected project results were modified and it was agreed that impact level results could be attained after the end of NTF IV under the parallel CBI projects in the three countries. This handover from ITC to CBI worked well, and several good results were subsequently achieved by CBI for which ITC laid important building blocks. This includes one partner MSME obtaining the first organic certification in Liberia, another obtaining Fair Trade (FT) certification in Sierra Leone, and interest expressed by five international flavour buyers as well as large companies (including Tradin/Barry Callebaut) in buying cocoa from farmers in both countries.

⁴⁷ As explained in chapter 1, "other stakeholders" include government counterparts, donors, including Dutch embassies in the targeted countries, NGOs, associations, policy makers, and regulators.

⁴⁸ ITC & CBI (2019), Joint CBI – ITC Report NTF IV and Parallel Projects

138. The 2019 midterm self-evaluation noted that in Guinea, the division of labour and complementarities between ITC and CBI needed to be clarified concerning service capacity strengthening for AGUIPEX and other BSOs. Although the issue appears to have been resolved, during the present evaluation, the ET heard differing explanations of CBI's role in Guinea, indicating that some confusion remained. Some respondents stated that CBI initially decided to focus on coffee instead of cocoa because coffee offered better export opportunities, and only later began working on a parallel cocoa project focused on improving buyers' and exporters' access to finance. One respondent stated that CBI intended to work on both coffee and cocoa in Guinea but since no cocoa companies applied to the call for the Business Export Coaching trajectory (with support from ITC), it was decided to focus on coffee only. The CBI parallel projects in all three MRU countries made important contributions to improving trust between cocoa producers and buyers or exporters. At the time this evaluation was conducted, CBI was working to tackle the many limiting factors that still prevent direct export through cooperatives.
139. In the programme plan for MRU, it was announced that the Alliances for Action methodology would be applied in MRU, to enhance value chain competitiveness and inclusiveness in the context of improved sustainable participation in value chains and achieving the SDGs. During the interviews carried out with project partners, this methodology was not mentioned by anyone, but this does not mean that it was not applied. In the view of the ET, it seems that the approach taken was in line with the A4A methodology, but has not been fully integrated during implementation, as also shown by the fact that the methodology was mentioned only once in the Narrative progress report for 2020.
140. **Myanmar and Uganda (both in NTF III):** In these two countries, where NTF III had previously been implemented, the evaluation found there was greater internal coherence between ITC and CBI in NTF IV than there had been in NTF III. All lines of evidence supported the conclusion that the expertise and specialized work of ITC and CBI were very complementary and that the stakeholders benefited from the specific and complementary expertise brought by each. Stakeholders further benefited from both projects because ITC and CBI had already learned from their past experience how to better serve them. For example, in Myanmar, technical assistance was improved by relying on a training of trainers' approach right from the beginning of NTF IV. Despite implementing separate projects, ITC and CBI designed, implemented, reflected on, and adjusted their respective initiatives together from the beginning.
141. **Myanmar:** NTF IV joined forces with the other tourism projects implemented by ITC in Myanmar and funded by Swiss State Secretariat Economic Affairs (SECO) to develop "COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Community Tours." This material provided simple guidelines to keep rural village visits, including CBT, safe from the risks of COVID-19. The evaluation also found cooperation between ITC, CBI, and SECO in support of an ITC tourism initiative in Southern Shan State.
142. **Senegal and Uganda:** In these two countries, CBI concentrated on export to the European market, while ITC targeted general global and regional exports. Synergies made it possible for participating IT companies to grow both technically and through access to markets. A steering committee including the ICT Association of Uganda (ICTAU) and the Alliance for Trade in Information-Technology and Services (ATIS) formulated and approved work plans, implement approved activities, and reviewed performance on a quarterly and annual basis for both projects. Although the associations had different member organizations, their activities complemented each other. For example, Uganda Export Promotion Board (UEPB) trained member companies and took them to export markets for exposure, while NTF IV rented an office at the Innovation Village for the most part of the project, coordinated and managed BPO services, and handled IT certification for the MSMEs and start-ups.
143. CBI and ITC also had different but complementary targets/partners in both countries. In Senegal and Uganda, CBI focused more on the "gold" MSMEs while ITC had a more holistic approach, dealing with MSMEs of all types.
144. In a few isolated instances, communication challenges led to one agency not knowing exactly what the other was doing, which affected somewhat their ability to coordinate. However, overall, communication and coordination were relatively smooth.

145. In Senegal and Uganda, ITC and CBI provided MSMEs links to the identified export markets, trained their managers on best practices when participating in fairs, and provided training and air tickets for participating MSMEs and start-ups in these fairs and training.
146. The ITC SheTrades initiative was linked to the NTF IV projects in Senegal and Uganda, where it worked with public institutions and associations of women entrepreneurs (such as the Women's Investment Club in both countries). The institutional support provided by SheTrades was complementary to the work of NTF IV, especially for the first two intermediate outcomes addressing ecosystem support and geared to women in the IT sector in both countries. Although the evaluation data suggests that the SheTrades approach was not fully integrated into NTF IV's work, the outputs of both projects generated a win-win situations for stakeholders in the two initiatives. SheTrades supported data collection to better understand women's needs in the sector and supported the government, for example in the development of IT-specific policy in Uganda, but these outputs were not used within the NTF IV implementation contexts despite their relevance.
147. Based on the review of the draft evaluation report, NTF IV management referenced a few examples of additional internal coherence. The ET found in a few documents the mention of other ITC branches' team members having provided input in the development of some projects' outputs.

Regarding external coherence, was the programme compatible and consistent with the interventions of other actors' interventions in the same countries and sectors?

148. The OECD defines external coherence as the consistency of the intervention with other actors' interventions in the same context. This includes complementarity, harmonization, coordination with others, and the extent to which the intervention is adding value while avoiding duplication of effort.⁴⁹ Specifically, in line with the ToR and the Inception Report, the evaluation questions set out to determine how well the programme complemented other trade-related interventions in each country, if there was harmonization and coordination with other entities, and, if so, to what extent the programme added value while avoiding duplication of effort.
149. Despite some positive examples and efforts by all managers during implementation, overall, **there was limited evidence of external coherence between NTF IV and programmes or projects** of other funders and agencies in the targeted countries.
150. **MRU:** The evaluation found that in MRU, there was a good, although light touch level of external coherence:
 - In Sierra Leone, ITC joined the Sierra Leone Cocoa Coffee Cashew Platform (SLCCCP), which uses a WhatsApp group for communication on various issues among actors in these three sectors. The SLCCCP includes funder organizations (e.g., GIZ), NGOs, and government organizations in the cocoa sector. ITC was part of the marketing/public relations and export technical committee. Joining this platform appeared to be a very effective way to coordinate activities.
 - In Liberia, ITC joined the Liberian National Cocoa Sector Public-Private Platform, coordinated by Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH). Through this platform, ITC collaborated with the key stakeholders working on cocoa, including GIZ, Solidaridad, and Adam Smith Foundation. Activities were well aligned, with ITC focusing on training farmers, while other actors provided farming tools and seedlings.
 - In Guinea, NTF IV built on a presidential initiative for agricultural development which prioritized ten sectors, including cocoa. No other initiatives exist in the country's cocoa sector. The NTF IV project brought all national institutions together, and a partnership agreement was signed in 2020.⁵⁰ There was also a good collaboration with the French Association *Charente-Maritime*. The association was linked by ITC to producers in

⁴⁹ OECD (2021). Op. cit.

⁵⁰ Accord de Partenariat entre AGUIPEX et Point focal national du Projet NTF IV en Sierra Leone et Liberia, Janvier 2020

Bonuma, leading to an export agreement of cocoa beans for chocolate production in France. Activities had to be halted temporarily because of COVID-19 but the evaluation learned that cooperation was re-initiated towards the end of the programme (June 2021).

151. **Myanmar:** The evaluation found that there was external coherence with the few projects supported by other funders in the tourism sector. According to document review and KIs, there were only two other major initiatives—one funded by the Swiss SECO and one supported by GIZ. The SECO-funded initiative was addressed above under internal coherence since ITC was the implementer. NTF IV participated in a Myanmar Tourism Coordination group including donors interested in the sector. The group had regular calls to exchange information and work together to ensure coherence in their messages to support stakeholders, particularly during and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Smaller groups of organizations working on similar topics were also created, including the Community Based Tourism Network. ITC also participated in groups on Tanintharyi Region, Destination Management Organization, Destination Marketing, and Training and Skills Development.
152. One example of coherence within the Myanmar project was the development of a Tourists Do's and Don'ts code of conduct. ITC collaborated on this with other organizations such as the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI).⁵¹ Ensuring external coherence with government institutions was more difficult, leading to weak project linkages between the private and public sectors. Interviews suggest that cooperation with government departments was not based on a solid institutional foundation but rather on relationships between the project and individuals heading specific agencies. These individuals were at times relocated to other duty stations, which required the project to keep building new relationships with government officials. However, this limitation was not rooted in the project but rather in the organizational culture of government departments.
153. **Senegal:** This project planned to work with the African Development Bank, which was funding the Diamniadio Technopark (PTN) project, as well as with the World Bank's Digital Economy programme, which aimed to support the *Plan d'Actions Prioritaires 2* (PAP2) under the *Plan Sénégal Emergent*.⁵² Data collected for the evaluation could not confirm these collaborations with external partners. Programme management explained that the collaboration could not take place because the park's construction was not finalised and hence the collaboration could not take place. Based on these additional explanations, it seems that efforts were also made by the NTF IV to contact the World Bank, without success. Nevertheless, many respondents considered useful NTF IV support to the *Délégation à l'entrepreneuriat rapide* (DER), a public institution supporting MSME funding needs, seeing it as a logical alliance benefitting partners and MSMEs. However, some respondents knowledgeable about the collaboration between NTF IV and DER reported that they did not notice any direct results from this alliance, although the participation by some start-up companies in Vivatex 2019 was facilitated by the NTF IV project in collaboration with DER. Programme management, in reaction to the first draft of the evaluation report, pointed to the documented examples of international deals between two start-ups and clients in France and Belgium, fostered by the project.
154. During a trade mission to Tunisia supported by NTF IV, a partnership was established between the project and France Invest/ Ambition Africa, a network of incubators in Paris. The partnership gave "gold" MSMEs access to an immersion experience in Ambition Africa incubators. The companies participated in Business to Business (B2B) meetings with French and foreign companies. In addition, a B2B partnership was signed to support the opening of a project beneficiary office in Paris.
155. **Uganda:** NTF IV coordinated its work with the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance (NG), which handled policies and provided an enabling environment for the MSMEs and start-ups and a training venue at the Information Access Center (IAC). The project also worked with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and Cooperatives to establish a Directorate for MSMEs to seek direct and

⁵¹ The project jointly organized the 4th National Conference on Communities and Tourism (June 2019) by collaborating with Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI).

⁵² ITC. Senegal: Export development of IT and IT-enabled services. P 11-12

real-time support from the Ministry. The objective was also to develop a trade portal to promote ICT exports globally.

156. The project sought to promote IT and ITES solutions from the participating MSMEs and start-ups within the country in various sectors such as education, trade, health, transport, and tourism to increase efficiency, competitiveness, revenue generation, and in turn export promotion. However, the evaluation found there were no significant results for the beneficiaries. Some respondents explained that this was because country-specific trade barriers (such as taxes, standards, and requirements for physical in-country presence) affected IT and ITES promotion activities in Uganda. In addition, in some circumstances, slow implementation and uptake of NTF IV technical support, recommendations, innovations, and ideas from national institutions were noted by many respondents. For example, the NITA-U certification process was delayed due to slow response, despite early payment by service providers.
157. The data collected from the field points to the fact that notwithstanding all the efforts put forward by the project management team, some bottlenecks were faced due to unharmonized, and sometimes conflicting policies, laws, and regulations housed and enforced by different ministries, departments, and agencies in the country. This challenge to coherence constrained effective implementation of NTF IV activities, limiting the project's ability to fully achieve expected results.

3.3 Effectiveness

158. **ET rating for effectiveness: Satisfactory⁵³.** Each project performed somewhat differently in the context of each of the four intermediate outcomes. In other words, broadly, the programme and its projects have a preponderance of positive results (mainly for the MSMEs) with some shortcomings in certain areas, different for each project, but with some stronger linkages with the work done with public institutions as well as with the integration of cross-cutting issues.

To what extent did the NTF IV programme achieve, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its attributable results along the causal pathway, including any differential results across groups?

159. All lines of evaluation evidence showed that **the NTF IV programme was effective overall**. Self-reported data shows the programme achieved most of its targets for the expected results and also contributed to some of ITC's corporate indicators.⁵⁴ However, the ET was unable to fully match the project-specific targets in the NTF IV programme proposal with the overall programme reporting in the final report.
160. As Figure 8 shows, 97% of BSO and MSME survey respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the programme's contribution to the programme objective of making MSMEs more competitive. When asked about the quality of programme results, 95% said they were very satisfied or satisfied. In the "other stakeholders" category, 100% were satisfied on both issues. All project teams, funders, and other partners were also very satisfied or satisfied with the programme contribution to the overall objective, and almost all (92%) were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of programme results, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 8: NTF IV contribution to programme objective of making MSMEs more competitive

⁵³ The ET had initially rated Effectiveness of the overall programme at Moderately Satisfactory. In the first version of the report, the ratings were divided by intermediate outcomes and although the last two intermediate outcomes had a Satisfactory rating, the first two had Moderately Satisfactory; because of this, and also because little information is available on the programme management project, the overall rating was judged as Moderately Satisfactory. However, even though there are still some missing details, after considering some additional information and written arguments made by NTF IV programme management (e.g. additional output results reached with public sector partners in Senegal and Uganda, which can be found in the Audit Trail in Annex 10) the ET agreed to adjust the rating to Satisfactory.

⁵⁴ ITC, November 2021. Draft Final Report. P. 17 – 20. Table replicated in Annex 7. It is to be noted that not all indicators mentioned in the Evaluation ToRs are reported in the report.

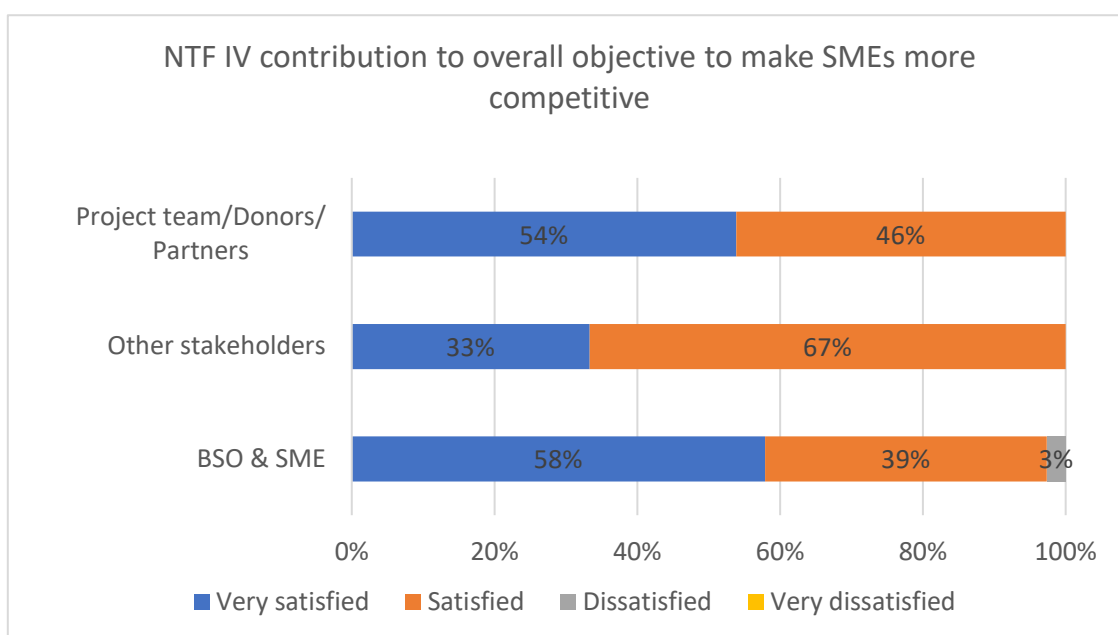
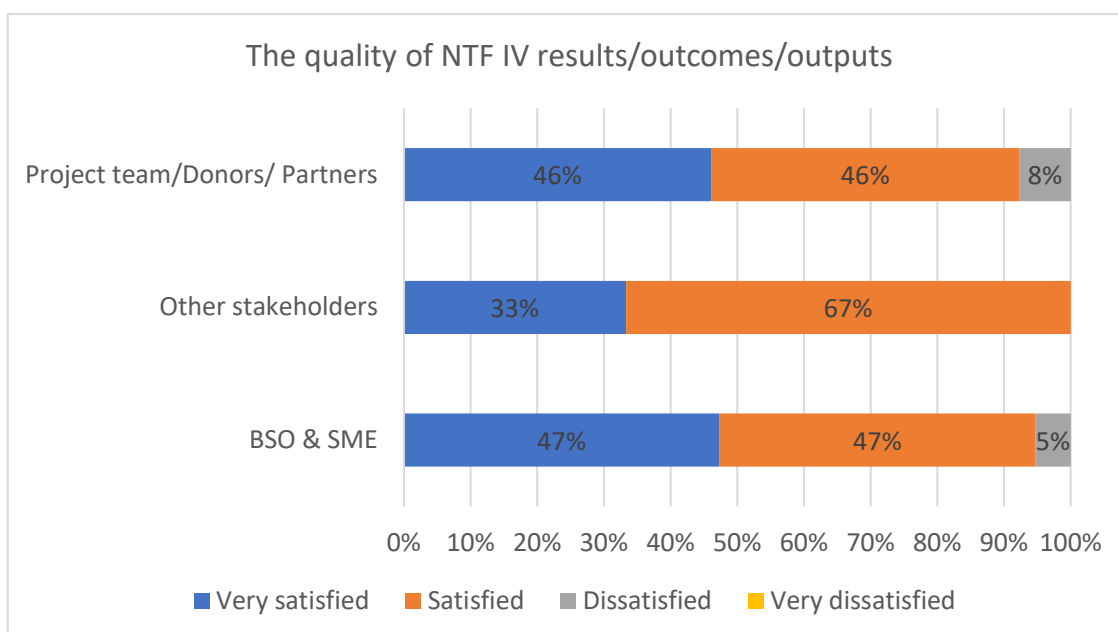


Figure 9: The quality of NTF IV results/outcomes/outputs



IO 1, programme level: Policy makers and regulators endorse relevant plans and agreements for market access and enhance the business environment to reflect MSME investment and export objectives in the selected sector.

161. With some support from the NTF IV programme, **policies and plans were developed and approved by policy makers and regulators enhancing the ecosystem to support the competitiveness of targeted MSMEs. However, results achieved for this IO were more limited than for other IOs, as demonstrated below.** COVID-19 affected this IO most (via slower and lower government responsiveness).
162. **MRU (IO 1: “Policy makers and regulators endorse relevant plans and agreements for market access and enhancing the business environment to reflect SME investment, and export objectives in the cocoa sector”)** In MRU, the ET assessed the outputs and outcomes

in relation to the results chain. Based on the output and outcome indicators, reported in the Annual report 2020,⁵⁵ the ET has found that as a result of NTF IV, policy makers and regulators in MRU have endorsed relevant plans and agreements for market access and enhancing the business environment, which has led to increased MSME investment in the cocoa sector. With regards to the export objectives, important steps have been taken, including the adoption of norms and standards for cocoa quality, but it has not led to a visible increase in the export volumes of cocoa. It can thus be concluded that for MRU, the rate of achievement of the project's IO 1 was satisfactory.

163. At the end of 2020, all expected outputs contributing to IO 1 had been achieved. By setting up public-private dialogue platforms, reviewing policies to upgrade the cocoa VC, elaboration of action plans, and conducting VC analyses (one for each country), IO 1 has been achieved. For instance, in Sierra Leone, a Cost-Benefit Analysis was carried out for a cocoa marketing model. Also in Sierra Leone, a successful workshop was held on designing a regional standard on sustainable cocoa and farm mapping, building digital farmer profiles, and farm monitoring. Also, producers from all three countries participated in study visits to other cocoa-producing countries, including Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. A major outcome in Guinea was the development of a cocoa quality standard to ensure consistent production and export of high-quality cocoa. This standard was the first of its kind in Guinea and it was endorsed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI). This led to the following concrete outcomes (surpassing the expected outcome):
 - 173 staff from relevant institutions and sector associations reporting improved understanding of trade
 - 19 national public-private dialogues conducted in an inclusive manner contributing to an increased understanding of policy requirements in the cocoa sector
 - plans endorsed to develop the cocoa sector
164. One of the findings of the ET was that in terms of quality management of cocoa production, Sierra Leone was far ahead of Liberia and Guinea in results achieved by the project, in part because the country already had a more advanced cocoa sector when NTF IV started. Moreover, NTF IV began in Sierra Leone first, followed later by the two other countries. More actors worked on cocoa quality in Sierra Leone, and the government was more closely involved in implementing the project with ITC, in particular the government focal point – the Produce Monitoring Board. As evidence of the progress made in the Sierra Leone cocoa sector, in 2020, organic cocoa from that country was ranked the best in Africa and third in the world. In Liberia and Guinea, cocoa production practices still need to improve to reach international standards. Although the project started in Sierra Leone, efforts in the other two countries “caught up” reasonably well. ITC introduced a new cultivation technique that permits the first harvest after 18 months instead of five years, as well as promotes intercropping with pineapples, plantain, vegetables, and other crops, contributing to improving farmers’ productivity.
165. The NTF IV project played an important role in introducing international norms and standards (in particular organic and fair trade certification) in the cocoa sector. In Guinea, this resulted in the elaboration of the National Cocoa Quality standard, the first standard developed for the sector, which will guide the standardization of the quality of cocoa produced and exported from the country.
166. **Myanmar (IO 1: “Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MOHT) and Ministry of Commerce (MOC) endorse relevant plans and agreements for market access and enhance the business environment to reflect export objectives in the tourism sector.”)** The ET determined that the MoHT supported all planned activities in Kayah, Tanintharyi, and Chin states⁵⁶ but could not confirm that the ministry officially endorsed plans and agreements for market access and enhanced business environment to reflect export objectives in the tourism sector. The project nevertheless reached its target of one improved policy at the state level and far surpassed the

⁵⁵ ITC, NTF IV Annual Report 2020.

⁵⁶ This was reported in a note for the file dated March 2019.

target for the number of national and state tourism stakeholders adopting codes of conduct for visiting ethnic communities. The project supported, through multi-stakeholder consultations, the development of the “Kayah State Tourism Action Plan” and produced the “Dawes and Peninsula Tourism Action Plan” and the “Chin State Tourism Master Plan,” submitted these in 2019 to MoHT. The Dawei Action Plan was finalized via remote work in 2021. Given the changing political circumstances in Myanmar, and to contribute to sustainability, the plan includes educational materials and guidelines to support subsequent implementation by local stakeholders.

167. The project also delivered two of three planned more accurate and/or user-friendly tourism statistics-related outputs for national and state levels – a leaflet on the number of arrivals, the origin of travellers, point of entry, and other information and a MoHT Border Survey Questionnaire (which collects basic information and data on tourists). In addition, the project supported the development of the Myanmar Five-Year Statistics Agenda, including a key action work plan and TOR for a task force on tourism statistics, including members from MoHT and other governmental agencies. Greater access to reliable statistics allows the government to assess more accurately whether its policy framework supports its objectives in the tourism sector.
168. **Uganda (IO 1: “Policy makers and regulators monitor and coordinate the implementation of the Value Proposition, integrating the Country Marketing Plan”):** For this intermediate outcome, NTF IV in Uganda collaborated primarily with the IT Ministry’s NITA-U, focusing on the government enabling environment for MSMEs to grow, become more competitive, and reach international markets. The roll-out of two outputs achieved during NTF III – two strategy documents to update the national Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) – that was planned to take place during NTF IV implementation was postponed by NITA-U due to reprioritization within the agency. In this context, policy makers and regulators were not monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the endorsed BPO Value Proposition, which includes the Sector Export Plan and Country Marketing Plan. To remain aligned with NITA-U’s changed priority, as communicated by ITC in its reporting to the donor on the project in Uganda,⁵⁷ NTF IV, therefore, shifted focus to develop, in coordination with CBI, an IT sector value proposition with specific emphasis on the European market. ITC also supported the development of a value proposition focused on Africa, consulting with various ministries and BSOs. Many respondents considered these outputs useful, but the evaluation found no evidence that they had yet been applied within the project timeline. However, these documents indirectly addressed the objective of enhancing NITA-U’s capacity to coordinate the efforts of public institutions to advance the IT sector interests, even though the initial work was reprioritized by NITA-U.
169. **Senegal (IO 1: “Policy makers coordinate the design of a Sector Export Strategy through an industry-wide coordination effort.”)** The NTF IV project supported M&E efforts for public institutions reporting on newly adopted IT and ITES strategies. The project also trained Foreign Trade Representatives from Senegal to support IT and ITES MSME strategies for reaching international markets. However, none of the evaluation respondents identified results emanating from this work, and the ET in Senegal was not able to talk to policy makers even after multiple efforts were made, supported by the NTF IV staff. The ET cannot confirm that this was done through an industry-wide coordination effort, as it was supposed to be based on the design of the project and its outputs leading to the intermediate outcome.

IO 2, programme level: TISIs and trade/business support providers extend and improve their services to the focus sector.

170. Some **respondents noted clear guidance for the enhancement of BSOs’ service portfolios, but the evaluation found some examples of shortcomings.** The pace of progress on results achieved with the BSOs improved following the midterm self-evaluation. NTF IV adapted its approach to provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic (adopting online methods). Enhanced governance of BSOs was noted in certain cases.
171. **MRU (IO 2: “TISIs and trade/business support providers extend and improve their services in the cocoa sector.”)** It was found by the ET that in MRU, BSOs have extended and improved

⁵⁷ However, no change to the project’s logic model was officially integrated.

their services in the cocoa sector through a strengthened capacity of selected BSOs by training-of-trainers and other capacity-building activities of farmer cooperatives, leading to strengthened services portfolios of BSOs. This was especially the case in Sierra Leone, and to a lesser extent in Liberia and Guinea as the project started later there. It can therefore be concluded that IO 2 has been partially achieved for MRU.

172. All expected outputs contributing to IO 2 had been achieved by the end of 2020. Outputs contributing to IO 2 include a needs assessment analysis for 9 BSOs, elaboration of development plans, training packages developed, and group trainings provided. In these trainings, a total of 236 people participated, including 47 women or 20% of the total). Also, strategic and business plans were adopted by BSOs, and managerial and operational capacities improved. BSO's services portfolios were also strengthened, leading to 60 SMEs making use of services from BSOs. This included among others an agreement between the two major BSOs in Sierra Leone, PMB and SLIEPA, on close coordination and planning between the two institutions with regards to support to cooperatives and exporters. Also, trainings were held on cocoa quality improvement training and Good Agricultural Practices. Some of the trainings were done through radio broadcasting, in response to the limitations experienced by COVID-19 for face-to-face training. This led to the following concrete outcomes (surpassing the expected outcome):
 - 6 institutions reporting improved operational and managerial performance as a result of NTF IV support
 - 5 BSOs with new or stronger business services developed
 - 28 SMEs served by TISIs that are satisfied by their services
173. For all three MRU countries, the most significant positive effects related to training, especially the training-of-trainers (ToT) for representatives of farmer cooperatives, BSOs, and government organizations. These trainings were replicated with farmers, covering topics including techniques for improved farm management and good agricultural practices to improve the quality and productivity of cocoa production. In all three countries, the evaluation found evidence that the production and quality of cocoa had improved as a result, contributing to improved livelihoods of cocoa producers and their families.
174. **Myanmar: (IO 2: “Tourism and tourism related sector associations extend and improve their services to the focus sector.”)** The project progressed on many fronts through its successful delivery of various outputs including:
 - Delivery of advisory services to UMTA and MTM on marketing, branding, and market linkages. This was highly appreciated by many respondents. The marketing-related support to institutional capacity was needed and the project delivered.
 - Provision of advisory services (including assessment) on associations strengthening provided to state-level tourism associations. In 2020, based on lessons learned and consultations the project focused on the best performing BSOs at the regional level, namely the Kayah Tourist Guide Association. This proved to be very effective. Thanks to the commitment and ownership of the members, ITC was able to remotely facilitate the finalization of the association's Charter and Membership Handbook as well as Action Plan, which included participation in trade fairs.
 - Online CBT ToT course on how to develop and market successful CBT, developing knowledge and skills of the participants with a special focus on developing and marketing CBT through international Business to Business (B2B) tourism supply chains.
 - Jointly created by CBI, ITC, the Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO), and the German Import Promotion Desk (IPD), the project developed a tool kit to help BSOs select the best ways, such as trade fairs, road shows, familiarization trips, and others, to competitively promote their tourism destination.

- Kayah State and Tanintharyi Region adopted marketing strategies. The Tanintharyi website was launched in 2020 and included a COVID-19 information page. Unfortunately, the site cannot be reached at the time of writing this report, possibly as a result of internet blockages by the military regime.
175. The project delivered numerous services to state level tourism associations leading, among others, to improved operational and managerial performance. For example, this was the case for the Kayah Tourist Guides Association and the Dawei Tourist Guides Association. Notwithstanding the project's effective delivery of a greater number of outputs than originally targeted, which were also of high quality, this translated into a lower number of improved services from state tourism and tourism related associations with respect to what set out in the project logical framework (8 of 14 targeted) or an increased number of services offered by UMTA and MTM in the area of marketing and branding (none of the targeted 2). It seems that in Myanmar, working at the state level was more effective than working with national sector organizations. The reason seems to have been related to the importance of maintaining relationships with the individuals the project interacted with in these organizations, including the partners from NTF III. This made it more effective to work directly at the sub-national level.
 176. The Myanmar project was designed to directly support the programme objective and contributed to its achievement at the sub-national level through the delivery of high-quality activities which the ET found were valued by targeted beneficiaries. UMTA and MTM were constructive partners for ITC, but the concept of community-based tourism was new for the country which rendered progress towards IO targets somewhat less straightforward.
 177. **Uganda (IO 2: TISIs are functional and extend and improve their export-related services for IT and ITES businesses.)** Data collected for the evaluation shows that NTF IV helped establish strong multisectoral and multi-stakeholder IT and ITES industry governance links between government and the private sector, through work with BSOs such as ATIS and the ICT Association of Uganda (ICTAU). This provided effective coordination and implementation mechanism for the IT ecosystem in Uganda. The two bodies played a critical role in shaping and developing strategic directions for IT and ITES, monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the NTF III-endorsed BPO Strategies and implementing the Sector Export Plan and Country Marketing Plan. Other BSOs were also supported and trained, including UEPB, Financial Technology Service Providers Association (FITSPA), Startup Uganda, and Tech Hubs. NTF IV was able to coordinate some activities with these BSOs and position the project within them, contributing to improved BSO service delivery, which was noted by some MSME evaluation respondents.
 178. **Senegal (IO 2: "TISIs (OPTIC and ASEPEX) extend and improve their export-related services for IT and ITES businesses.")** The work of the NTF IV project in Senegal with BSOs such as OPTIC and ASEPEX was similar. However, the pace of work appears to have been somewhat less intense than in Uganda. Many of the reported results for the BSOs in Senegal are actually from activities from the ITC AIM for Results methodology, which sets organizational improvement targets for BSOs based on a benchmarking process. NTF IV did train OPTIC representatives in international B2B during their annual events in 2018 and 2019, which led to the reorganization of some of their approaches and structure to service delivery – for example, through new statutes and commissions, a new Strategy 2021 – 2024, and improved services to members overall.

IO 3, programme level: Female and male MSME owners/managers implement business decisions that raise their competitiveness in the selected international value chains

179. The evaluation found that **this was the area in which NTF IV produced the most results.** In combination with support from CBI, NTF IV's work led to enhanced competitiveness thanks to MSMEs' improved understanding of the context they operate in (markets, value chain, management as well as overall ecosystem). By the end of the NTF IV projects, MSMEs were better positioned to meet international norms and standards. Project efforts on gender equality helped raise awareness on the part of MSME representatives on gender issues and led, in a few instances, to change – such as the involvement of women on company boards.

180. **MRU (IO 3: “Female and male SME owners/managers and producer groups implement business decisions that raise their competitiveness in the cocoa value chain.”)** The project successfully achieved IO 3, by building the capacity of farmer cooperatives and MSMEs and improving their productivity and competitiveness in the cocoa value chain, primarily focusing on improving the quality of cocoa produced. While support to farmers was most successful in Sierra Leone, the project also succeeded in strengthening farmer capacity in Liberia and Guinea. As reported below, most outputs and outcomes have been achieved under IO 3.
181. When NTF IV began, farmers in both Liberia and Guinea had very little knowledge of improved cocoa production techniques. Old plantations had often been abandoned as farmers shifted to other crops, including coffee. With support from the NTF IV project, this has started to change, and cocoa quality and export readiness has improved. For instance, thanks to their improved cocoa production, targeted farmers in Guinea can now capitalize on the competitive advantage of the special variety of cocoa grown in Guinea, which can attract high demand. In 2021, Guinea produced cocoa of the highest grade for the first time. Cocoa samples were sent from Guinea to a trade fair in Rome where its quality was considered to be very good, although the evaluation found no evidence that market deals have been closed. The establishment of a 27-member producers’ cooperative was another important result in Guinea. Its registration process was ongoing when this evaluation was carried out but was expected to be finished soon; the process had also been initiated for three other cooperatives.
182. For IO 3, almost all outputs have been achieved by the end of 2020. The outputs that were achieved include training programs developed and provided, a total of 265 participants to group trainings (including 78 women or 29%), strengthened capacity of SMEs to provide services to farmers (mainly through ToT on production and post-harvest practices), and 5,707 farmers trained on these topics (including 3,195 women, or 56%). Also, over 1,000 farmers have been enabled to increase their volume and/or quality of cocoa production.
183. In Sierra Leone, an average increase of production of 30% was reported by cooperatives, while also a 30% increase in price was reported. This included training on quality management and on developing a market information tool for MSMEs (exporters and cooperatives), focusing on post-harvest practices and quality requirements, as well as how to assess cocoa bean quality. In Sierra Leone, the training supplemented Produce Monitoring Board (PMB’s) support to cocoa cooperatives to participate in the 2021 Cocoa of Excellence (CoEx) Programme in Paris, France. Participation in such global forums offers opportunities for Sierra Leone’s cocoa to be recognized internationally, and thereby attract more investors to the sector.
184. One project partner from Liberia, Arjay Farm, participated in a training in Ghana on cocoa processing. This company is a woman-owned enterprise working with 75 women farmers and was supported to produce chocolate bars in collaboration with the ITC project in Ghana. Also in Liberia, women-led cooperatives were trained on the establishment of agro-forestry plots, nursery establishment, cocoa quality, and crop diversification. The findings of these FGDs were confirmed during the interviews and FGDs held by the ET in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
185. NTF IV output indicators that were not achieved included the number of farmers and SMEs improving their management and business skills (181 realized against 300 planned), and the number of ToT provided on production/post-harvest (only 3 trainings realized against 6 planned). Also, ITC launched a call to establish agro-forestry systems/demo plots in the three countries. However, the bids received did not meet the budget criteria, so this activity was not carried out.
186. NTF IV overall led to the following concrete outcomes under IO 3 (surpassing the expected outcome):
- 1,549 male and female farmers/SMEs reporting increased awareness and understanding in cocoa value chain-related challenges
 - 30 SMEs reporting having made measurable changes in their business practices including on sustainability and supply transparency

- 5 SMEs owned by women report having made measurable changes in their business practices including sustainability and supply transparency
187. The only outcome indicator that has not been achieved, is the number of SMEs integrating requirements for certification within their practices to be certified by private sustainability standards. Only 1 SME succeeded in doing this (owned by women), instead of the 12 SMEs expected.
 188. **Myanmar: (IO 3: “Female and male SME owners and local tourism products and service providers implement business decision that raise their competitiveness in the international tourism and tourism related value chains.”)** The project met most of its targets under this outcome, supporting the development of MSMEs and informal local tourism products. Many CBT service providers, including tourism MSMEs and informal local tourism and service providers owned or managed by women, reported measurable changes in their business practices to attract additional clients at the state level. Ten ethnic minority villages adopted and implemented a CBT approach. The evaluation found evidence that tourism products from Kayah reached the market and were consistently sold. Products in Tanintharyi were also ready at the end of 2019 (in line with tourism season) and they were introduced to local tour operators through an effective familiarization tour. However, promotion of Tanintharyi products in international markets was hindered by the pandemic.
 189. Evaluation data – especially interviews and survey responses – show that the adoption of a ToT approach and destination marketing activities (which are part of IO 4) is behind many of these positive results. Training activities included craft training and product development, training on the development of cultural tourism tours and food safety, and other themes. Training was continued via remote means during the pandemic.
 190. During evaluation interviews, some participants indicated that their capacity and willingness to meet global tourism industry value chain norms increased, with stronger results in Kayah, but they noted that they still faced some capacity limitations. Some of the relevant norms are quite basic,⁵⁸ but since participants had no knowledge of them prior to the project, the training immediately resulted in increased knowledge and improved practices. In Kayah, for example, by the end of the project, national tour operators found regional ground handlers more capable and reliable to work with than before and feel more confident about selling tour package products.
 191. Some local market actors (such as tour guides and operators) and communities in Kayah felt that the ITC’s CBT model was not flexible enough in considering their suggestions for adjustments to address some important issues. For instance, the project fixed locations for tourists to visit, but some stakeholders noted that tourists from Europe and the West prefer impromptu visits and see CBT trips as inauthentic if they are too organized or the price is kept fixed. Some tour operators want to take tourists to homes that are willing to accept visits without necessarily choosing these in advance. They feel that ITC was too strict on sticking with the CBT methodology, which does not allow tourists’ visits to random homes. ITC staff explained the reasons behind this: (i) it needs to maintain quality control and avoid an inflated number of service providers; (ii) all visits need to be managed by the village CBT group and a small percentage of revenues need to be paid directly to CBT group and not to houses owners (this goes to the community development fund collectively owned by the village). Most interviewed tour operators partially agree with those reasons, but at the same time, they also pointed out actual operational difficulties which can significantly affect the image and reputation of the CBT products. Such difficulties include overcrowded home visits during peak months. Another significant challenge is that tour operators, tour guides and drivers, who are not collaborating with the project, does whatever way they want and can compete with their competitors by offering lower prices.
 192. The evaluation found weaker results in Tanintharyi than Kayah. Most of the interviewed stakeholders said that the new tourism products and services were developed and ready to sell in the market at the end of 2019. This would have assured almost two years for promotion and

⁵⁸ Examples include keeping prices unchanged for packages so that tour package products can be sold one to two years in advance and reserving time and resources to serve tourists according to an agreed schedule.

market linkages activities. Evidently, this was hindered by Covid-19 and the political crisis. Many interviewees mentioned that the project could have achieved more in Tanintharyi if it had not been for COVID-19 and the political crisis. Many pointed out that Tanintharyi is a promising destination that could sell well in domestic, regional, and European markets and there are already experienced service providers in the region.

193. What is referred to as the Kayah Learning Centre in project documents is actually depicted by many respondents as a group of loosely connected resource people trained by the project. The objective is for them to transfer knowledge so that the Kayah CBT experience can be replicated elsewhere in the country. This group of about 30 trained trainers, most of whom are tour guides) has the intention of formalizing themselves into an organized entity and took some initial steps to do so with the support of the project.
194. The content, process, method, and resource people used by the ITC for its technical assistance activities were highly regarded by all respondents. However, some respondents thought the process was perhaps too long and that the preparatory phase (including surveys and long trainings in the communities) took up too much of the available time, leaving little time for actual tourism operations. The project was also less effective than expected in delivering advisory services as referred to above concerning the PPD work. As a consequence, there were fewer than expected regular participants in PPD in these two locations.
195. While the project delivered more advisory services to enable trainers/councillors to provide quality food services to hotels, restaurants, and in ethnic minority villages visited by tourists, it did not succeed in attracting as many female participants as targeted to workshops on food safety. Overall, the project in Myanmar made an effective contribution to the expected programme outcome and impact by, except in a few instances, reaching or surpassing its targets.
196. **Senegal (IO 3: “SME and start-up company owners/ managers implement business decisions that raise their competitiveness in the selected international value chains.”) and Uganda (IO 3, same as for Senegal):** Results reported by MSMEs and start-ups on intermediate outcome 3 were also strong in these two countries.
197. The projects worked with gold and silver category MSMEs as well as start-ups, providing numerous trainings on a variety of themes and subjects, leading to improved export readiness. NTF IV facilitated their access to tools and knowledge and helped company decision makers better position their MSMEs at different levels in the international markets. Tools used included Export Marketing Plans (EMPs – linked to CBI work), branding strategies, and digital marketing guidebooks. Participants also learned about brand and marketing communications, corporate governance, and crisis management (linked to COVID-19), among other topics. Some of the gold-level MSMEs received ISO Quality Management Systems certification.
198. Many of the MSME respondents consulted during the evaluation reported that they were able to apply the skills and knowledge they acquired, and some explained that this had helped them generate higher sales. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall export sales of targeted MSME were slightly down from previous years; nevertheless, many of them reported international business transactions that came about thanks to the NTF IV project. A few start-ups mentioned that the project enabled them to begin exporting for the first time.
199. In both countries, a few start-ups and less export-ready MSMEs demonstrated weaker engagement with the project, leading to limited participation and “no-shows” for certain events and training sessions. Some respondents also raised the challenge of being involved in additional MSME support projects which created competing priorities and some “event participation fatigue.” Yet those who were engaged, as mentioned above, contributed financially to their participation through the project’s cost-share approach, indicating the strength of their commitment and that they valued what the project offered.
200. Shifting the support to the targeted companies online in the wake of the pandemic created a steep learning curve, and it took some time for all stakeholders to adjust. Most respondents were also disappointed that trade missions had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, the adaptation was easier in these two countries than in MRU and Myanmar because IT companies were already

accustomed to online practices and the type of support offered by the project was better adapted to remote work.

201. The trade missions organized by the project were praised by the majority of those who participated in them. They appreciated that the agenda of the B2B meetings were organized in advance rather than at the last minute and found it relevant, targeting potential clients aligned with their IT services. B2B partnerships were facilitated and formalized through the missions, leading to important results. For example, some participating companies from Senegal opened offices in Ivory Coast, in Burkina Faso, and France, and overall, MSMEs and start-ups enhanced their international exposure.
202. Many of the companies mentioned that they appreciated the exchange of knowledge, know-how, and best practices among companies supported by NTF IV during the B2B events. Some companies even entered into agreements for the supply of services (such as contracts for mobile phone solutions, integrated maintenance solutions, integrated digital waste management, waste audits, and training). This contributed to an increase in participants' awareness of regional market opportunities, in particular in West Africa for the Senegal project, but also East Africa.

IO 4, programme level: MSMEs linked to international companies for sourcing and sustainable product/service and market development.

203. The projects covered the entire value chains, up to international markets and **the evaluation found good results in terms of connectedness with international markets** (for example, through fairs and events). This included, in some cases, regional connections, which were considered important by many stakeholders. Some concrete results were achieved in the form of new contracts or business deals, but some stakeholders saw closing deals as a missing final step and felt the project could have done much more to help them reach new export markets.
204. IO 4 was closely linked to IO 3, since, as business decisions improve and MSMEs and farmers become more competitive, they can position themselves better in their international sector value chains. Interaction between the two IOs shows some of the dynamics in the overall ToC. As results were strong in IO 3, they were also stronger in the other because of the links among them. The relationship between the two IOs goes both ways also: access to international opportunities for the MSMEs, or their better understanding of international value chains might motivate better business decisions.
205. **MRU (IO 4: “MSMEs linked to international companies for sourcing and sustainable product/service and market development.”)** Through the NTF IV projects, the connection with international markets was achieved for some farmers (mainly in Sierra Leone), but not all. It can be concluded that IO 4 was only partially achieved and can be rated as moderately satisfactory, as explained in more detail below.
206. In MRU, none of the 7 output indicators under IO 4 have been achieved, while the two outcome indicators have been realized. The weakest outputs were the number of market orientations developed (only 1 developed vs. 3 expected), the number of SMEs trained on finding new market opportunities (zero trained vs. 12 expected), and the number of SMEs having made new contacts for future business (only 4 achieved vs. 12 expected). Nevertheless, some promising results have been reported by ITC, including the participation of a delegation from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea at the CHOCOA fair in Amsterdam (in collaboration with CBI), and the establishment of contacts with three cocoa importing companies. In 2020, 10 cocoa cooperatives from Sierra Leone were introduced to a Swiss cocoa buyer. As a result, one of the cooperatives is at the final stages of negotiations to export their cocoa to Switzerland. This would be the cooperative's first time directly exporting cocoa. The same buyer has also expressed interest in buying from Liberia and Guinea. In Guinea, a women-led company started processing cocoa into chocolate and cocoa powder for the local market and increasingly for export markets as well. These outputs have led to the following outcomes:
 - 6 international market partners having established plans to source from SMEs in MRU countries;

- 4 market linkages established.
207. One of the main challenges in MRU was that cocoa cooperatives did not export on their own behalf, but rather through exporters. Respondents expressed the need to create more integrated value chains that allow them to manage exports themselves so they can increase their profit margins and incomes for smallholder farmers.
 208. At the end of the project, three short videos were produced about project results in each of the three countries. This is considered a very good way to showcase the strength of the cocoa sector in the Mano River region, including for potential international buyers.
 209. **Myanmar: (IO 4: “Tourism and tourism-related MSMEs linked to international markets.”)** The project made progress towards this outcome although, as noted above in relation to other IOs, there was less time to produce results in Tanintharyi, where the project started later and did not benefit from NTF III. The COVID-19 pandemic also slowed the delivery of activities contributing to this outcome, but the project rapidly adapted by moving to online approaches.
 210. ITC and CBI worked together to enhance impact both for regional CBT products and MSMEs as well as for tour operators, designing a comprehensive strategy including:
 - Myanmar Tour Operator Inventory and Survey, including gathering information on their activity/interest in working with domestic and/or regional travel markets,
 - Regional (Asian markets) Tour Operator Inventory of key markets (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, India, and Australia) to identify ToTs interested in Myanmar and the ITC developed products,
 - Inventory of Myanmar travel press and media, bloggers, and influencers in view of their involvement towards targeting domestic market travellers.
 211. At the macro level, the project surpassed its targets for the number of international outbound tour operators reporting that they offer the tourism products and services developed thanks to ITC support. Over 120 tour operators in Myanmar-Europe tourism supply chains included the new Kayah CBT tours in their offer. However, the project was less successful in increasing the number of ground-handlers and national tour operators reporting that they offer such tourism products and services.
 212. The project was successful in organizing familiarization trips for press and international tour operators, including female participants in Kayah State and Tanintharyi. As in MRU, the project produced high-quality promotional videos – in this case, featuring the CBT destinations⁵⁹. A few of these were well received by broad audiences and even won international awards. Until the coup d'état interrupted the attempt, the project also made efforts to target domestic and regional tourist markets as an adaptation to the COVID-19 context.
 213. There was a significant increase in the number of tourists in Kayah between 2017 and 2019 (from a baseline close to zero) and evaluation evidence indicates that this was largely due to project contributions. In Tanintharyi, the effect of market access activities was promising up to the pandemic, but since then, results have been affected.
 214. Notwithstanding some obstacles noted above, the Myanmar project directly and successfully contributed to the fourth – and key – element of the programme's value chain approach, linking domestic products and services to the international market. The project's contribution is demonstrated in various tangible ways, including the significant number of international outbound tour operators reporting that they offer the tourism products and services developed with ITC support (72 compared to the targeted 7).
 215. **Senegal (IO 4: “Beneficiary companies and supported private sector associations develop international linkages and build partnerships in view of funding and/or sales.”) and**

⁵⁹ For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21t2CxKd8yY>

Uganda (IO 4: same as for Senegal.)”) As noted above, generally speaking, connecting targeted MSMEs and start-ups with international markets was an important result of the project, although it was affected by the economic downturn linked to COVID-19. NTF IV sought to maintain the visibility of the MSMEs—mostly start-ups—through its own online platforms, such as the NTF IV Facebook group. In addition, virtual B2B events were held to replace cancelled face-to-face meetings.

216. Market linkages were established through, among others, B2B events at international and regional levels. Diverse markets were explored, from both East and West Africa to China and Europe. This diversity was appreciated by a majority of evaluation respondents. However, a few of the most export ready MSMEs noted that they had expected somewhat more opportunity for connections with the international markets than actual results.

To what extent have the activities and outputs been delivered according to the quality requirements and the workplans?

217. The ET identified two indicators to guide its assessment of this question: the evidence of baseline data and the perceptions of project managers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. It further assumed the closer activities and outputs came to meeting quality requirements, the higher the level of satisfaction would be among stakeholders and target beneficiaries. The ET also assumed that activities and outputs were delivered according to the workplans unless reported otherwise in project documents or during interviews or survey responses.
218. Based on a review of project reports on activities and outputs, the ET determined that **progress was steadily made over the course of the implementation cycle**. As indicated in the 2020 Programme report, covering 1 January to 31 December of that year, most outputs were either met or about to be met. The delivery of some activities and outputs was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the projects adapted by accelerating digitalization of information and the use of ICTs. However, not all businesses benefitted from this transition, and experienced loss of sales and revenues, and delays caused by the pandemic were noted by BSOs and MSMEs. As indicated above in Figure 9, 94% of BSOs and MSMEs were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of NTF IV results, outcomes, and outputs.

To what extent did stakeholders have a good understanding of the programme?

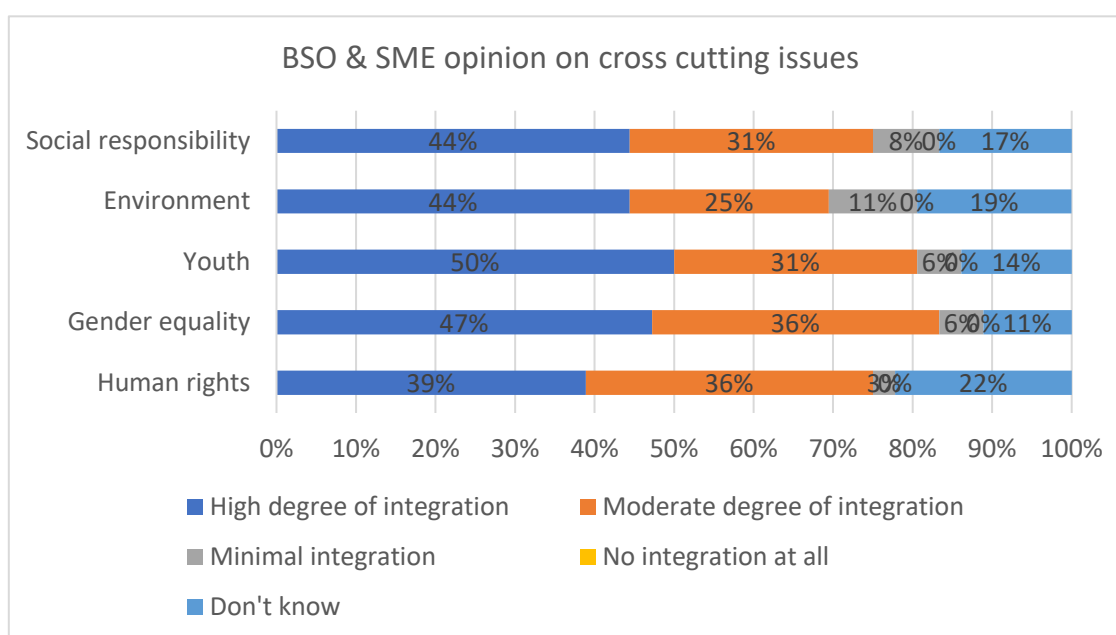
219. At the onset of the evaluation process, the ET identified three sub-questions, linked to a series of indicators in the evaluation matrix, to assess stakeholder understanding of the programme, interpreted to refer to access and uptake of programme deliverables. The final NTF IV report, interviews, and survey results show that **stakeholders had satisfactory access to training opportunities, publications, and other deliverables**. Relevant targets were either surpassed or met, with two exceptions. No information was found on the number of action plans endorsed and incorporated into national policy, including plans related to the economic empowerment of women. Nor was sex-disaggregated data available on the number of TISI clients reporting improved services from selected TISIs including competitive intelligence.
220. The programme did even better on indicators related to the use of deliverables, with most targets met and a greater proportion surpassed. An exception is the number of MSMEs certified in quality and/or sustainability standards: only half of the 12 targeted MSMEs were able to reach the expected results. NTF IV performed especially well on the indicator tracking MSMEs who reported making measurable changes in their business practices and improving international competitiveness as a result of ITC support, with a final total of 1601, far exceeding the target of 127. A total of 1230 market linkages were established compared to a target of 275.
221. Evaluation evidence suggested that **those targeted by NTF IV projects were able to access benefits without facing significant barriers**. Important exceptions were some youth and women, who in some cases faced additional barriers in accessing project activities, potentially because of the long distance to access the project activity and short notices given. (This issue is further discussed in the Cross-cutting Issues section which follows.) In addition, the evaluation found that for some activities a lack of interpreters at the local level created barriers related to language.

3.4 Cross-cutting issues⁶⁰

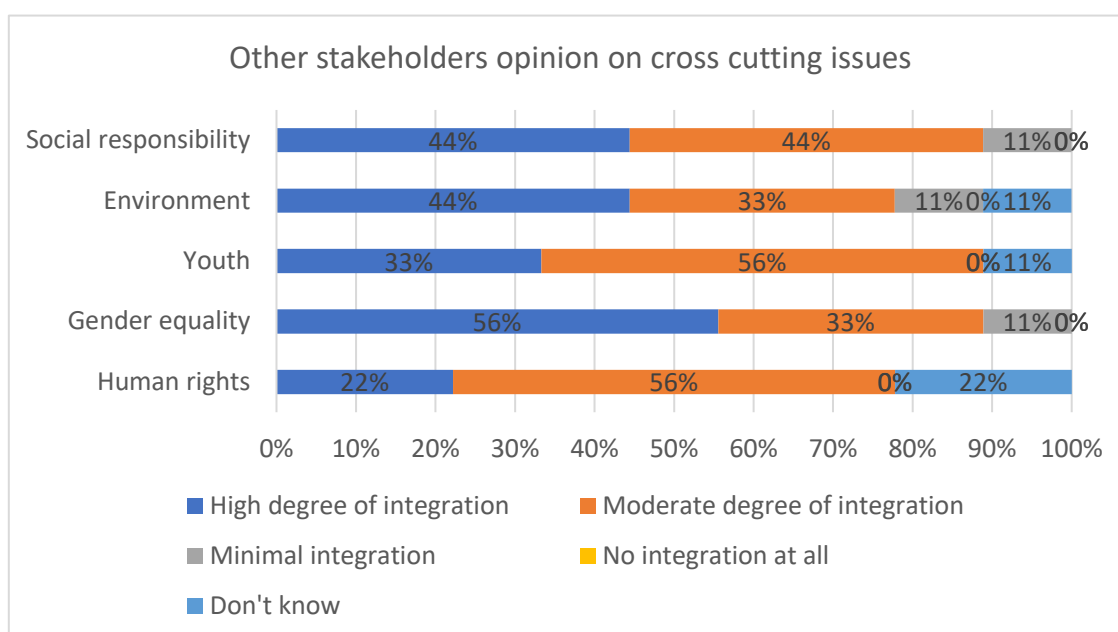
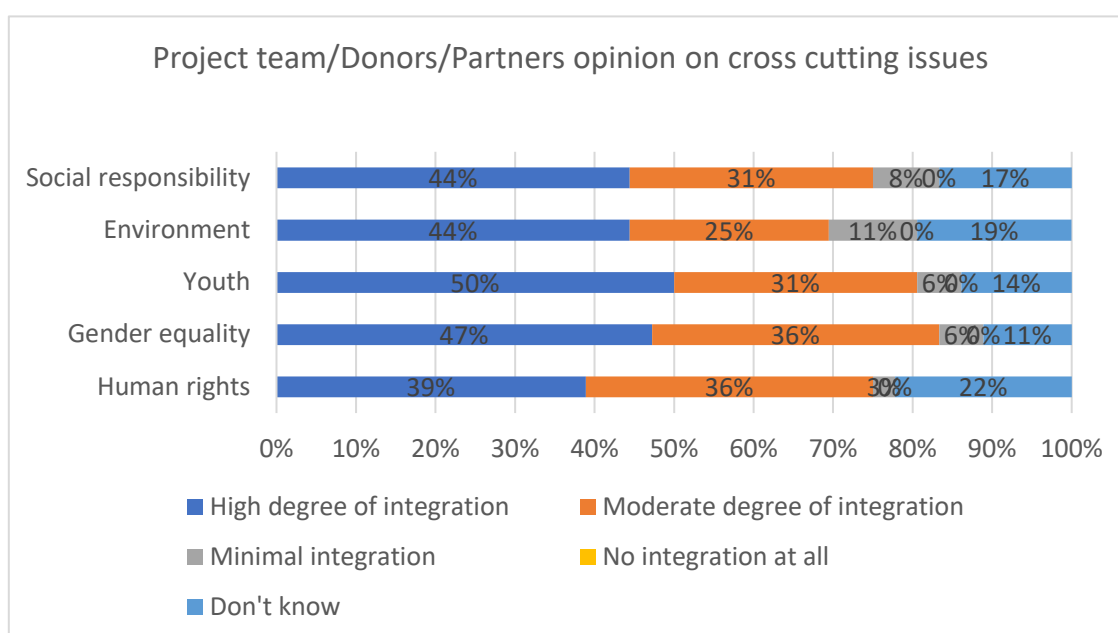
Are there any results related to cross-cutting issues related to human rights and gender equality, youth, environment, and social responsibility?

222. Positive results in promoting economic opportunities for women and youth are accompanied by some specific indicators. However, gender equality is more than the number of women involved. **There was limited deliberate gender-based analysis and gender transformative results.** The ET also found that there was a lack of environmental impact assessment of targeted economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism. Human rights analysis focused on certain specific aspects of the projects' context. However, overall, this analysis was limited, whether in the design documents or programme reporting.
223. In each of the projects and at programme level it was expected that several issues would be considered and addressed in a cross-cutting manner – namely gender equality, the inclusion of youth, environmental protection, human rights, and social responsibility. In all projects, despite a lack of attention at the design stage, cross-cutting issues were addressed to some extent during implementation and as illustrated in Figures 10, 11, and 12, a majority of evaluation survey respondents in all categories felt these issues were integrated to a high or moderate degree. The highest responses related to gender equality and youth. However, compared to other questions from the survey, there was a higher percentage of negative and “don't know” responses, confirming what the ET found from other lines of evidence – that for the most part, these cross-cutting issues had a relatively weak profile in the projects.

Figure 10: Cross-cutting issues (BSOs – MSMEs)



⁶⁰ As the cross-cutting issues are important aspects of the evaluation, the ET decided to address the key evaluation question in a sub-section of the effectiveness criterion.

Figure 11: Cross-cutting (Other stakeholders⁶¹)**Figure 12: Cross-cutting (Project team/ funders/ partners)**

224. **Gender equality and youth:** Overall, the programme put more emphasis on gender equality and youth than other themes. In all projects, the ET found indicators of positive results in promoting economic opportunities for women and youth. For example, in **Myanmar**, the project midterm survey found that of the 70 MSMEs interviewed in Kayah State and Tanintharyi Region (including hotels, restaurants, ground-handlers, etc.) 13% of women entrepreneurs and 5% of youth had benefitted from increased tourism income between 2018 and 2019.⁶², but disaggregated

⁶¹ Government counterparts, funders (including Dutch embassies in the targeted countries), NGOs, associations, policy makers and regulators etc.)

⁶² The survey followed the ITC MSMECs methodology adapted to Myanmar, and to the tourism sector.

monitoring mainly focused on the numerical participation of women and youth and few activities were oriented to gender-specific or youth-oriented results based on sector- or context-specific analysis.

225. Nevertheless, in **MRU**, in particular, the project contributed to gender equality by supporting increased participation of women in cocoa farming and delivered governance training that led to strengthened gender policies in MSMEs/cooperatives. In all three MRU countries, women became more motivated to grow cocoa, through awareness-raising activities implemented by the project. The participation of women increased during the project's life cycle, and the number of female executives in the participating cooperatives increased as well. In Liberia, there are now quotas for female participation on cooperative boards.
226. In **Senegal** and **Uganda**, women were encouraged to take up leadership roles in the various IT and ITES structures established. For example, the current board chairperson of the ICT Association of Uganda is a woman, and the board⁶³ includes two women of the seven members. ATIS has a woman as its vice-chair, with the capacity to take strategic decisions. In both Senegal and Uganda, as discussed above in the Relevance section, SheTrades initiatives were conducted starting in 2019 – 2020 (slightly later in Senegal) to encourage women to participate in the ICT ecosystem and bridge the gender gap in the sector. The 2020 NTF IV annual report shows that women received training and advisory services and women entrepreneurs and managers took part in various training, advisory, and coaching sessions through NTF IV. It was also brought to the attention of the ET by project managers that in Uganda, Zimba Women were supported under the Funzi partnership where women entrepreneurs were trained, their founders also had the opportunity to travel for some B2B events under the project for exposure and business opportunities.
227. **Youth** was a central element to the **two IT projects**, as IT is an attractive sector for this stratum of the populations involved. Their needs have been considered by definition as they compose the majority of the beneficiaries. Gender issues were not raised as a specific issue in the context of the NTF IV Senegal project. Yet there is a minority of female entrepreneurs in the IT/ITES sector in the country. The major subject raised was how to run their businesses in an effective and efficient manner, like any entrepreneur. In Uganda, NTF III lessons learned had identified the gender gap in the IT sector as an important challenge to consider in NTF IV. From the data collected during the present evaluation, it seems gender equality was not as central to activities implemented by the ITC as it should have been considering the NTF III lessons learned.
228. **Environment:** To the credit of ITC and CBI, the projects made some references to environmental considerations. This issue received the most attention in the **MRU** project although, according to the midterm self-evaluation, “no specific activities were envisaged in the design of the project that was related to the environment.” In Guinea, forest protection was very important, because Guinean cocoa is produced in agroforestry systems, which is different from Cote d'Ivoire (not in the project but a country to which Guinea is frequently compared) where cocoa is produced without shade.
229. Although there was a reference to solid waste management in **Myanmar**, the project did not fully consider the environmental impact of tourism as it applies to community-based tourism. Nor did it benefit from a thorough tourism sector impact assessment conducted by the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, which was publicly accessible. The ET also noted that the project did not deliver on its expected results of conducting campaigns on environmental sustainability awareness in relation to tourism, nor on the number of tourism stakeholders reporting improved awareness on environmental sustainability in relation to tourism. The main limitation was the lack of awareness-raising activities, particularly on garbage issues, targeted towards domestic tourists. Consequently, only a few stakeholders participating in the interviews and the survey reported greater environmental awareness on environmental sustainability in relation to tourism.

⁶³ The ICT Association of Uganda is therefore pleased to officially announce that the new board of directors includes; Mrs. Elizabeth Ntege as the Chairperson, Mr. Rajeev Agarwal as the Vice Chairperson, Mr. James Byaruhanga as a Non- executive Director, Mr. Ken Stober as a Non- executive Director, Mr. Boaz Shani as Non-executive Director Ms. Joan Katambi as a Non-executive Director and Mr. Patrick Kadama as a Non- executive Director.

Results are somewhat better among CBT groups in the communities, tour guides, tour operators, and ground handlers.

230. **Human rights:** Attention in this area was limited across the projects. The evaluation respondents noted that in Guinea, children do not work in the cocoa sector, and cocoa production increasingly benefits women. Producers have mixed cropping systems which are different from other countries. Traditionally, men produced cocoa, but recently women are more involved and a few even own cocoa farms. This was a development, already underway before the project, was further stimulated by NTF IV. A normative framework was developed for the cocoa sector, elaborated by IGNM with the support of ITC. One of the six norms focuses on social responsibility and includes specific attention for human rights, gender, and CSR.
231. The question of human rights was raised in **Myanmar** only in the context of noting how the situation with the Rohingya population negatively affected international market perceptions of the country as a tourism destination. Other human rights issues in Kayah were not addressed – notably the presence of the military and the sporadic armed conflict. Over the years the region has experienced forced labour and extra-judicial killings among other violations.⁶⁴ Before the recent military coup Kayah state had been experiencing relative tranquillity, but thousands of people remained in refugee camps in Thailand and for many people who live in Myanmar, past atrocities have left profound marks and scepticism about how the country's central government understands the needs of ethnic minority populations.⁶⁵ The ET found no evidence that the project in Myanmar demonstrated an understanding of the realities of the various communities in Kayah that it engaged by considering or addressing these issues, even though the project involved governmental authorities based in the region and the capital.

3.5 Efficiency

232. **ET rating for efficiency: Satisfactory.** From the evidence provided below, the ET has found that the projects were implemented relatively efficiently. However, it was difficult for the ET to fully assess the efficiency of the programme coordination as available financial data is presented in a way that makes it difficult to understand what is being spent where and at which level.

What is the extent to which the programme delivered results in an economic and timely way?

233. The **strongest factor linked to the efficiency of programme governance and management was its overall flexibility.** A notable example was NTF IV's adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to its ability to change its approach quickly, with support from stakeholders.
234. NTF IV's decentralized, project-level management was appreciated by a majority of evaluation respondents. However, it was noted that there were many layers of management – Programme level, ITC project level, and national coordinators – which at times, led to confusion of the different roles and responsibilities. Some respondents also told the ET that they felt there was somewhat too much reliance on international technical support. There were also some delays in implementation in certain projects, as discussed in more detail below.
235. During the inception phase of this evaluation, the NTF IV programme management team sent the available financial documentation to the ET. These donor statements, financial progress reports, audits, and other similar documents were relatively general. For example, most of the financial progress reports were one-page documents showing expenditures by the project. The certified financial statements were slightly more detailed, presenting in two pages the account status, using the following ITC budget lines by the project:

⁶⁴ Amnesty International (1999). Aftermath: Three Years of Dislocation in the Kayah State. UNHCR website. Accessed online: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a9ca10.html>.

⁶⁵ Transnational Institute (2018). From War to Peace in Kayah (Karenni) State – A Land at a Crossroad in Myanmar. Accessed online: https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tni-2018_karenni_eng_web_def.pdf

- Contractual Services;
- Equipment, Vehicles, and Furniture;
- Operating and other Direct Costs;
- Staff and other Personnel Costs;
- Supplies, Commodities, Materials; and
- Travel.

236. No cumulative financial figures were made available. In the absence of detailed financial and human resources reports, the evaluation reviewed the high-level financial data provided and primarily relied on interviews and the survey to assess the efficiency of the programme and its projects. However, during the data collection process, the ET noted that few people had details on budgets and expenditures.
237. The evaluation found that, in general, programme efficiency was high, and this was supported by the survey results. Almost all respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the human resources (such as project staff and trainers), financial resources, and material resources (such as manuals and videos) available to achieve expected results – as shown in Figures 13, 14 and 15. Anecdotally, a few respondents in two countries indicated they had expected their respective projects to make some financing available so that, as active and engaged beneficiaries, they could implement some of their ideas to achieve project objectives. This unmet expectation may partly explain the relatively high percentage (compared to other questions) of survey respondents not satisfied with available resources.

Figure 13: Satisfaction with Efficiency (BSOs and MSMEs)

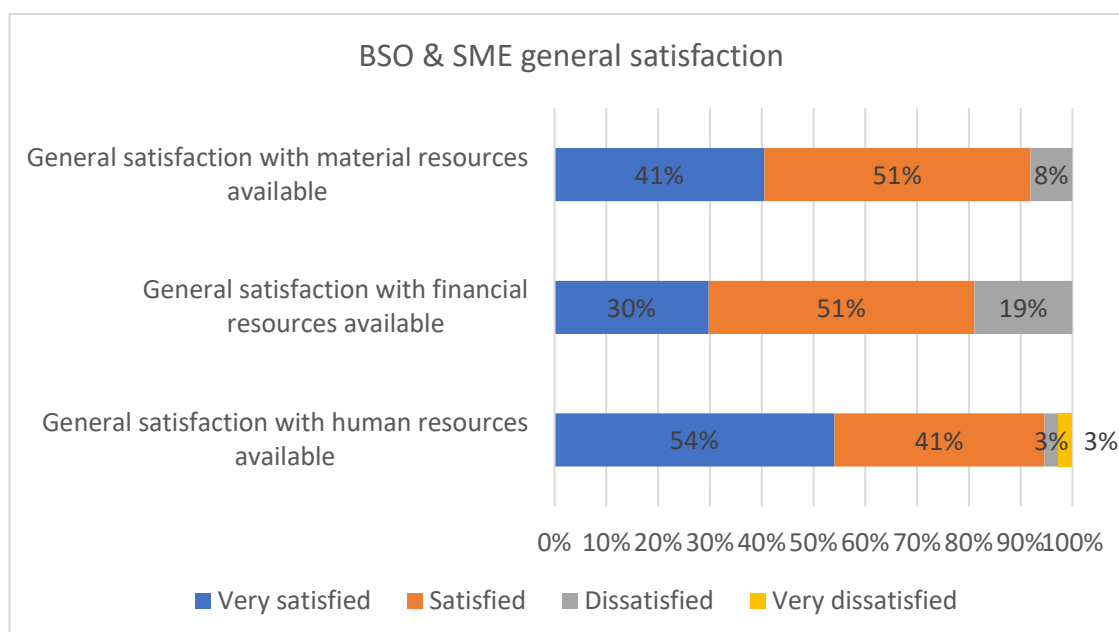
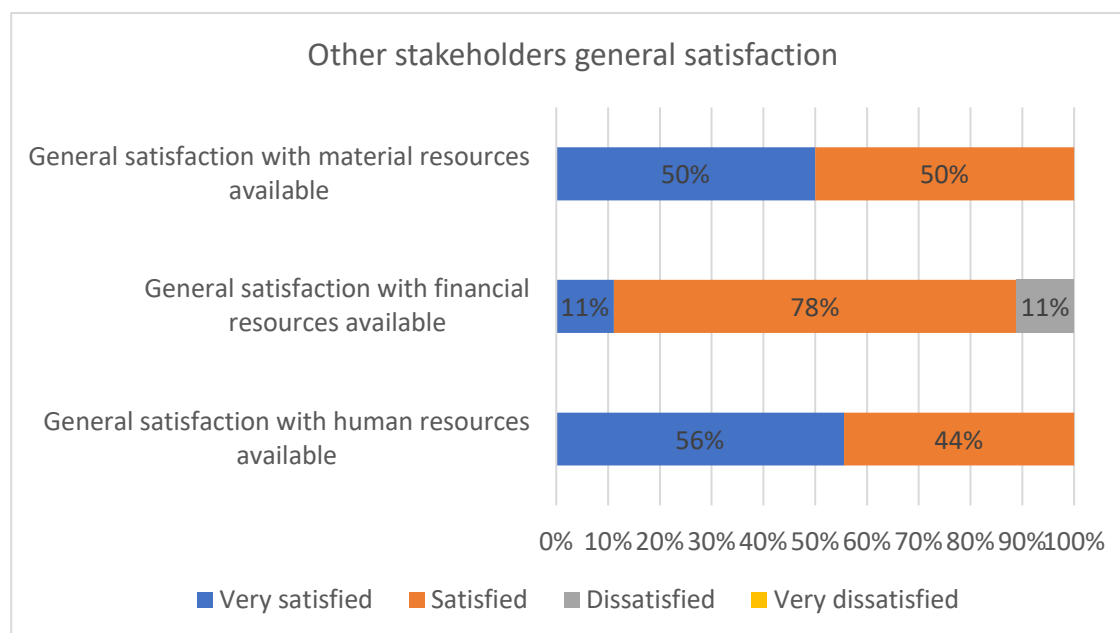
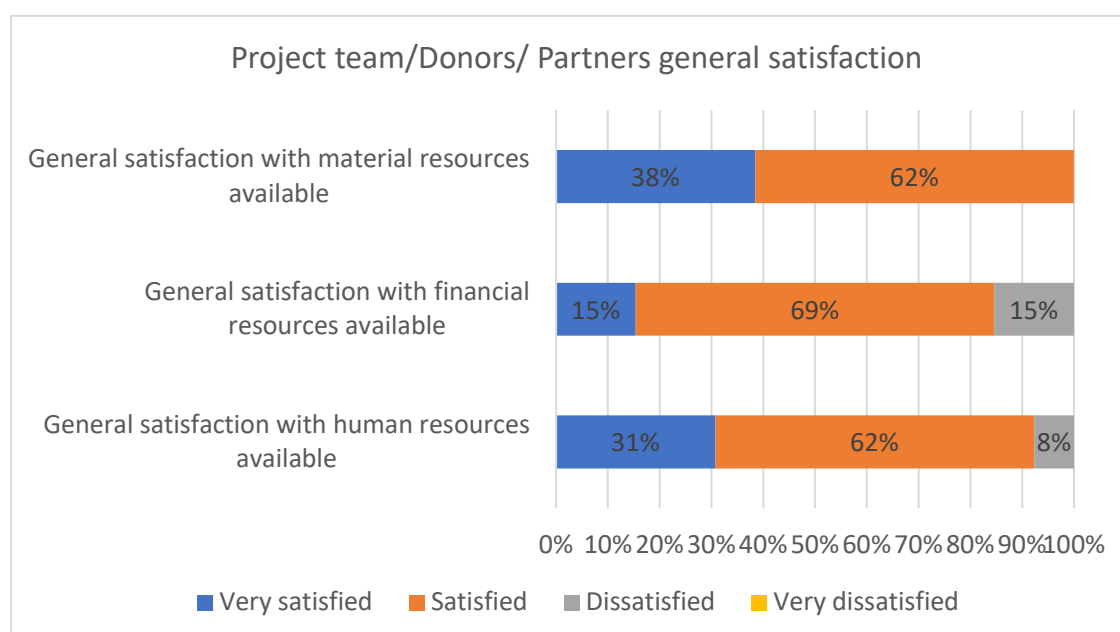


Figure 14: Satisfaction with Efficiency (other stakeholders)**Figure 15: Satisfaction with Efficiency (Project team/ Funders/ Partners)**

238. **MRU:** Overall, the ET found that the MRU project was implemented relatively efficiently,⁶⁶ despite some initial challenges. The project experienced many delays as it was getting underway: the midterm self-evaluation noted the substantial gap between the signature of the NTF IV programme document in September 2017 and the submission of the Mano River Cocoa project document to ITC's SMC for approval in January 2019. Three factors explain this delay: (i) the need to feed the work done under STEP into the NTF IV project document, (ii) a large number of personnel changes in the project management team, and (iii) the time needed to finalize the logical framework. Even after the submission of the project document, these issues were not fully

⁶⁶ Please see table 5 in chapter 2 above for the budget amounts per project.

resolved until mid-2019, at which point, project implementation picked up speed. The implementation approach itself also caused delays, as it was decided to start with one country (Sierra Leone) rather than all three at the same time (see also under Effectiveness).

239. In general, evaluation respondents observed that their collaboration with ITC during the project was positive. Partners benefited from ITC's experience in developing relationships in the value chain, as well as on institutional development. They felt that ITC had good coordinators on the ground. They also felt that the trainers that were hired were professional in delivering the training, and they appreciated the materials provided by the programme. Training participants were satisfied with the per diems, food, and training facilitation.
240. The project carried out activities in a cost-efficient manner. For example, in Guinea, given the limited budget, only one international consultant was hired, and the project relied on local consultants, which was both more cost-efficient and more sustainable in the context of a multi-country project. As the other projects were targeting individual countries, this did not happen.
241. However, some respondents expressed concerns about the lack of financial support to provide follow-up training after the ToT training, which meant that training replication in their villages was done at their own expense. The evidence collected by the evaluation indicates that there was limited stakeholder ownership in some cases. It was suggested by a number of cooperatives that in a future project, it might be useful to sign MoUs to ensure the commitment of the cooperatives to continue the training after the project has ended.
242. **Myanmar:** From a human resources perspective, NTF IV moved from a very heavy reliance on international consultants in NTF III to greater empowerment of local actors, using a ToT approach. This was noted positively during interviews. Specific positive comments were given on the quality of key international consultants. Despite this improvement, a few respondents felt that NTF IV still relied too heavily on international consultants and Geneva-based staff for activities which, in their view, could have been carried out more cost-effectively by local staff and local consultants. According to the same sources, local staff primarily supported the international consultants, rather than leading activities on their own, which they thought would have been feasible. NTF IV reports did not include information that could further support this point of view.
243. Some respondents perceived also that local staff was not sufficiently involved in field-level activities, in liaising with government agencies at the national and regional levels or delivering training and coaching by themselves – which would have reduced reliance on international consultants. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that most respondents appreciated the expertise of the international experts.
244. The decision to include an additional region, beyond the one covered by NTF III, was essentially equivalent to starting a new project: new analysis and field design work where necessary, and so were the identification of new locations, partners, and stakeholders. It also meant delivering technical assistance in a completely new environment. For CBT, this required sizeable resources, making Myanmar's planned share of the total NTF IV programme budget -- almost one-third -- relatively high for a second project in the same country and sector.⁶⁷ However, the evaluation found that this was justified by the nature of the project. ITC and CBI shared costs for some activities but the evaluation did not find any indication of cost-sharing arrangements with the Myanmar project partners.
245. The ET found that there were delays in the delivery of some activities resulting from lengthier time than expected for decisions to be made by governmental partners. Some local respondents attributed delays to what they considered lengthier than necessary processes to select communities in their state.
246. **Senegal and Uganda:** Individually, these two projects had the smallest budgets of the programme. This was partly because they gained efficiencies by sharing a project manager and they had similar approaches and expected results. Indeed, there was some replication and

⁶⁷ By comparison, the Mano River Cocoa project budget, covering three countries, was the same as the budget for Myanmar.

learning from one project to the other, exemplified by the development of the Value Proposition in Senegal which was inspired by results achieved in Uganda.

247. Many of the respondents that had contacts with NTF IV for expenditure purposes reported that procedures to access and account for funds were clearly explained, and there were no delays in money transfers. This voided bottlenecks in decision making and implementation, rendering implementation more efficient and timelier. NTF IV team's resource management made it possible for the projects to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic situation by transferring some of the funds allocated to travel to other types of support for the MSMEs and start-ups.

How does the NTF IV investment compare to the realized benefits in US dollar terms as compared to the baselines per programme – what is the ROI?

248. In the evaluation inception report, the ET stated that answering this ROI question would require them to "heavily rely on data provided by the programme" and noted, "If there are gaps in data concerning the benefits realized, the team will have difficulty providing informative analysis for the question." With the information at hand, **it was not possible to quantify the project or programme benefits in US dollar terms**, making it impossible to answer this question.

Was a monitoring system put in place that enabled effective management, implementation and accountability?

249. While for the most part the NTF IV monitoring and reporting system provided sufficient and appropriate information, mainly by project, to support adaptive management, the evaluation found that **the connections between project activities and the overall logic model were not always clear**. The lack of baseline data at the programme outset also complicated efforts to assess performance based on monitoring data.
250. Project and programme management processes permitted a constant feedback loop on activities. This is considered good practice, but evaluation evidence indicated that it was somewhat time-consuming and complex considering the use of the data.
251. The programme's indicators and monitoring system at the project level were both robust. This was after a slow beginning since project implementation started while the team was still working on the RBM framework.⁶⁸ An M&E system was in place, with a project indicator tracker to provide real-time information about progress on project results. Surveys were used regularly to assess stakeholder satisfaction after activity implementation. However, a few respondents, namely BSOs and local coordinators, mentioned that the added value, relative to the time required to collect this type of data, was not fully proven.
252. Although the programme did not have external monitors to provide an assessment of performance, the ITC relied on its SG members from headquarters and on a midterm self-evaluation to assess its performance. Indicator targets, which were quite low, and for the most part surpassed by a wide margin, were set without any baseline studies. This had a significant impact on the ability of the programme and this evaluation to measure the real efficiency of the proposed approach – including the logic model – to achieve results. It is not clear why such a choice was made. While zero baselines were appropriate in some cases, in others they were not; for example, for projects that were rollovers from NTF III, baseline data other than zero was available and should have been used.
253. By design, it was part of the role of the SG to conduct monitoring field visits. Over the years, the programme benefited from strong continuity within the SG as representatives from CBI and ITC DEI essentially remained the same and participated in most if not all of the meetings. Field visits were planned in advance. Having said that, during interviews, some respondents expressed the view that these monitoring visits by HQ representatives were not efficient, requiring a high level of effort in relation to their perceived value-added.

⁶⁸ This was reported in the SG minutes of June 19, 2018

254. Notwithstanding, reports show that the SG added value by bringing key strategic issues to the table to ensure that the programme was delivering on its expected results. Programme issues were discussed and addressed at the meetings, which took place at least twice a year as planned. For example, this included monitoring and advising on the integration of gender in all projects and how the programme as a whole, based on country reports, was supporting SDGs.
255. Some important monitoring details were addressed in the steering committee minutes and others in the progress reports (e.g., progress towards reaching targets, some issues in implementation, etc.). The programme and the projects lacked a single, consolidated source of monitoring analysis/response and it was not always clear either how the data was aggregated from project to programme level. For example, when looking at the project level indicators, it is unclear how the programme was able to aggregate data on “Percentage increase in income of women beneficiaries from- SMEs /cooperatives/ farmers and individual service providers” when not all projects had this indicator. And even when the mapping between the project level and programme level indicators was done, the links were not clear. For example, at project level, the indicator was “Number of enterprises that transacted business as a result of NTF IV support” and at programme level, it was matched to “Number of enterprises having transacted *international* business as a result of ITC support”. Hence, it is not clear if businesses that might have transacted at the national level were accounted for in the programme level indicator that targeted international transaction. If not, it is not clear how the types of transactions were differentiated as the indicator do not call for this type of disaggregation. Other examples exist. Information provided was mainly by the project. Still, some good tools were used for reporting purposes as well as for exchanges among stakeholders, including ASANA Project Management, Google Cloud, and even WhatsApp at certain times. The use of videos was also an important approach to disseminate project success stories.

How well was the programme managed in order to address operational efficiency, within ITC as well as the local project coordination teams?

256. It was easier for the ET to assess the programme management with macro-level, strategic respondents than with field-based management, involving local coordinators, as there were more reports to rely on in addition to the survey and interviews. The ET also encountered some reluctance to express critical views of how ITC operated locally.
257. NTF IV reporting requirements did not result in the same level of regular and thorough reporting on Project Steering Committees of all projects and thus the ET could not make generalizations on the efficiency of this governance mechanism. As a consequence, the ET will have recommendations to make to this effect. Indeed, the ET considers that this **lack of reporting on the project management is a weakness of the effectiveness of the programme as a whole.**
258. At the planning stage, 9% of the total budget of \$10,277,700 was allocated to project management, of which 80% covered the services of a programme leader, a programme assistant, and a quality assurance advisor. The remaining funds were to serve for the final evaluation and facilitating the work of the SG (just 6.5% of the project management envelope). At the end of NTF IV, with 99% of the original budget spent, the ratio of 9% had been maintained. The ET considers it to be effective when the percentage of budget allocation for project management and administration is normally around 10%.

3.6 Impact

259. **ET rating for impact: Satisfactory.** A programme like the NTF IV is not expected to necessarily achieve impact-level results after four years. However, the intention is to put in place the building blocks for impact to eventually materialize and, in this case, for inclusive and sustainable development to occur partly thanks to NTF IV.

To what extent has the programme generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects? To what extent has the programme generated inclusive and sustainable development through improved

livelihood of communities/farmers/MSMEs/households (particularly for women and youth)?⁶⁹

260. The ET considers that, within the context of what the programme was supposed to accomplish (its targets) and taking into consideration challenges faced due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, **the NTF IV programme contributed to improved livelihoods for farmers, MSMEs, and individuals, particularly women and youth.**
261. Job creation, which contributes to improving community livelihoods, was mentioned by many MRU evaluation respondents as a programme impact. NTF IV enhanced the BSO services portfolio, but some respondents noted limited human and financial resources to ensure these would be sufficiently scaled to achieve results at higher levels (the multiplier effect not assured).
262. According to the programme theory of change, by adding value to trade in the four projects and through the SheTrades approach in countries where the conditions were favourable, the programme was expected to contribute positively to inclusive and sustainable development. More specifically, at the impact level, it was expected to contribute to improved livelihoods for communities, farmers, MSMEs, and households, and particularly women and youth, through income generation and access to an increased share of the additional wealth created. The main expected outcome was: MSMEs more competitive through improved value chains and through enhanced ability to meet market requirements and create value in a sustainable manner.
263. For each project, the expected programme impact was adapted to the relevant country and sector context as follows:
- a. Inclusive and sustainable development in MRU: improved livelihood of farmers through income generation. The outcome was: SMEs in the cocoa value chain will become more competitive through an improved value chain and through enhanced ability to meet market requirements and create value for increased trading in a sustainable manner.
 - b. Inclusive and sustainable tourism development in Myanmar: Improved livelihood of local village stakeholders and providers of tourism products and services, including through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth generated. The outcome was: tourism and tourism-related SMEs and local tourism product and service providers are more competitive through improved value chains and through enhanced ability to meet market requirements and create value in a sustainable manner.
 - c. Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Senegal: Improved livelihood of SME owners (particularly women and youth) through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth created. The outcome was: export competitiveness of the Senegalese IT & ITES sector is increased at the firm and TISI levels.
 - d. Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Uganda: Improved livelihood of SME owners, their households, and employees (particularly women and youth) through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth created. The outcome was: export competitiveness of the Ugandan IT and ITES sector is increased at the firm and TISI levels.
264. The ET faced difficulties in finding quantitative and qualitative data at the programme level and the limitations in this area were confirmed in the NTF IV final report,⁷⁰ which noted that “as some indicators at the outcome and impact levels were the same for all projects, aggregation was possible to a certain extent. However, as all projects have achieved many more impact, the individual project logframes are able to capture these.” Notwithstanding, the available data shows that the programme reached and surpassed its targets in most cases (through its projects’

⁶⁹ These two evaluation questions are addressed together as the second question states the impact result, hence relating to the “higher-level effects”.

⁷⁰ NTF IV 2017-2021 Final Report. November 2021. page 16.

cumulated targets), except for the number of MSMEs certified in quality and or sustainability standards – only six out of the targeted 12⁷¹.

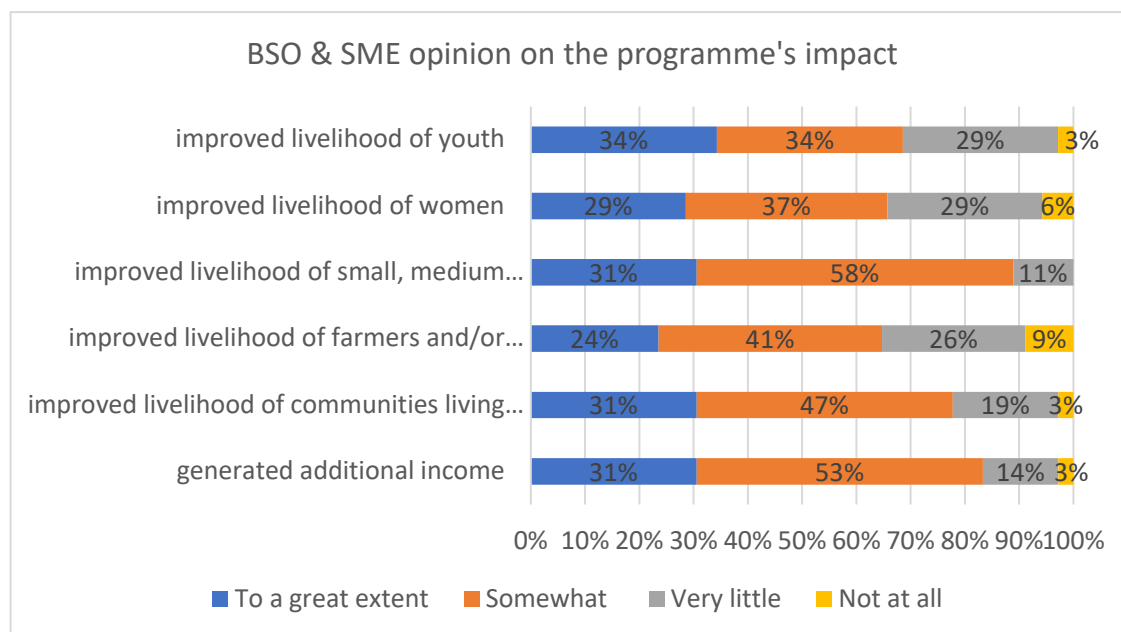
265. Evaluation evidence, including survey results, led to the ET's general finding that **programme impact was good but could have been stronger. Most BMOs and MSMEs that took part in the survey stated that the project contributed somewhat to generating additional income and improved livelihoods for beneficiaries; only a small number of respondents stated that the project contributed to a great extent.** Even fewer stated that the project contributed very little. The following strengths in terms of impact were mentioned most often by survey respondents:

- The project helped to create job opportunities and improved the livelihoods of women and youth.
- The project created some gender and environmental awareness among MSME beneficiaries.
- The project contributed significantly to the income of artisans and created new jobs

266. Survey respondents also mentioned some weaknesses, including:

- The difficulty of tracing the change pathway from training activities to outcomes and impact, especially after such a short time.
- Improving livelihoods is too ambitious an impact target for meaningful contribution within the project scope and timeline.
- Prospects for impact are greatly affected by contextual factors; for example, in Myanmar.

Figure 16: Impact



267. MRU (Impact: "Inclusive and Sustainable Development: Improved livelihood of farmers through income generation.") Through this project, farmers gained more interest in cocoa production. However, achieving impact in the cocoa sector takes time and it is not clear that impact level results have been achieved at scale. The ET found that the majority of farmers participating in

⁷¹ NTF IV 2017-2021 Final Report. November 2021. page 19.

the project, including both men and women, were able to generate additional income. This was particularly evident in Sierra Leone, where the project started earliest, while in Liberia and Guinea the impact on livelihoods and incomes was less pronounced. The following observations can be made based on the data collected:

- The introduction of the 18-month variety of cocoa beans by ITC motivated more farmers to grow cocoa, or to grow more cocoa since this shorter harvest cycle offered a way of improving their livelihoods and income. The project also improved the participating cocoa producers' knowledge and skills, through a better understanding of production methods and how to add value to cocoa through packaging.
 - Many farmers participating in the project in Sierra Leone and Liberia confirmed that their productivity and incomes increased (as also reported under Effectiveness, section 3.3); previously, these farmers harvested about 100 kg per acre, and after the training provided by the project, they now harvest 150 to 200 kg per acre due to improved shade management and pruning skills taught through the project. This outcome level data supports the conclusions that the project has had a positive impact on participating farmers' income or livelihoods, although indirect benefits to others (non-beneficiaries) have been limited.
 - In Sierra Leone, all processing, including quality control, packaging, and standardization is now done by the cooperatives. While the project did not succeed in ensuring that the cooperatives manage exports on their own and by the end of NTF IV, cooperatives in Sierra Leone were still exporting through private export companies (such as Tradin), they intend to start exporting their full production themselves in 2022 or 2023. This is also the case in Liberia, where cooperatives expressed more determination to start exporting independently, but this has not yet taken off.
 - In Sierra Leone, several farmers interviewed for the evaluation stated that partly thanks to the project, they can now borrow from their cooperative, instead of being dependent on loans with harsh conditions from buying agents or exporters. This positive outcome has the potential to produce some impact-level results in the near future.
 - Impact in Guinea was more limited than in Sierra Leone and Liberia because the project took off later⁷². One most visible impact-level result was the establishment of a chocolate manufacturing company by a female entrepreneur, who was inspired by the exchange visit to Cote d'Ivoire organized under NTF IV.
 - In general, the ET noted that the exchange visits with Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire were highly successful, demonstrating to producers how they can improve their production at every step of the value chain.
268. A number of limitations were found in MRU with regards to impact, including the limited financial support for replication of ToTs to benefit more smallholder farmers, which affected the potential for scaling reported impact trends. More training is needed for farmers on quality cocoa processing as well as more follow-up to monitor the adoption of trainings received on improved farming methods. The ET found during field visits that cocoa beans were mainly still being dried on the bare floor in Liberia, instead of on a platform or tables, where germinating, discoloured, and diseased beans can more easily be discovered and removed to enhance the quality of the beans. Raised drying was taught in project trainings, but for the most part, had yet to be adopted. This observation demonstrates that there is still much to be achieved at the lower level of results before eventually reaching impact level targets.
269. COVID-19 also posed a major challenge as lockdowns through the region made it difficult to carry out training. More broadly, the pandemic had a clear negative effect on the overall livelihoods of the targeted stakeholders and the level of project-related livelihood improvement from baseline, therefore, needs to be seen in the context of this downward trend. ITC adapted flexibly to the

⁷² It is important to remind the reader that the Liberia project also started later than planned.

changing situation. For example, when a training that was supposed to be given by experts from Cote d'Ivoire (CDI) could not take place in that country, instead two experts from Guinea went to CDI to receive a ToT and then train farmers in Guinea.

270. **Myanmar (Impact: “Inclusive and sustainable tourism development in Myanmar: Improved livelihood of local village stakeholders and providers of tourism product and services, including through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth generated.”)** The ET found that the project had a positive impact on the livelihoods of local village stakeholders and providers of tourism products and services, including through income generation. However, it was not possible to confirm that the project contributed to an increased share of the additional wealth generated among these stakeholders. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 military coup, the project was able to meet or exceed targets for 65 of its 72 indicators. Five indicators reached between 50 and 100% of their targets and only two were below 50% of target by programme end. Some notable results include:⁷³
- Between 2016 and 2019, sales of SMEs and service providers increased by 60% (from USD 2,390,485 to USD 3,940,346).
 - In the same period, 271 part-time jobs were created in Kayah and Tanintharyi (including villages where ITC developed CBT).
 - In the same period, export sales generated by international tourism increased by 130% (from USD 362,900 to USD 857,175).
 - Since the start of the NTF III project in 2014 (and until 2019), Kayah's market share, compared to Myanmar's top destinations, has grown by 150%.
 - Between 2016 and 2019, the value of new business for local, Kayah SME tourism suppliers, based only on tour programs which included the ITC CBTs, is estimated to be more than USD 1.4 million.
271. Since the tourism sector is generally in its infancy in Myanmar, certain quick changes linked to the project had more or less immediate positive effects on the livelihoods of the targeted communities. For example, tourism arrivals in Kayah State have grown by 768% between 2014 and 2021 when NTF III started in Myanmar.⁷⁴ Many evaluation respondents felt that NTF IV support was crucial for this growth, with positive impacts on service provider incomes as well as on community businesses. Jobs for beneficiary MSMEs and service providers also increased.
272. A limitation for assessing impact is that these figures come from only one source of quantitative information – ITC project reports. Qualitative evaluation evidence from other sources corroborates the project's overall contribution to stakeholder livelihoods but the ET nevertheless notes that greater rigour by NTF IV was needed in gathering and reporting detailed quantitative and qualitative information – for example, on the type of jobs created (part-time, full time, long term, short term, by sex and by age group) and how increased sales benefited communities (who benefited, in which magnitude).
273. By the end of the project, four regional tourism associations (Kayah Tourist Guides Association (KTGA), Dawei Tourist Guides Association (DTGA), Myeik District Tourism Association, and Kayah-UMTA chapter) reported improved operational and managerial performance. The project also contributed unexpectedly to peace and social cohesion to some extent in Kayah, as recognized by Myanmar's Vice President and Tourism Minister.
274. **Senegal and Uganda (Impact: “Improved livelihood of SME owners (particularly women and youth) through income generation and an increased share of the additional wealth created.”)** Many evaluation respondents in both countries reported that NTF IV had positively impacted their businesses, even though some mentioned the difficulty of quantifying this impact. More specifically, respondents highlighted access to new markets, mainly in Europe, the opening

⁷³ ITC. NTF IV 2017-2021 Final Report, p.6.

⁷⁴ Idem.

of new international offices for some MSMEs, and increased export turnover, which they expect to be a long-lasting trend. As noted above in the Relevance section, some respondents mentioned that they were expecting more business development and contacts with potential clients than experienced. They had higher expectations in terms of what the projects could deliver compared to the projects' targets. Benefits mentioned by some start-up representatives— such as developing a new vision and mission, the restructuring of their international organization, or new services to explore and better management restructuring. etc. etc. – may support future impacts, but at the programme end, it was still too early to know. They also benefited from the enhanced BSO support through institutional benchmarking tools and technological watch to improve their competitiveness. In addition, both MSMEs and start-ups may see positive impacts at a later date from the enhanced international visibility of their businesses.

275. Self-reported data in both countries shows that jobs were created for youth and women. This can be attributed to the growing IT and ITES market as well as the active tech hubs and government initiatives. Data collected and triangulated by the ET shows that companies have introduced changes in their business operations to improve their international competitiveness, which has the potential for a positive impact in the medium to long term.

To what extent has the programme contributed to SDGs 5, 8 and target 8.5, and 12?

276. The programme contributed to **SDG 5 at the impact level in two main ways: by the number of SheTrades platforms launched in Senegal and Uganda and by surpassing its targeted percentage of women beneficiaries from MSMEs/cooperatives/farmers and individual service providers reporting an increase in income**. All projects contributed to these results with the possible exception of MRU, which did not report information by sex, making it impossible for the ET to confirm the situation in MRU due to a lack of data. At the outcome level, the programme was also successful in surpassing the targeted number of enterprises owned, operated, and controlled by women that have transacted international business as a result of ITC support (116 enterprises, compared to 28 targeted). All four projects directly contributed to delivering on this programme outcome by surpassing their targets significantly.
277. **SDG 8** addresses sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, and **Target 8.5** aims for full employment for all, including women and youth. At the impact level, **the NTF IV final report indicates the programme surpassed targets related to SDG 8 by supporting 8,591 jobs and creating 1,186 additional ones; the programme was especially successful in the number of informal and formal jobs supported. However, the programme's definition of "jobs supported/created" was unclear to the ET**. Neither programme nor project-level reporting offered consistent details on the nature or quality of additional jobs created, including if they were part-time or full-time;⁷⁵ how many hours per week or month; how well they were paid; to what degree do they support an increase in total personal income; or how many by sex and by age group.
278. Through reports and interviews, the evaluation found evidence that, **in Myanmar, the programme also contributed to Target 8.9 (Devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products)**. However, it was not possible to determine to what degree the 271 jobs created would be sustained over time.
279. Contribution to **SDG 12** on responsible consumption and production had one major programme indicator: the number of MSMEs that include sustainable business practices (in particular CSR). The programme targeted only 5 such MSMEs and the final NTF IV report indicates the programme met this modest objective. None of the project logic models included an indicator corresponding to this programme-level, SDG 12-related result statement. Notwithstanding, an acceptable proxy to assess this impact is the IO 3 indicator tracking the number of enterprises that made changes to their business operations for increased international competitiveness as a

⁷⁵ According to NTF IV 2017-2021, the jobs created in Senegal (294) and in Uganda (560) were full time.

result of ITC support through NTF IV. **All projects surpassed their targets for this indicator**, which the ET considered to offer evidence of programme contribution to SDG 12.

3.7 Sustainability

280. **ET rating for sustainability: Moderately Satisfactory.** The programme's ecosystem approach, evident in IOs 1 to 4, strengthened sustainability by encouraging the development of a supportive enabling environment including a range of interconnected stakeholders with improved capacities. However, as evidenced above, **more was achieved with the MSMEs comparatively to the other ecosystem stakeholders and partners** (i.e., BSOs and public institutions and decision makers). In certain circumstances, **the lack of sufficient financial resources or time affected the programme's ability to scale** (e.g., concerning certification) and hence ensure results would be perpetuated over time and to additional stakeholders.

To what extent the net benefits of the programme will continue, or are likely to continue? To what extent are the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain the net benefits over time in place? ⁷⁶

281. Good building blocks to ensure **the sustainability of the results have been put in place by the projects**. For example, ToT, in principle, strengthens the transfer of knowledge for future use to local stakeholders, and cost-sharing with stakeholders for missions strengthens ownership. MSMEs' enhanced understanding of relevant markets, which contributed to improved strategic planning and more stable growth, was also noted as a positive sustainability factor.

How effective has the programme been in establishing national ownership in each country?

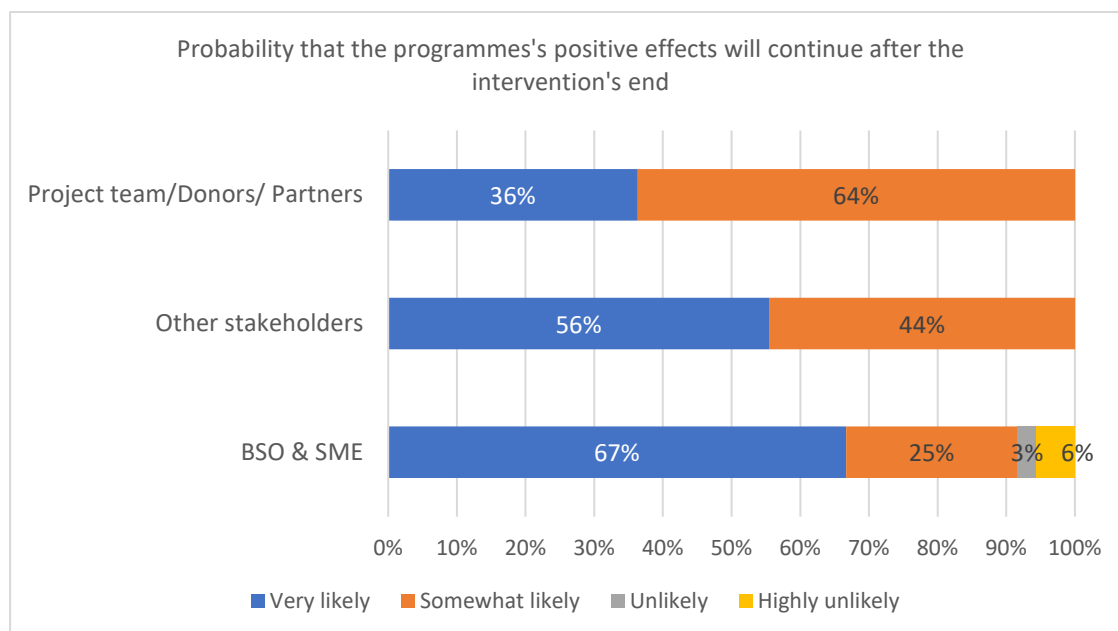
282. Concretely, certifications achieved by some stakeholders – such as ISO, Fair Trade, and organic certification – have the potential to contribute to sustaining results because they represent installed capacity to meet access standards for certain important markets. However, certifications were still in progress at the end of the programme and were not accessible to MSMEs with lower levels of business maturity. Despite these positive sustainability factors, **projects also faced sustainability challenges such as insufficient financial support to replicate the results** over time.

To what extent was a specific exit strategy or approach prepared and agreed upon by key partners to ensure sustainability?

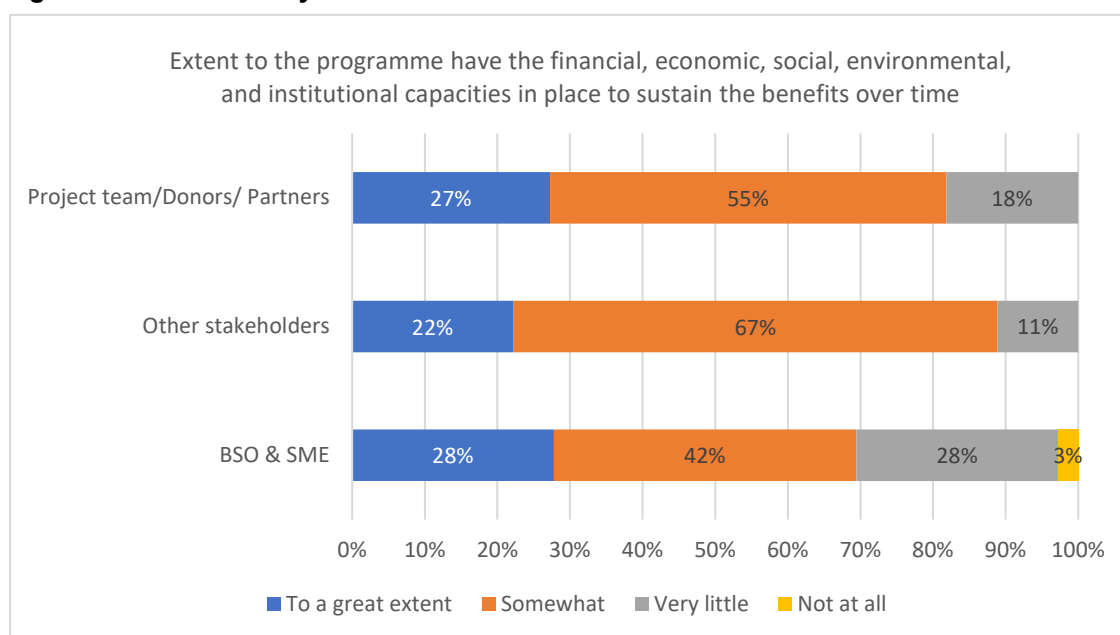
283. The evaluation found that in some cases, **exit planning was weak or missing**. However, 67% of BMOs and MSMEs stated on the evaluation survey that it is very likely that the programme's positive effects will continue after the end of its intervention. 25% considered it somewhat likely and 8% unlikely or highly unlikely. While other stakeholders – the project team, funders, and partners – all expressed confidence in the sustainability of the programme, the more variable response of BMOs and MSMEs supports the general findings of this evaluation, which showed that sustainability was not always ensured.

⁷⁶ These two questions are addressed together as they very closely relate one to the other. The second questions refer to what needs to be in place to ensure that the net benefits of the programme continue, the central element of the first question.

Figure 17: Probability that the programme's positive effects will continue after the intervention's end



284. In response to the survey question about the extent to which local or national stakeholders have the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities in place to sustain the benefits over time, 31% replied “very little” or “not at all,” while 42% replied “somewhat” and only 28% “to a great extent.”
285. Generally speaking, sustainability prospects are affected by the major differences between the sectors linked to NTF IV projects, with more potential for sustainability in Uganda and Senegal than in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Indeed, the IT and ITES sector in the first two projects might have more chances of sustaining their results than in the cocoa sector in MRU as by nature, there is more receptivity and capacity to retain newly acquired ways of working. The situation in Myanmar is difficult to predict given the highly unsettled situation; in the short term, the aftermath of the coup is a negative factor for sustainability. Further evidence and explanations are provided below.

Figure 18: Sustainability of Benefits Over Time

286. **MRU:** The ET found this project's sustainability weak for several reasons. First of all, as all interview respondents confirmed, the project duration was too short to achieve sustainable outcomes, especially in Liberia and Guinea, where it only started in 2019. Some farmers may continue applying their newly acquired knowledge and practices based on the positive results already gained from applying them. The participating cooperatives have also established the capacity to continue supporting their members. However, after the closure of the programme in June 2021, project partners had trouble continuing the training programme because they lacked resources. During the project, all trainings were provided free of charge and although it used a ToT model, this did not prove to be self-sustaining.⁷⁷ The ET found that the cooperatives were not well prepared to develop the ToT training as a paid service, creating a major limitation to the sustainability of the project.
287. All cooperative representatives interviewed in Sierra Leone and Liberia mentioned that they are not yet able to export directly to international markets to increase profit margins and incomes for smallholder farmers. In Guinea, the creation of cooperatives was just getting started during the project, and it is doubtful whether this process will continue without outside support. This indicates that the goals may have been too ambitious in Guinea, especially given the short time available. The ET found that in Guinea, NTF IV was more focused on achieving short-term outputs and outcomes and placed less emphasis on longer-term sustainability.
288. While some sustainability elements were integrated into the MRU project design, in practice sustainability received minimal attention, especially with regard to the costing model of the training provided. Compared to the Senegalese and Ugandan projects, there was greater reliance in MRU on a traditional service delivery model, subsidizing fees for training, without building a self-sustaining service delivery model with the BSOs. This finding is in line with the May 2020 midterm self-evaluation, which pointed to "a number of concerns that merit attention to ensure that NTF IV moves towards sustainability of its work."
289. As mentioned above in the coherence section, in response to these concerns and recognizing the limited time left to deliver on selected results, discussions between ITC and CBI to ensure at

⁷⁷ In the project proposal, it was noted that sustainability would be ensured in three ways: 1) The ToT approach, ensuring that knowledge would get transferred and retained at local level; 2) The diversification of the target participants, especially in ToT efforts, to ensure sustainability of services started under the project in the context of institutional weakness; and 3) Working with partner BSOs (at the time TISIs) to support the delivery of the majority of trainings and advisory services to enterprises, so that they can expand and improve their services and build a network with local businesses.

least minimal sustainability of MRU results via CBI's parallel project, which runs until the end of 2022.⁷⁸ This allowed some ITC project activities to continue, but not all, as CBI focuses more on supporting MSMEs to become export-ready, and less on technical assistance to improve cocoa quality. Also, the handing over of certain activities is limited to Sierra Leone and Liberia because CBI is not working on the cocoa sector in Guinea. The ET found that this gap in coordination with CBI had created a situation in which outcomes in Guinea were less likely to be sustained.

290. The MRU exit strategy was based on the idea that the project would complement the services of long-term, well-established development agencies, and NGOs such as GIZ and WHH in Sierra Leone and Solidaridad in Liberia. Project activities would also be hosted by local institutions and available for other projects to replicate. In practice, this did not materialize; while there was coordination with other NGOs, there was no clear strategy for handing over activities to them, and the national institutions were not enabled to fully continue providing the training and support to their members. The only completely coordinated handover took place with CBI, but CBI's capacity to continue the work started by NTF IV is limited due to their limited budget and – as noted above – by their market focus. In Guinea, stakeholders held diverging opinions on the exit strategy of the project, with some mentioning that it was very well communicated that the project would end this year, while others felt it was unclear if and how NTF IV would follow up.
291. Generally, project partners were disappointed that there will be no NTF V programme in the Mano River region. They considered it a missed opportunity since the project was just starting to gain traction.
292. **Myanmar:** The project in Myanmar succeeded in achieving results that should contribute to the sustainability of benefits over time, on the assumption that community-based tourism will be able to resume as a viable approach to tourism in Myanmar, including in ethnic minority states like Kayah and Tanintharyi. Sustainability factors for the project included the use of a ToT approach to create capacity for continued knowledge and skills transfer after the end of NTF IV. The project trained 15 trainers on providing quality food services for hotels, restaurants and ethnic minority villages visited by tourists. Even during the project, Kayah ToT independently assisted CBT villages in Chin State and coordinated activities from a tourism coffee project implemented by GIZ in Southern Shan State. ToT in food safety and craft also provided advisory services to MoHT in Chin State, sharing materials and best practices. Notwithstanding, according to KIIs, although some individual trainers are confident in their capacity to deliver training, they are hesitant to describe their collective work as being fully coordinated within a structured “CBT centre” – as NTF IV refers to when talking about the Kayah Centre.
293. Another example of sustainability in the project is the reported improved capacity of local ground handlers and tour guides, who are now better able to follow global tourism value chains' industrial norms. In Kayah, some ground handlers, tour operators, and tour guides took tourists to new villages on their own, outside of the project. Thanks to the project, they report knowing how to organize CBT in new villages, adapting them with services similar to those offered within the project. The significant number of international outbound tour operators reporting they offer the tourism products and services developed with ITC support corroborates this assessment.
294. The production of various documents including Codes of Conduct and digital tourist information will also contribute to the project's sustainability. Possibly, market-led partnerships forged along the value chain (in particular linkages between local and international tour operators; with tourism service providers at the community level) could be revived once the security situation in the country significantly improves
295. Many respondents, including project staff, indicated that ITC was too involved in community-level implementation activities. The project could have established institutional arrangements with TVET institute(s) and/or local civil society organizations to develop curriculum and transfer capacity and give them the role of continuing training after the ending of the project after its end.

⁷⁸ Letter of Intent between ITC and CBI, January 2021

296. The ability and effectiveness of the project in developing the institutional capacity of associations such as the Kayah Tourist Guide Association is likely to remain as a model of how to reinforce such tourism-related organizations. Indeed, the ToT approach will contribute to the sustainability of the project and what is called the “Kayah Model” has already been replicated in the Tanintharyi region and in Chin State.
297. Notwithstanding the fact NTF IV in Myanmar could not complete all its activities due to a combination of contextual factors (the pandemic and the military coup), the evaluation found evidence that results achieved along the tourism value chain will continue to have an impact now that the project has concluded. Examples of this include the following:
- a. Ten young women trained by CBI and ITC in digital marketing during NTF IV are now managing and creating content for a pilot platform called My Local Passion⁷⁹. This is a blog-style page where they create digital content on culture and tourism news, stories, and Myanmar traditions. Through this platform, they select and contact sustainable tourism businesses to help them in a future recovery phase.
 - b. The BetterTourism.Info⁸⁰ platform, designed for tourism professionals (tour operators, travel agents, local tourism companies, sector associations such as UMTA and MTM, etc.), offers free of charge training materials, webinars, manuals, and other tools to support knowledge and capacity building in various areas such digital marketing and CBT.
 - c. Tanintharyi's website⁸¹ has been managed by local MoHT staff themselves.
298. **Senegal and Uganda:** In these two projects, the integration of the MSME export plans, designed with the support of NTF IV, into their strategic plans have the potential to sustain over time some of the results achieved. In Senegal, the opening of regional and international offices are also outputs that anchor progress and have the potential to sustain results in the short and medium terms. The companies, both MSMEs and start-ups, can also now better monitor their progress through the staff's enhanced capacity to assess their financial status.
299. The ET also found that the use and implementation of the Value Propositions are sustainability enabling factors. The same can be said about the sectoral working groups. In Uganda, this group is comprised of government and private sector entities, such as ATIS, ICTAU, NITA-U, UEPB, and UIA, all former stakeholders of the NTF IV project. Many respondents mentioned that the NTF “agenda” has been embedded in government departments such as UEPB. The project has improved the department's ability to promote the export of IT services. These sustainability elements were not as present in Senegal, however.
300. In both countries, IT sector specific BSOs, such as OPTIC and ATIS are well positioned following the project to continue providing support to IT and ITES MSMEs and start-ups, although the scale of demand will be an issue as they will struggle to respond to it. Sustainability in this area is strengthened, unlike in the other two projects, by the integration of beneficiary financial contribution to their participation in project activities. For example, for events organized with project support, ITC paid for participants' air tickets, but subsistence expenses were handled by the respective companies. This generated ownership and responsibility.
301. In Uganda, the evaluation found that UEPB had already started providing continuous training for companies and taken some of them to export markets for exposure. During project implementation, NITA-U hosted the NTF IV offices, coordinated and managed BPO services, and handled IT certification of the MSMEs and Start-ups. The Ministry of ICT and NG handled policies and provided an enabling environment for the MSMEs and start-ups to thrive and provided a training venue at the Information Access Center (IAC). The Ministry of Trade Industry and Cooperatives established, through their own means, a Directorate for MSMEs to seek direct and real-time support from the Ministry and also developed a trade portal to promote ICT exports

⁷⁹ Website URL: <https://www.mylocalpassion.com/>

⁸⁰ Website URL: <https://bettertourism.info/>

⁸¹ Website URL: <https://www.traveltanintharyi.com/>

globally. All these elements are evidence that the ecosystem has been somewhat strengthened and has the potential to sustain results for some IT and ITES MSMEs.

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICE

Lessons Learned

- 302. Partners were most satisfied when the support provided covered many aspects of the value chains: training on management (MRU), marketing (all projects), quality control and organic/fair trade certifications for export (MRU), linkage to buyers/exporters (all projects), because it reflected the needs of the partners. In addition, when projects fully integrated actors along the value chains and partners from the different spheres composing the ecosystems, results were made more sustainable as the responsibility for ensuring they were durable and scaled was diffused among these actors.
- 303. When partnerships were more officially sealed with implementing stakeholders, for example through Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), ownership was enhanced, again rendering results more sustainable and scalable.
- 304. When projects kept a broad view of different and diversified types of markets being targeted, including at the regional level, more and better results were achieved compared to projects focusing on one specific market, such as the European demand for goods and services.
- 305. A reduced reliance on international consultants and increased use of regional, national, or local resources for technical support ensures some institutional memory is kept within the targeted regions. It also enhances the chances of results being scaled once the projects are closed.
- 306. A more in-depth contextual analysis of the multisectoral situation in which the projects were to be implemented, conducted beforehand, and throughout the implementation process, would have led to a solid baseline to start with. With this in hand, more realistic, adapted, and incentivizing targets could have been set, increasing the chances of having more effective projects. This would have also enhanced reporting quality and with stronger reporting, the projects could have provided better evidence of the progress they were making towards the achievement of results (on youth, SDG, green growth for example). Finally, better reporting also serves as a learning tool for its project managers and stakeholders, ensuring decisions are taken on strong data from the field.

Best Practice

- 307. The digitalization of marketing tools allowed the projects that used the approach to rapidly adapt to an unforeseen situation (the Covid-19 pandemic) and positively contribute to the sustainability of the projects. This demonstrated ITC's flexibility and innovativeness. Furthermore, using new information technology favoured greater involvement among youth.
- 308. While some local participants thought some processes were lengthy, it is good practice to proceed with extensive consultations to choose project locations and be mindful of political interests in the process.
- 309. Myanmar specific: The project worked with relevant actors along the tourism value chain (covering both domestic and export market actors) to develop well-designed and readily marketable products. Familiarization (FAM) trips and promotional videos in particular were considered by different stakeholders as highly effective. The promotional videos developed by the project were popular among all types of stakeholders ranging from tour operators and individual community-based tourism (CBT) service providers to government departments, private associations, and European tour operators.
- 310. This was an important and useful approach that ensured more sustainability to the project's results as if there are challenges on the demand side in some market destinations, others can compensate.

5. CONCLUSIONS

311. **Overall rating: Satisfactory.** Generally speaking, as demonstrated above, although the programme exhibited some minor shortcomings, these were outweighed by the preponderance positive results.
312. NTF IV successfully built on lessons and achievements from NTF III as well as previous phases to make significant progress towards programme and project outcomes. This was commendable, particularly in light of the major challenges that emerged over the project lifecycle, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Myanmar's political crisis. It reflected a strong commitment by programme staff and other stakeholders to taking the real needs of various categories of beneficiaries into account to ensure delivery of high quality, relevant programme activities and outputs. By taking forward partnerships and learning from this phase, the programme is well-placed to continue contributing to improved livelihoods in the target countries and sectors where NTF V is continuing its work (namely, Senegal and Myanmar.)
313. Nevertheless, although the programme design was set to address the multi-stakeholder ecosystem surrounding the MSMEs as well as the latter themselves to ensure their competitiveness, the approach was less holistic than planned overall.

Relevance

314. Programme relevance was evident in NTF IV's overall alignment with national plans and priorities in its sectors of intervention, as well as its responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders and the contexts in which they work. Stakeholders welcomed the programme's participatory and consultative approach, which contributed to the relevance of project-level activities and approaches. However, delaying scoping missions to identify stakeholder needs and analyse sector contexts until after the programme had started meant that valuable, up-to-date input was not available during programme and project design.
315. Nevertheless, weaknesses in needs assessment and scoping during the design phase may have led to some missed opportunities – for example, in the development of activities tailored to achieving results related to cross-cutting issues such as gender, youth, environment, human rights, and social protection. Nonetheless, the evaluation found that programme and project management was sufficiently flexible to make adjustments “en route,” based on consultations that took place after implementation started. This flexibility was critical to ensuring the relevance of the initiative.

Coherence

316. The programme demonstrated strong internal coherence, as exemplified in its coordination with CBI initiatives to take advantage of potential synergies and combine forces where possible across all the projects. The Letter of Intent signed between ITC and CBI to ensure that MRC results attained under the NTF IV programme would be sustained via parallel projects in the cocoa sector implemented by CBI was a good example. Looking ahead, continued efforts to capitalize on complementarities of this kind will be important for maximizing achievements and coordination of all related initiatives. However, concerning the internal coherence at ITC, besides the SheTrades that was well integrated in Senegal and Uganda through relatively small projects, few other examples exist. For example, although the ITC project Alliance for Action was mentioned as a project that was to be integrated into the NTF IV MRU project, there was very little evidence of its coordinated implementation. Still, based on the review of the draft evaluation report, NTF IV management referenced a few examples of additional internal coherence. The ET found in a few documents the mention of other ITC branches' team members having provided input in the development of some projects' outputs.
317. The evaluation did not find evidence of systematic efforts during planning and design to identify external actors (external to the projects and programme) in the targeted sectors and countries and develop strategies for working with them. The ET refers to external actors outside the

programme and projects' realm. In other words, actors other than beneficiaries, partners, BSOs and public sector representatives such as external donors and implementing agencies. However, various isolated examples were noted in which the programme collaborated with others, for example on sector platforms and government or donor entities and initiatives. However, reflecting the absence of systematic programme or project strategies to leverage or contribute to the efforts of other actors – or to address the complex institutional, policy, and regulatory ecosystems in which the work was carried out – the tangible benefits of such collaboration were variable. Clearer and more official coordination with other development partners would likely have added value to the NTF IV projects through, among other pathways, generating more results in the private sector in a more efficient manner, by coordinating more closely with projects focusing on institutional building.

Effectiveness

318. The evaluation found that the NTF IV projects were broadly effective, producing planned outputs and contributing to planned outcomes summarized in the programme reconstructed ToC, in terms of increasing MSME competitiveness. In general, programme performance was strongest in relation to BSOs and even more in relation to MSMEs, under IOs 3 and 4 who benefited from activities such as training and other efforts to strengthen their capacity and increase their market opportunities through increased contact with buyers and improvements in productivity and quality.
319. Relatively weaker performance was observed on Intermediate Outcome 1, which related to enhancing the business environment for SME investment and exports, through institutional support. This was partly a result of the slowdown and diversion of government priorities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but may also have reflected weaker causal pathways from project-level activities to the expected project outcome. In other words, much of the projects' efforts went to the private sector (i.e., IOs 3 and 4) and although the results chain at the programme level presented a more holistic, ecosystem approach to implementation, this did not translate as strongly at project-level implementation.
320. Concerning intermediate outcome 2, broadly speaking, results were achieved as planned with the BSOs, key partners in the ecosystem to closely support the private sector, and the MSMEs particularly in their quest to become more competitive in the international market. Still, although more was accomplished with BSOs than with the public sector (IO 1), compared to MSMEs' related level of results, there were some shortcomings in IO 2. Broadly speaking, the ET concludes that the NTF IV projects successfully contributed to IOs 3 and 4.
321. In all projects, the integration of cross-cutting issues suffered from a lack of attention at the design stage, although this was compensated to varying degrees during implementation. Gender equality received the most emphasis, along with youth inclusion, but evaluation evidence in this area was relatively limited, in part due to the lack of gender-specific and sex-disaggregated monitoring indicators. It is not to say that there were no indicators, only that there were few, and that some that were supposed to be informed by disaggregated data, were not. In some cases, projects focused most on encouraging women's participation in numerical terms rather than promoting gender-specific results or fostering transformative change. Nevertheless, there was evidence of project work with women farmers and women-led SMEs in the different sectors and women participating on IT SME boards. The lack of a specific programme design linked gender equality strategy based on a dedicated gender analysis at country and sector levels limited the extent to which the programme was able to address the gender dimensions of its planned outcomes. The situation was similar for other cross-cutting themes such as human rights and environmental considerations, which were also not systematically embedded in the programme.

Efficiency

322. NTF IV was delivered efficiently, with appropriate management structures and systems, appropriate use of resources, and generally smooth financial and administrative processes. Flexibility emerged as the most positive feature of the programme management approach. A capacity to adapt activities and approaches to new information, such as the results of the stakeholder consultations, and changing circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and

the political crisis in Myanmar was important for maintaining stakeholder support and delivering relevant results.

323. Linked to this was the decentralized approach to management which created significant decision-making space at the project level – despite some issues related to the multiple layers of management. Nevertheless, programme M&E systems and processes appear to have been a bit complex relative to the utility of the information they produced. Reporting was informative, but project-level data was not always clearly aggregated at programme level and SDG reporting was limited. More streamlined processes, better baseline data, and more meaningful and disaggregated indicators might have better-supported programme managers and other stakeholders in using implementation experience to support ongoing planning and adaptation.

Impact

324. Overall, the varied programme achievements at output and outcome level contributed to impact level progress for farmers, SMEs, and individuals. Change pathways leading to impact-level results were not always clear, and it should be kept in mind that it would be overly ambitious to expect significant and measurable livelihood improvements to result from project activities within the programme timeframe. Nevertheless, across sectors and countries, the projects did build skills, generate knowledge and awareness, create jobs, and strengthen market opportunities which contributed to or hold the promise of contributing to, improved livelihoods and higher incomes in target groups, including for women and youth. At the same time, the scalability of contributions to impact is not entirely clear. Within each project, the number of people benefited is relatively low compared to the expected community-level impact

Sustainability

325. Overall, there is good potential for programme results to be sustained over time, thanks to the multi-stakeholder approach involving key actors including government and BSOs along the value chain, in the majority of projects. In addition, project-level outputs from training and other activities are useful and leave behind capacities that should endure and continue producing benefits over time – such as increased familiarity with international tourism standards or knowledge of how to meet quality standards for cocoa export.
326. The training of trainers and cost-sharing approaches, in particular, have promise for sustainability. However, in the absence of these approaches as well as lack of human and financial resources to support project stakeholders in replicating training and other support provided by NTF IV over time and at scale, the sustainability of results is uncertain. By building in realistic strategies to address this – and related issues of external coherence – from the outset, including clear exit strategies, future programming may be able to ensure more robust and lasting results.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

327. In light of the above findings, accompanying evidence, and conclusions, the ET makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

328. For NTF V Steering Committee: Consider for future NTF programme iterations, a longer programme lifecycle of five or even six years, to allow for a full participatory design phase before programme activities begin. An agreement could be signed to finalize the design phase during the first year (inception period). The programme document could be finalized and approved at the end of this period, at which time proper implementation would begin.
329. This recommendation is important, given the importance of assessing needs and priorities through background research as well as extensive consultation to support the relevance (as well as coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability) of programming.

Recommendation 2

330. For NTF V Programme Coordinator: Specifically in terms of the already started NTF V Programme, ensure that by the end of the inception phase (by January 2022), ITC programme and project managers and their partners have achieved the following:
- Map out other, external projects and programmes with which it could coordinate activities with the same beneficiaries or capitalize on complementarity;
 - Establish official project management structures and teaming arrangements within ITC, as well as identifying and mobilizing internal ITC services (e.g., SheTrades and AIM for Results) to mobilize useful collaboration and synergy in an organized and timely fashion, through financed service delivery; and
 - Conduct in-depth gender, human rights, and environmental analysis, with results clearly presented in evidenced documentation (e.g., strategies) and used to inform the design of programme and project results, indicators, baseline (or midline), targets, and activities.

Recommendation 3

331. For NTF V Programme Coordinator: By the end of the inception phase (January 2022), develop official and concrete partnerships with other programmes and projects that work on policy dialogue and institutional strengthening to allow ITC to focus on its particular areas of strength (i.e., working with the private sector) while remaining connected to, and gaining opportunities to inform efforts at policy and institutional level, for better coverage of this segment of the ecosystem.
332. With an extended planning phase for NTF V, ITC could take the time to solidify coherence with such external actors, so that implementation, monitoring, and reporting considerations can be assessed and decided upon.

Recommendation 4

333. For NTF V Programme Coordinator: By the end of the inception phase (January 2022), develop, ideally through an inclusive and collaborative process, a full ToC at programme level, which clearly sets out expected change pathways and illustrates how each project contributes to Risks and assumptions should also be assessed both at programme and project levels, and specific analysis of political risks should draw on historical information. Indeed, critical conditions for the realization of outcomes should be laid out, and detailed and continuously reviewed mitigation strategies should be determined. Linked results statements and indicators should be fully explained and established before the programme proceeds from inception to full implementation to ensure shared understanding and ownership of expectations amongst all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 5

334. For NTF V managers fulfilling RBM roles: 5.a) More time and resources should be invested in the development of robust, useful, and user-friendly RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme and project management, monitoring and reporting, and adaptive management. This would be based on the more extensive design to be achieved at the end of the inception phase (January 2022), as suggested in Recommendation 1.
335. Baseline data should be used to set realistic yet ambitious targets and both baseline and targets should be available before programme and project implementation starts. Setting targets based on clear baselines – that draw on comprehensive needs assessment and situational analysis during the inception phase, and through ongoing bilateral discussions with local stakeholders – is fundamental to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment based on unwarranted expectations. Reliable data available from NTF IV should be used to set baselines whenever possible.

336. 5.b). Simple programme and project level reporting tools should be systematically designed and used at every stage of the reporting cycle, including baseline data and monitoring data compared to targets. Monitoring data should be presented at both project and programme levels, as well as for programme management, and the links between indicators at the two levels should be clearly explained so that data aggregation can be traced back by external readers. SDG reporting requirements should also be made clear.

Recommendation 6

337. For NTF V Steering Committee: Conduct a formative (learning-oriented) midterm evaluation for NTF V, which should be carried out by an external, independent evaluation team and planned well in advance. Such an external midterm evaluation, conducted in close collaboration with stakeholders to promote learning and ownership, will allow to identify any needed course corrections.

Recommendation 7

338. For NTF V ITC staff responsible for financial and administrative management of future programmes and projects: To enable robust demonstration of value for money, establish protocols to generate more detailed financial reporting, linked to detailed budget lines at the end of the inception phase (January 2022). For example, financial data should be available by intermediate outcome and by type of investment (e.g., international or national consultants), at project level as well as aggregated to programme level.

Recommendation 8

339. For NTF V managers: It is recommended to build in sustainability mechanisms based on the improved planning achieved by the end of the inception phase (partly through enhanced coherence with complementary actors), identify barriers to and enabling factors for sustainability as they emerge, and work to flexibly address and/or build on these during implementation. The low-hanging fruit to implement this recommendation would be to clearly define exit strategies, at programme and project levels, and update them on a regular basis considering the changing circumstances. These mechanisms should be operational before the midterm evaluation suggested in recommendation 6.



Baastel

30 Years Promoting
Sustainable Development

North American Office

Le Groupe-conseil Baastel ltée
92, rue Montcalm
Gatineau (Québec)
Canada, J8X2L7

P: +1 819 595 1421
F: +1 819 595 8586

European Office

Le Groupe-conseil Baastel srl
Boulevard Adolphe Max 55
B-1000 Brussels
Belgium

P: +32 (0)2 893 0032
F: +32 (0)2 503 3183

Representation France

Olivier Beucher & Gaetan Quesne
T: +33 7 82 92 44 98
E: olivier.beucher@baastel.com
gaetan.quesne@baastel.com

Representation Jamaica

Curline Beckford
P: +1 876 298 6545
E: curline.beckford@baastel.com

