



International
Trade
Centre

TRADE IMPACT
FOR GOOD

2021 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report

Review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2018-2021

ITC Independent Evaluation Unit



2021 ANNUAL EVALUATION SYNTHESIS REPORT

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC is the only international agency dedicated to the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Formed in 1964, ITC is the focal point for trade-related technical assistance within the United Nations system.

For all of ITC's interventions, evaluation is a key instrument to ensure accountability against expected results and to support organizational learning. Evaluations inform ITC's decision-making in policy, programme, and project management, with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing ITC's contributions towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is an independent publication by the ITC Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU), which established a team formed by the Head of the IEU (Mr. Miguel Jiménez Pont), one independent external consultant (Ms. Carolina del Campo Vara), an outside evaluation reviewer (Mr. Wayne MacDonald), and Mr. Simon Bettighofer (IEU Evaluation Officer) and Ms. Marianne Schmitt (IEU Associate Evaluation Officer) for overall quality assurance.

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Executive summary / Review of the Strategic Plan 18-21

Conceptual framework

SIGNIFICANCE – *Why?*

Corporate rationale linked to ITC's mandate, mission, values, and theory of change

RESOURCES – *How?*

Inputs, activities & outputs that contribute to the desired result (i.e., human, financial, material and information resources)

RESULTS – *What?*

"Value-added", outcomes and impacts on the groups reached by the resources used

REACH – *Who?*

Breadth and depth of influence on the stakeholders that ITC wants to affect

High level findings

SIGNIFICANCE

- Plan provided clear rationale in line with ITC's mandate
- It strengthened managing for results, growth agenda, and staff sense of purpose

RESULTS

- Strong rationale for the role of ITC's 'good trade' approach

REACH

- Greater staff engagement in the design process would have benefits and is desirable
- Importance of partnerships was emphasized
- Needs assessments practice can be strengthened

RESOURCES

- Products and services were offered through "integrated or modular solutions"
- Balance needs to be struck between tailor-made solutions and clear value chains
- Accountability and coherent target-setting have been improved
- Sub-strategies would have been helpful, especially for crosscutting functions
- Efforts in good quality project development and the matching of staff skills to projects were strengthened
- Effective data management was paramount and is in progress
- Coordinators, integrators, and multipliers needed to enhance internal collaboration
- Innovation and learning were key drivers

Conclusions

- The Strategic Plan 2018-2021 has proven to be an effective tool that has provided ITC with a directional and yet flexible operating framework
- It conveyed a clear sense of purpose and has built trust, both inside and outside ITC
- Next strategic plan should be the starting point and map of *a four-year journey*
- Strategy implementation will require an implementation framework bridging between high-level medium- to long-term corporate objectives and annual operational objectives
- Progress and lessons learned from strategy implementation to be reviewed on a regular basis

Recommendations for next Strategic Plan

Message 1: underscore Strategic Plan results-focus

- Determine limited number of high-level, medium- to long-term objectives for the organization (aligned / contributing to SDGs)

Message 3: ensure strategic allocation of resources

- Develop internal value chains about of how best to combine individual products and services, in which order and context, to achieve specific goals
- Develop coordinated solutions for the achievements of the high-level objectives
- Develop blueprints for general models of solutions that meet the needs of specific clients groups or contexts and the same for different types of partnerships

Message 2: maintain corporate focus throughout strategy operationalization

- Bridge between high-level objectives and operationalization on an annual basis
- Prioritize all corporate objectives and determine which sections contribute
- Develop sub-strategies to guide work necessary to achieve high-level objectives
- Incorporate lessons learned

Message 4: create momentum for stakeholders' mobilization

- Insert the values of coordination and collaboration in the next Strategic Plan
- Keep an on-going dialogue with beneficiaries on their needs in relation to high-level objectives
- Ensure full understanding and adherence of staff to Strategic Plan

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Introduction

1. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is a joint agency of the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). ITC's mission is to enhance inclusive and sustainable growth and development in developing countries, especially least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition through improving the international competitiveness of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). With support from funders and development partners, ITC works with policymakers, business support institutions (BSOs), exporters, and other stakeholders in the public and private sectors.
2. This is the **ninth Annual Evaluation Synthesis Review (AESR)**. Its goal is to provide ITC stakeholders – ITC management and staff, including member states and beneficiaries – with a synthesis of key evaluation messages for accountability and learning purposes. The AESR is a public document. It is presented at the annual meeting of ITC's Joint Advisory Group (JAG) to support a better-informed dialogue.
3. **Focus.** Usually, the AESR provides a synthesis of findings from evaluations of ITC's projects, programmes, and policies conducted during the previous year. Overviews of funder-led evaluations and self-evaluations, and project completion reports (PCRs) conducted in 2020 are provided in Annexes 1 and 2.¹ This year, however, the AESR focuses on a review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2018-2021, which overall goal is defined in its subtitle "Trade Routes to Sustainable and Inclusive Development".
4. The review's primary emphasis is on organizational 'learning', with an eye towards ITC's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. Findings of the review have been provided to the team that has worked on the new Strategic Plan 2022-2025, to ensure that lessons learned could be integrated. Specifically, the objectives of this AESR are to:
 - a) support ITC's accountability to its member states and other ITC stakeholders; as well as learning within the organization.
 - b) understand how well the Strategic Plan has served to set organizational goals focusing on sustainable and inclusive development, and how it has helped ITC to manage and monitor the results related to these goals.
 - c) understand the extent to which the implementation of the Strategic Plan has enabled ITC to adapt to changes in the global context and emerging priorities while keeping the organization focused on its strategic direction; and
 - d) contribute to a better-informed planning and decision-making process for the upcoming Strategic Plan 2022-2025.
5. **Approach.** This review is an assessment of ITC's Strategic Plan 2018-21 as a tool to improve the organization's performance in the areas related to vision, planning, measurement, reporting, and decision-making. It is 'process-based', not 'outcome-based', and is more 'formative' than 'summative'. This report is structured into key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
6. The United Nations (UN) does not have a single clearly-articulated definition of strategic planning. For the purpose of this review, strategic planning is defined as "*The process by which an organization's medium- to long-term goals, as well as resources and plans to achieve them, are defined, and a documented plan is developed to monitor achievement of these goals*".²

¹ Other annexes comprise the implementation status of the 2020 AESR recommendations (Annex 3), and a report on the implementation of accepted or partially accepted recommendations of previous IEU's independent evaluations (Annex 4).

² OIOS (2021). *Evaluation Synthesis of Strategic Planning*. IED-21-001, p.iii, <https://oios.un.org/inspection-evaluation-reports>.

7. This review also builds on the guidance provided to strategic planners of UN Agencies, which determines that a good Strategic Plan should combine the following dimensions:³
- What we exist to do* – Identity, which is defined in the Mission,
 - Why we need a strategy* – Momentum or sense of urgency, which relates to challenges to be addressed,
 - Where we need to go* – Direction, which is provided by the Vision,
 - How we will achieve it* – Alignment and coherence of resources and processes (financial, people/knowledge, processes, service/programmes, customer/stakeholder), and,
 - What beliefs we will follow* – Values we need to share internally and externally with our partners.
8. The assessment of ITC's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 steps outside the traditional evaluation paradigm. It focuses on the 'operational' or 'practice' aspects of strategic planning linked to decision-making, implementation, and performance management. Guided by a simple *conceptual performance framework*,⁴ the review focuses on, and is structured according to the following four areas:

Significance - Why? -	<p>Significance refers to the corporate rationale. It is linked to ITC's mission, mandate, values, and theory of change. It focuses on the vision for achieving the desired high-level outcomes or impacts of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021.</p> <p>The 'why' also is about coherence, doing the 'right thing', prioritizing (given various opportunities) and updating priorities as circumstances change.</p>
Resources - How? -	<p>Resources refer to the inputs, activities, and outputs that contribute to the desired results of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Resource utilization is connected to efficiency.</p> <p>The 'how' includes human, financial, material, and information resources. It is about time, money, and/or energy and the type of resources used. In terms of human resources, it is about the type of skills and competencies required.</p>
Results - What? -	<p>Results refer to the outcomes and impacts on the groups achieved through the resources used. Desired results usually include the achievement of a desired mental or physical state.</p> <p>Added value is provided if the results are desirable. With respect to stakeholders/clients/partners, this means they are satisfied and/or that they achieve a desired change.</p>
Reach - Who? -	<p>Reach refers to the breadth/depth of influence attained by the distribution of resources. Physical (spatial) reach is a dimension as well as the groups one intends to affect.</p> <p>For ITC, a team's or individual's reach refers to the amount, type, and extent of stakeholders served by the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. It also encompasses suppliers, delivery partners, and other groups who are directly involved in the service delivery or related processes.</p>

9. **Methodology and limitations.** It is worth clarifying that the 2021 AESR is not an overall evaluation of ITC's performance concerning its Strategic Plan. Such an endeavor would require a large-scale

³ See UN Strategic Planning. Guide for Managers, https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/4.5.1.6_Strategic%20Planning%20Guide_0.pdf

⁴ The framework used is adapted from the work of Steve and Carolyn Montague, Performance Management Network (PMN), <https://www.pmn.net>.

corporate evaluation like the 2014 Independent Evaluation of ITC, which was funded by a group of donors, designed and managed by the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU), and conducted by an external service provider.⁵

10. A mixed-methods approach was used, which included extensive document reviews, a survey of ITC internal staff (with 77 respondents), and interviews with 23 ITC senior- and mid-level staff. No external stakeholders were consulted, nor field work conducted. Instead, a fit-for-purpose approach was implemented, examining practical and operational aspects of the strategic planning function linked to vision, decision-making, implementation, and performance management.

Significance – the “Why” of the Strategic Plan

Findings

11. **Rationale for ITC’s work and corporate identity.** The Strategic Plan 2018-2021 specified that the central purpose of the organization was to increase its capacity to generate “good trade” – meaning trade that contributes to sustainable and inclusive growth and development – by improving the international competitiveness of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with a focus on priority countries and populations. The Plan also emphasized the ambition to significantly expand ITC’s technical assistance during the period through larger, deeper, and longer-term country and regional interventions.
12. The Strategic Plan has balanced specified high-level objectives, target groups, and thematic priorities with flexibility in scope. The vision and mission set out therein are value-driven and ambitious, with a focus on improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs as *the* lever to deliver on its reasserted trade and sustainable development agenda. It established a clear understanding of what the organization wants to accomplish and provided a foundation for a strong sense of purpose and identity for the organization – the *why* of work.
13. **Priorities regarding target groups, sectors, and countries.** The Strategic Plan identified micro, small and medium-sized enterprises as the organization’s primary clients. At the same time, it was emphasized that ITC would not act with a one-size-fits-all approach but instead offer customized solutions for informal and small-scale producers; aspiring exporters in the formal economy; passive exporters (exporting only from time to time); active exporters; and women and young entrepreneurs.
14. The Plan also identified national governments and trade and investment support institutions as other main client groups, as they form part of national trade support systems. Moreover, the Plan identified targeted sectors with strong potential for employment creation and inclusive growth: agriculture; the green economy; and the service sector. It also established a strategic focus on ensuring that at least 80% of its country-level interventions benefit least developed countries (LDCs), land-locked developing countries (LLDCs), small-island developing states (SIDS), small vulnerable economies, post-conflict and fragile states, and sub-Saharan Africa.
15. ITC’s purpose and these priorities were in full alignment with the needs communicated by clients and other stakeholders during the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 design process.

In the overall, do you consider the Strategic Plan 2018-21 a useful tool for the organization?

“Yes! It gives all staff a common understanding of ITC vision and objectives.”

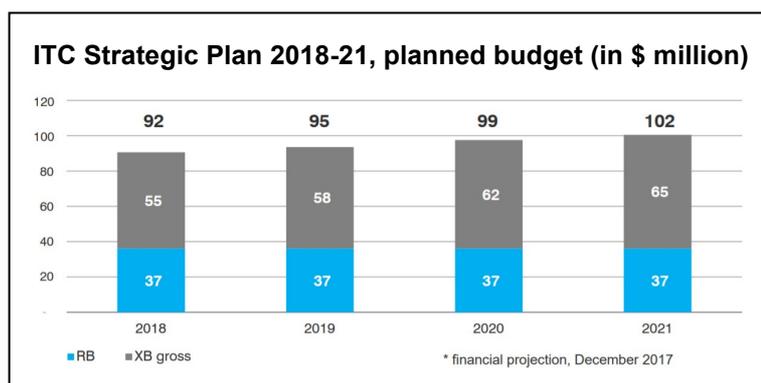
“It helped to steer ITC on a more dynamic course and better position the organization vis-à-vis donors. [...] The focus areas brought clarity and purpose from an outside point of view. The main challenges have been to reflect these new focus areas into the organizational chart.”

“The current plan was very broad, the focus areas had overlaps.”

⁵ Saana Consulting (2014). [Independent Evaluation of the International Trade Centre \(ITC\)](#)

16. **Focus areas and thematic priorities.** The Strategic Plan emphasized the organization’s commitment to six focus areas⁶ and related key initiatives, which covered a broad range. The focus areas, in particular ‘*Providing Trade and Market Intelligence*’ and ‘*Strengthening Trade and Investment Support Institutions*’, were also coherent with ITC’s mandate as it was originally defined in 1964 to “*provide developing countries with information on export markets and marketing*” and “*help them develop their export promotion services and train the personnel needed for these services*”.⁷
17. **Managing for results and organization-wide intervention logic.** The Plan included a corporate results framework, clearly identifying linkages between outputs, intermediate outcomes, and contributions to achieving the SDGs. This framework, which had been approved in 2017, was defined at a high-level yet was already much more concretely elaborated than comparable elements in the Strategic Plan 2015-17.⁸

18. **Growth targets.** The Strategic Plan laid out that ITC intends to grow to accomplish its mission and meet demand. To achieve this, the Plan envisaged an increase in budget⁹ (see graph on the right) based on increased extrabudgetary contributions; better leveraging of funds; more partnerships; and showing the value-for-money contribution to the SDGs. So far, the organization has significantly exceeded the targeted budget increase, with an operational budget of \$135 million in 2020¹⁰ instead of the originally targeted \$99 million. This increase indicates that ITC succeeded in maintaining and/or generating high levels of trust among its funders¹¹, which led to historically exceptional growth of its extrabudgetary funding and delivery.



19. **ITC’s business model.** Finally, it is worth reminding that ITC’s strategic planning must be understood against the backdrop of ITC’s business model, which relies for the most part on extrabudgetary funds for its technical assistance activities. Therefore, any sound strategic planning approach must take into account the priorities of funders and the extent to which they are willing to make long-term and advance commitments.

Conclusions

20. **A significant Strategic Plan 2018-2021.** The plan has proven to be an effective tool that has provided ITC with a directional yet flexible operating framework. It conveyed a clear sense of corporate purpose, highlighted the benefits of “good trade” and clearly articulated the rationale of how the organization contributes to sustainable and inclusive development. Improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs has been identified as key, with a particular focus on priority countries and populations.

⁶ Focus Areas: 1) Providing trade and market intelligence; 2) Building a conducive business environment; 3) Strengthening trade and investment support institutions; 4) Connecting to international value chains; 5) Promoting and mainstreaming inclusive and green trade; and 6) Supporting regional economic integration and South-South links.

⁷ GATT (1967). *Joint GATT/UNCTAD Trade Centre: Note by the Director-General*, L/2890 (6 Nov 1967), p. 2.

⁸ ITC (2015). *Strategic Plan 2015-2017*, p.27 and p. 44-45.

⁹ ITC (2018). *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, p.15.

¹⁰ ITC (2021). *Report to the Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund*, p. 6.

¹¹ ITC’s work is enabled by two streams of funding: the regular budget (RB) and extrabudgetary funding (XB). The RB consists of assessed contributions from member states and is approved by the United Nations General Assembly and the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council. The XB funds are voluntary contributions and come from a wide variety of funders: governments and national development agencies; international organizations; academia, training and research institutions, nonprofit organizations; as well as businesses and business support organizations.

21. The Strategic Plan has been both ambitious and inspirational. It drew together ITC stakeholders' resources, efforts, and energies to guide them in a fitting, focused, and unified direction. It has created trust and confidence, which has helped the organization to demonstrate exceptional growth in its extrabudgetary delivery that even exceeded the initial goals of the Strategic Plan.
22. Considering the "Why" dimension of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, it has been considered as adequately addressed and therefore, no recommendation is required.

Resources – the “How” of the Strategic Plan

Findings

23. **Products and services offered through "integrated or modular solutions".** In terms of *how* the organization will achieve its purpose, the Plan specified that, across its focus areas and associated programmes, ITC will (a) combine and coordinate the products and services it offers, providing tailor-made "integrated or modular solutions" (i.e., projects); while (b) pursuing the goal of improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs as the primary beneficiary; and (c) aligning interventions with the corporate results framework. Moreover, the document defined ITC's approach to be:
 - *innovative and scalable*, providing products and services that are adapted to client's needs
 - *responsive*, focusing attention on the most vulnerable
 - *market-led*, exploiting opportunities and gaps in markets and value chains; and
 - *partnering*, affirming the importance of partnerships to deliver more trade impact for good.

From your perspective, what are the most significant changes that the current Strategic Plan has been implying for your own work?

"It has given guidance, to some extents, in project design activities. It would be a better tool if there are forums where we could discuss and innovate how the Strategic Plan should be turned to actions through project activities and new initiatives."

"Although very ambitious to the outside in terms of goals and expectations, the current Strategic Plan has not addressed the internal bottlenecks related to implementing and turning those goals into reality. ITC's capacity to deliver is severely hampered by its inflexible, bureaucratic system of administration and slow decision-making."

"It has provided the direction our projects should aim at and the type of results we should produce with our interventions. In that sense the Plan was very useful. However, it has not managed yet to foster a 'cooperative culture' in the organization to maximize the impact of our interventions."

24. **Understanding of internal value chains.** As explained above, the Strategic Plan provided a strategy for how ITC creates value through the flexibility of tailor-made solutions. Those interviewed, as well as past evaluations, confirm that the organization has great competence in coming up with solutions tailored to client needs. For the 2018-2021 period, the section responsible for strategic planning, Strategic Planning, Performance, and Governance (SPPG), made efforts to better define how 'integrated solutions' work and achieve results by developing theories of change for all corporate programmes with the respective ITC teams. At the same time, however, the plan did not show *precisely* how the organization would achieve them. Subsequent annual operational plans also did not further elaborate on how individual products and services in the ITC offering related to one another.
25. **Follow-up through operational plans.** The annual operational plans consistently reaffirmed the corporate vision, mission, and goals. They presented the performance of ITC's technical assistance with an emphasis on the overall development of the budget; delivery by focus area and programme; and by country and region. To measure whether ITC is on track with its objectives, the operational plans also included a three-tier scorecard, with tier 1 representing the SDG perspective, tier 2 tracking ITC's development results through quantitative corporate outcome and output indicators, and tier 3 monitoring key performance indicators to track corporate efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, they highlighted milestones that operationalized the 'key achievements' to which ITC committed in the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 to be reached and reported against during that year.

26. **Coherent target-setting.** Both in the Strategic Plan and subsequent operational plans, extensive use has been made of the above-mentioned quantitative and 'key achievement' qualitative targets. Projects were asked to link their results framework to corporate indicators to ensure that their aspirations were in alignment with ITC's corporate indicators. For each operational plan, the strategic planning function reviewed these bottom-up targets and, from there, set the annual targets for the corporate outcome and output indicators. As a result, the Strategic Plan and annual operation plans were well integrated into a coherent planning practice, at least when it comes to performance management.
27. **Elaboration of more comprehensive sub-strategies.** The Strategic Plan identified objectives for many operational or thematic areas, even if these were sometimes only broadly defined. Good strategic planning practices indicate that sub-strategies¹² are useful to provide a more precise understanding of what exactly needs to be achieved and how. However, while the annual operational plans regularly quantified individual indicators for some areas, e.g., under the heading of 'efficiency and effectiveness', these offered only selective metrics without providing further insight into any broader sub-strategies being pursued and how they aligned with the strategic plan. Some sub-strategies were developed, such as the guidance to mainstream sustainable and inclusive trade practices throughout ITC projects. Nevertheless, the organization could have been more effective if it had deliberately developed more comprehensive sub-strategies and plans, particularly with regards to structural processes and internal functions that are more cross-cutting in nature and often essential to the effective and efficient implementation of projects.
28. **Project development.** Emphasis was put on facilitating the development and approval of new, high-quality projects. For example, the project portal was upgraded with a clearly structured and comprehensively documented design process. Staff were trained in the development of new initiatives across all stages, from *lead* to *concept*, to actual *plan* and *implementation*. The Strategic Plan 2018-2021 emphasized in this context the internal project design services and referred to ITC's project design task force "*with specific expertise to develop customized interventions*". During the period, the task force successfully ensured the alignment of new projects with the corporate objectives and results framework.
29. **Decision-making.** High-level decisions were made in conscious reexamination with the Strategic Plan (such as the One-ITC initiative that prioritized areas for internal improvements). Findings also show areas where senior management has used the leeway available to implement strategic decisions in line with the Plan. This applies for example, to crosscutting decisions related to the use of un- and soft-earmarked contributions, for which a transparent and effective process was designed and implemented. Also, considerable time and consideration were invested in the decision-making processes required to achieve the Strategic Plan's back-bone objective to expand the volume of ITC's technical assistance during the period.
30. However, the links between the Plan and actual decision-making were not always clear within the organization. Given that the consideration of the Strategic Plan was rarely explicit, it was difficult for staff to see the extent to which it was systematically and/or consciously considered in high-level or cross-cutting decision-making. Possibly also due to these rather seldom references, knowledge of the details and specific goals of the Strategic Plan remained rather fragmented within the organization. Furthermore, the operational plans did not address the issue of differentiating between cross-functional decisions requiring guidance from senior management and those that can be made by others within the organization. An implementation framework bridging between the Strategic Plan and the annual operational plans could have been useful to provide clarification.
31. Good strategic planning practices indicate that constantly reminding and nurturing corporate strategic objectives is important when the corporate context is changing fast. This has been the case for ITC, which has dynamically evolved during the 2018-2021 period, for example with the increase of ITC

¹² The term 'sub-strategy' refers here to documents/frameworks "*which provide more focused and specific details and guidance to facilitate the implementation of distinct areas of work in support of an entity's formal overarching strategic plan.*" See OIOS (2021). See OIOS (2021). *Evaluation Synthesis of Strategic Planning*. IED-21-001, p. 11. found at <https://oios.un.org/inspection-evaluation-reports>.

personnel, in particular in programme countries as well as the unexpected turn of events relating to COVID-19.

32. **Human resources development.** In terms of staff development and talent management, the Strategic Plan indicated that ITC “*will further develop its human resource management planning and enhance staff skills*”. It foresaw to strengthen workforce diversity as well as the required skills of staff, particularly in the area of large project management.
33. Many objectives set in this area were followed up and innovative approaches were taken to ensure that the right skills have been in the right place at the right time. In terms of the importance of retaining existing talent within the organization, commendable efforts have been devoted to the development and implementation of an intranet-enabled skills database and marketplace to facilitate the mobility and the matching of ITC staff skills to projects. Although this review was not in a position to assess the effectiveness of the scheme, this is of particular importance considering the need to efficiently allocate human resources to emerging priorities and in terms of mitigating uncertainties related to the ITC funding system, which presents challenges for longer-term workforce planning.
34. Furthermore, the organization effectively developed and delivered training devoted to project management practices and procedures along the different phases of the project cycle. In addition, there were annual ‘talent reviews’, where chiefs presented their sections and discussed staff and their development needs. The Human Resources section identified specific training for different staff groups. Finally, the operational plans promoted and monitored gender balance and diversity, especially at professional and senior-level positions. It is worth mentioning in this respect, that UN-SWAP recognized ITC as one of the best performing organizations within the UN System regarding mainstreaming of gender equality.¹³
35. **Collection and use of data.** The Strategic Plan announced the integration of new data and analytical tools, more granular needs assessments and benchmarking surveys, and the aggregation of data into a single corporate database. During the period 2018-21, increasing amounts of data have been gathered. Improvements in reporting and monitoring were initiated through the development of the Project Portal, which allows for the automation of processes and the development of management dashboards for core processes.
36. In 2019, ITC leadership followed through on large parts of these wide-ranging announcements by launching an ambitious corporate data management initiative, which realization is in progress. The completion of this initiative is very important since an enhanced use of data could better inform the design of the organization's technical assistance: For example, more detailed business intelligence could help ITC to improve its understanding of the specific strengths and weaknesses of companies in particular sectors, regions, or countries; and a more effective client management system could help to further segment different client profiles and target these companies with relevant products and services.
37. **Innovation.** The Strategic Plan affirmed that the organization “*will focus on innovative impact-driven products and services that are adapted to the needs of clients*” and that it will “*pursue innovation that improves its ability to deliver more value for money and greater scale*”.¹⁴ During the 2018-21 period, the Innovation Lab embodied the organization's commitment to exploring new approaches. The Lab was established in 2017. Since then, it has grown exponentially and created a deliberate space for innovation, despite mainly relying on volunteer engagement and being supported only through some very modest W1 funding. It has dynamically expanded its collaboration with ITC sections in strategically important areas, e.g., to improve networking and exchanges between personnel at headquarters and the rapidly growing number of colleagues based in other countries.
38. **Culture.** One of the key features of strategic plans is to provide stakeholders with a good picture of “how things are done at the organization”. On this matter, in presenting the characteristics that make

¹³ UNWOMEN (2020). [UN-SWAP 2.0 Framework & technical guidance](#).

¹⁴ ITC (2018). [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#), p. 26.

ITC unique, the Strategic Plan stated that nimbleness, adaptability, and innovation would be hallmark attributes of ITC's culture.¹⁵ The importance and benefits of these attributes have been demonstrated by past evaluations and during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the size and duration of interventions increase, and the complexity of their contexts, projects must be able to respond and adjust. The ability to be nimble, adaptable, and innovative was (and remains) therefore essential for ITC to be able to develop and implement tailored and client-focused “integrated solutions”. For ITC staff, this meant that they benefited from having entrepreneurial skills, both to put the aforementioned attributes into practice and because ITC's funding model requires fundraising for new projects, not least to secure extra-budgetary positions for personnel.

39. There was, however, a broad consensus in the interviews that ‘silos’ continue to exist in the organization, which is an observation corroborated by past evaluations. According to some respondents, the problem was related to the lack of a clearly defined value chain or, in other words, a shared internal framework that would define roles and technical responsibilities, to which all areas would adhere with their complementary products and services. In any case, there was agreement that the Strategic Plan has not been instrumental in addressing the issue of silos. In this respect, the plan did not explicitly address the need to connect, coordinate and combine knowledge, tools, and relationships so that the outcome is greater than the sum of the parts. It only *implicitly* suggested that ITC personnel/programmes should act as coordinators, integrators, and multipliers. Also in this case, past evaluations consistently identified these attributes as indispensable for enhancing project ownership and sustainability of results. While entrepreneurial skills are deeply rooted in ITC's organizational culture, they would have benefited from being balanced and complemented with qualities related to coordination and facilitation.
40. **Learning.** The importance of knowledge management was emphasized, explicitly to “*better capture lessons learned across all areas of the Strategic Plan*”, an endeavor to which the present review contributes. Related efforts in this area were supposed to strengthen an organizational culture that instills a spirit of continuous review and learning. In this respect, it would have been helpful to more actively analyze and address lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, particularly those to be drawn across all areas of interventions. Regarding the evaluation function, the strategic priorities of its annual work programme were geared towards ITC programmes and the corporate dimension. However, they could have been more deliberately oriented to cover progress in all key areas of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021.
41. In addition to ongoing consideration of lessons learned, it would also have been useful to ensure the regular follow-up of the effectiveness of key organizational functions that were not explicitly mentioned as such in the Strategic Plan or subsequent operational plans. These could include, for example, the country information/coordination function; the data management function; or the research function.
42. **Accountability.** The organization benefits from having an adequate accountability framework for the Strategic Plan implementation over the four-year cycle, as ITC senior management has been accountable for meeting the deliverables in annual operational plans within the timeframe and budget agreed while operating in a cost-effective manner.¹⁶

Conclusions

43. **Implementation during the 2022-2025 period.** The framing and operationalization of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 will be critical. A strategic plan should be accompanied by comprehensive implementation and monitoring plans. ITC's next strategic plan should be the starting point and map of a four-year journey, navigated throughout by the strategic planning function through operational plans, and actively steered and implemented by management and staff.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁶ See ITC Management Response to the 2014 OIOS audit “Advisory engagement to assess the progress of the International Trade Centre in developing its accountability processes” (Report 2014/055) pp. 7-18, found at https://oios.un.org/search_page.

44. The implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 should ensure continuity, operationalization, and accountability, in relation to the achievement of its objectives. It is important to ensure that progress regarding all Strategic Plan objectives and priorities is duly planned and reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis during its life cycle. Developing an implementation framework at the beginning of the cycle, guiding the overall implementation of the strategy, and bridging between medium- to long-term high-level objectives in the Plan, further operationalized objectives in annual operational plans, and related sub-strategies can prove very helpful in this regard.
45. **Resource capacity.** For fast-growing organizations, constantly improving their internal capacity is essential to address organizational performance challenges and ensure speedy and effective adaptation to evolving changes in their ecosystems. In this context, further to the proposed implementation framework, it would be helpful to ensure the development of sub-strategies with an action plan with objectives and milestones and their implementation, and the follow up on progress, to facilitate the achievement of ITC's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 overarching objectives. Sub-strategies can relate to cross-cutting functions for example administrative efficiency, human resources development, knowledge management, data management, monitoring & evaluation, country intelligence, advocacy, or research functions, as well as to areas such as 'logistics', waste management, MSME access to finance, etc.
46. To further enhance the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of "integrated solutions", it would be helpful to define, as precisely as possible, how best to combine individual products and services, in which order and in which context, to achieve specific goals.
47. In terms of corporate culture, there is also a need to promote the role of coordinator, integrator, and facilitator to connect and combine knowledge, tools, and relationships in "integrated solutions", so that the outcome is greater than the sum of the parts.
48. **Learning and accountability.** It has been particularly important that senior management has kept reviewing the course, correcting it where necessary, and ensuring the organization's ability to perform. In this regard, ITC benefited from an adequate accountability framework. In terms of integrating lessons learned into the strategy, it will be helpful to analyze and address lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan, throughout the Strategic Plan life cycle more proactively.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 Optimize the operationalization of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025:

- (a) *The strategic planning function to prepare an implementation framework bridging between medium-to long-term high-level objectives in the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, and the subsequent further-operationalized objectives in annual operational plans.*
- (b) *Monitor and report progress in the implementation of all Strategic Plan 2022-2025 objectives accordingly.*

Recommendation 2 Enhance the capabilities of internal resources to better align them with ITC's growth agenda requirements:

- (a) *Develop and implement sub-strategies that are conducive to achieving the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Elaborate for each of them an action plan with objectives and milestones and follow up on progress.*
- (b) *During the 2022-2025 period, develop a clear, organization-wide understanding of internal value chains and of how best to combine individual products and services, in which order and context, to achieve specific goals.*
- (c) *Promote the values of coordination and collaboration into the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.*

Recommendation 3 Enhance continuous learning and accountability for Strategic Plan 2022-2025 implementation:

- (a) *Within the annual CCITF report, include an analysis of the lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, ideally through a steering mechanism, incorporating collective feedback from across the organization.*
- (b) *Undertake an independent mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.*

Results – the “What” of the Strategic Plan

Findings

49. **Definition of objectives.** The Strategic Plan provided a strong rationale for the role of ITC’s “good trade” approach in enhancing sustainable and inclusive development within the context of the 2030 Agenda. It also anticipated changes in the trade and development landscape and identified risks and opportunities that ITC clients were likely to face in the years ahead. These were related to environmental, poverty, and technology issues, and their validity has been reinforced since the COVID-19 crisis. Building on this diagnostic, ITC could have leveraged the Strategic Plan to create a more explicit sense of urgency and mobilize stakeholders around the importance of the organization to address these challenges.
50. Planning objectives should be ‘SMART’: *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*. Many objectives in the Strategic Plan were set in fairly broad terms. To maximize organizational performance, strategic planning could have gone a step further toward being more specific and measurable, while still leaving a fair amount of flexibility and openness. Although it can be argued that the Strategic Plan is a high-level document where objectives are set in broad terms, their achievement would have benefited from an *implementation framework* to further elaborate into more specific and measurable high-level objectives, framed (inter alia) within the framework of the SDGs.
51. **Tracking achievement** of objectives was successfully carried out by the corporate monitoring function. The ITC sections had to monitor their ‘key achievements’ in the annual operational plan and reporting cycle. They also had to provide the project indicator targets and track them. However, this system was mostly focused on projects results and not on the achievement of some higher-level or transversal objectives, which would have required the coordinated action of several sections. A bottom-up approach could have been considered for following up on high-level medium- to long-term objectives, where ITC sections could have come up with coordinated solutions to meet them.

What would you change to improve the next Strategic Plan?

“Participatory approach to feedback and engagement. Buy-in from all is needed.”

“Deeper discussions on the sub-objectives in each work-stream, related targets and the best business models to achieve them.”

“Clearer division of responsibilities amongst various sections”

“Make it more realistic and include a resource planning mechanism to adjust to the changes in funding levels and programs’ scale and complexity.”

“Strengthen synergies and linkages to country needs (especially LDCs) for ITC programmes and corporate goals.”

“Consider adding regional priorities.”

Survey responses from ITC staff members

Conclusions

52. **Results.** Defining a clear organizational agenda is even more important in these unpredictable and challenging times in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. ITC’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the proposed implementation framework, and subsequent annual operational plans, constitute the essential tools for managing ITC’s medium- to long-term performance. They should also enable ITC’s purpose and direction to be focused on a set of clearly defined high-level or transversal objectives that could partly be framed within the SDGs, for example: strengthening those with the lowest income through trade-related economic growth (SDG 10.1) or increasing the exports of LDCs (SDG 17.11).

53. It would be helpful to further strengthen the strategic planning results-focus and the participation of ITC sections in tracking the achievements for high-level or transversal objectives, which require the coordinated action of several sections. To this end, the responsibility to achieve key objectives could be placed on parts of the organization, whereby sections could come up with coordinated solutions to meet them. Such a bottom-up approach can generate positive effects such as a stronger sense of corporate identity and purpose. It can also help to identify internal gaps and plan sub-strategies to remedy them, as well as to align external partnerships.

Recommendation

Recommendation 4 *Underscore the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 results-focus:*

- (a) *The Strategic Plan 2022-2025 to determine four to five corporate key high-level or transversal objectives to which projects will contribute, along with concrete and measurable client-focused objectives, partly but not exclusively framed within the SDGs.*
- (b) *Place the responsibility to develop coordinated solutions for the achievements of key high-level or transversal objectives on parts of the organization and request the interested ITC sections to track achievements accordingly.*

Reach – the “Who” of the Strategic Plan

Findings

54. **Staff awareness and ownership.** At the time of this review, many ITC staff, especially newcomers and staff working outside headquarters, were only somewhat aware of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, especially regarding the specific objectives it contains. This may be because the development of the plan now dates back several years, and/or because it is not directly used or actively referred to in their daily work. During the development of the Strategic Plan, workshops lasting several hours were held for each focus area. Aside from the coordinators for focus areas and programmes, staff involvement in the drafting phase was limited. Moreover, the finalized document could have been more actively disseminated, promoted, and discussed within the organization.
55. At the same time, staff identify with and are committed to the stated vision and mission of the organization. Strikingly, once employees became familiar with the document (or refreshed their memory), they were able to see the links with their work and the value they provide. Moreover, the organizational purpose of increasing "good trade" has been fully endorsed and perceived as meaningful. However, when it comes to how staff perceived the organization's agenda, it could have been helpful to keep reaffirming the Strategic Plan while breaking it down to be as concrete and tangible as possible. A more conscious and internalized sense of the organization's vision and agenda would have helped staff to better understand their respective roles and the contribution they provide. It would also have helped to further inspire commitment and energy. This would be all the more pertinent given that ITC employees expressed a clear desire for a stronger sense of organizational belonging.
56. **Partnerships.** The Strategic Plan stressed that *“strong partnerships are at the core of ITC’s work”*.¹⁷ It emphasized the need for a systematic partnership approach at the project level, with both clients and funders. In addition, it explained that the diverse networks of public and private organizations would form business ecosystems, which would be key clients, through which the organization would cascade and multiply support to businesses. The plan also referenced UN reform, though it did not explicitly mention the strengthened role of the Resident Coordinator System to coordinate partnerships among UN agencies (including ITC) at the country level. Many types of partnerships have been leveraged successfully. Building on these efforts, it could have been helpful to better define the quality and to measure the effectiveness of different types of partnerships, both within projects and at the corporate

¹⁷ ITC (2018). [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#), p. 6.

level. For strategic resource allocation purposes, partnerships could have been guided by specific sub-strategies with objectives and milestones.

57. **Clients' needs.** During its design process, clients' trade and sustainable development needs were gathered through a survey and were mostly embedded into the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Interestingly, they were pretty much aligned with the SDGs. In addition, clients strongly endorsed ITC's holistic approach to helping MSMEs access value chains. A consultative document was shared at the JAG meeting with the invitation to provide further feedback. There were also presentations to the country groups. At the same time, the design process could have dug deeper to understand and specify clients' needs, for example by conducting cross-sector analysis and more in-depth external consultations to refine solutions that correspond to needs.
58. Since the needs of ITC's clients are diverse, in-depth knowledge is paramount to be able to tailor "integrated solutions." Accordingly, the Strategic Plan emphasized the importance for the organization to develop more granular needs assessments¹⁸. Over the period, more efforts could have been made to refine and establish needs assessment methodologies across countries and align them to a common understanding of MSME competitiveness. There were also inconsistent approaches across projects to measuring baselines to assess the situation of clients at the start of the project. Cross-cutting corporate functions such as the research function and the country intelligence function could have been instrumental in capturing client needs but were not addressed in the annual operational plans.
59. Given that the scope of ITC interventions is broad, it would have been beneficial to look into transferable general models for "integrated solutions" oriented towards the needs of specific client groups. For example, an informal sector MSME has different specific trade and sustainable development needs than a company that is already integrated into international green value chains. Similarly, the characteristics and context of a post-conflict fragile state or a small island developing state require different profiles in terms of priority needs and focus for trade-related technical assistance.
60. During the 2018-2021 period, ITC has in the overall, substantially strengthened its needs assessments capability for example in the areas of institutional strengthening and MSME competitiveness. However, due to the prevailing complex situation, more systematic use of needs assessment practices and structured dialogues with different types of clients and other stakeholders about the Strategic Plan objectives, would be beneficial. This is all the most pertinent, more particularly in the COVID-19 context since a lot has changed for ITC's clients.

What are issues to be addressed by the Strategic Plan 2022-25?

"The Strategic Plan has to start by acknowledging that there is no "back to normal" future now.

When a large disturbance shakes a complex system, the weakest parts of the system collapse first. The pandemic has put a stronger light on global issues. I think it is the same for ITC.

The Strategic Plan has to reflect what we have learned during the crisis: what worked well and where we need to improve (digital skills from top to bottom). 2020 and 2021 have been shocking enough already, we don't want any more shocks. But the pandemic's not done with us yet, there are still lots of plot twists and turns to come [...].

The Strategic Plan has to reflect this and train its people for it (i.e., strategic foresight, risks management, agile projects)."

Conclusions

61. **Clients.** ITC's products and services are offered by combining them in tailor-made "integrated or modular solutions", which require an in-depth knowledge of the client's needs. Since clients' needs and contexts are evolving fast, it could have been useful to use needs assessments more systematically. Moreover, the diverse needs and contexts of ITC's clients could be categorized into different types in order to develop more general and communicable models for "integrated or modular solutions". These developments should benefit from a structured dialogue to enable the participation of ITC's clients, throughout the 2022-2025 period.

¹⁸ ITC (2018). [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#), p. 23.

62. The organization has built a worldwide network of partners from the private and public sectors at the national, regional, and global levels. Moreover, ITC's scope extends to actors in the UN Development System and the Multilateral Trading System. Extensive use of partnerships is paramount for ITC to play its role of facilitator and coordinator of "integrated solutions". While preserving the need for flexibility and openness, sub-strategies could have been helpful to be more concrete regarding strategic resource allocation to develop specific types of partnerships, oriented towards the needs of specific client groups or contexts, including at the country level.
63. **ITC staff.** Employees fully support ITC's "good trade" agenda and have a clear desire for a strong sense of organizational belonging. They also bring the technical expertise and hands-on experience that enables the organization to adequately address the needs of its clients. A more conscious and better absorbed knowledge of the corporate agenda would help ITC staff better understand their respective roles in the upcoming strategy for 2022-2025.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5 Ensure that the implementation of Strategic Plan 2022-2025 remains client-focused and adjusts to stakeholders' continuously evolving and increasing needs over the next four years:

- (a) *Build on the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 objectives to engage in extensive and in-depth dialogue with ITC's clients about their needs related to the high-level or transversal objectives, backed with preparatory need assessments. This will pave the way to co-design and co-implement concrete initiatives to fulfil these objectives.*
- (b) *Develop transferable general models (or 'blueprints') for "integrated solutions" oriented towards the needs of specific client groups or contexts, which can then still be adapted as the situation requires.*
- (c) *Develop sub-strategies for different types of partnerships, oriented towards the needs of specific client groups or contexts, including at the country level, and ensure due measurement of their results.*

Recommendation 6 Ensure full understanding and adherence of staff to Strategic Plan 2022-2025

- (a) *Maximize staff participation in Strategic Plan 2022-2025 design and implementation. Extensively diffuse and explain the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.*
- (b) *Invest in clarifying with staff the corporate value agenda to meet Strategic Plan 2022-2025 objectives through targeted dialogue, orientation, and training initiatives.*

Annexes

Annex 1: Overview of 2020 self-evaluations and funder-led evaluations

Self-evaluations in 2020 at a glance

1. Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) IV Export Sector Competitiveness Programme

The midterm evaluation covered the NTF IV projects carried out in Mano River (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), Myanmar, Senegal, and Uganda. The main objective was to assess the performance against intended outcomes and to guide decision-making for the rest of the programme's implementation up to June 2021.

The evaluation assessed the aspects of programme design, implementation, relevance, ownership, effectiveness, likely impact, efficiency in implementation, sustainability prospects, cross-cutting issues, and programme steering and management. Overall, the programme was assessed as satisfactory; the results were found to be encouraging, despite some delays that were expected to be overcome. The perception of counterparts, in general, was positive (notwithstanding counterpart staff turnover in several countries during implementation). The outreach, in terms of the number of enterprises involved and geographic spread at the country level, was found to be ambitious, considering the resources available. The evaluation found that there was a need for tightening the anchorage of tools/services introduced by NTF IV to the selected institutional partners as part of the strengthening of their service capacity. The need for adequate phasing out was emphasized, focusing on the sustainability of results achieved while avoiding engaging in activities at risk of not being completed by the end of the programme.

Core recommendations were to present evaluation findings to key project stakeholders in each country, review and revise programme/project logical frameworks and targets to ensure they were reachable, and define an exit strategy in each country. It was also recommended to maximize internal synergies among ITC managed projects at the country level and forge external synergies with other TRTA projects where appropriate, and support fundraising efforts for successor projects in the target countries.

Scope of the evaluation covered 2017 to 2019.

Total budget of the programme at the time of evaluation was approximately \$10.288 million USD, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

2. Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) Hubs

The main purpose of the midterm evaluation was to inform planning for the remaining duration of the T4SD Hubs (in Ghana, Kenya, Lao PDR, Nepal, Peru, and Viet Nam) and to provide input for a possible replication in other countries. The evaluation reported that the project objectives responded well to international priorities, including SDGs 2 (sustainable agriculture and food security), 8 (sustainable economic growth and decent work), and 12 (sustainable consumption and production). Project objectives were found to be fully aligned with ITC's strategic priorities in promoting trade for sustainable development. The project also met the needs of the T4SD Hub hosts and companies who benefitted from coaching by ITC consultants.

Interviewees in T4SD host organizations confirmed the relevance of the tools and the quality of support provided to companies. In addition, training material was revised to make it self-explanatory and replicable. The project was on track to reach its targets (200 companies trained and coached). Until the start of the pandemic, ITC had successfully piloted one training module in each of the six T4SD Hubs and reached 102 companies. The Voluntary Sustainability Standard tool, the Resource Efficient and Circular Production approach and a module on Climate Resilience had all been piloted. The project initiated the Access to Green Finance module with the first awareness-raising workshop in Ghana and started collecting information in Ghana and Peru. In some cases, the targets set out in the logical framework had been exceeded, due to an underestimation of interest and demand in each country.

It was recommended that the project assess the potential impact of the pandemic on delivery, evaluate all tools piloted, integrate capacity building on developing bankable proposals to finance technical upgrading in SMEs into each module, consider a gradual translation of course material into local languages, and develop publicly accessible, free eLearning courses for all courses. New T4SD Hubs were recommended to select host organizations based on an assessment of institutional potential, combine technical with institutional strengthening, and develop a clear strategy on how to mainstream ITC's service offerings into BSOs.

Scope of the evaluation covered 2018 to 2020

Total budget of the project: \$4.5 million USD funded by ITC's Trust Fund (Window 1).

3. Libya Trade Academy

The project aimed to introduce Libyan youth to the principles of entrepreneurship and empower them to develop business plans and enter value chains, leading to the development of sustainable businesses (MSMEs). The objective of this final self-evaluation was to assess the extent to which intended goals and outcomes were attained, analyze findings, and provide lessons learned recommendations, and transferrable findings. The evaluation found the project to be aligned to the national, regional, and global needs and priorities of integration of the business sector through innovative solutions, specifically the introduction of entrepreneurship as a key component of youth inclusive economic development.

The project set the stage for the expansion of the entrepreneurial culture among the youth and women in Libya. Although the project's efforts went a long way to make the user platform interface as engaging as possible, the completion rate was low. However, the online design of the project and remote provision of support and services make potentially it self-sustaining. The project design, the core subject matter, and the intended target population make it potentially easy to replicate given the youth's propensity to mobile phones and to be self-employed using innovative approaches.

It was recommended that future projects should consider incentivizing learners to complete the courses through offering grants and extra technical assistance in the form of mentoring and coaching. Partnerships with national universities should be explored again when security is restored and following their re-kindled interest to adopt the Libus platform for their business courses. Partnerships with the public sector for project planning, implementation, and service delivery, should also be explored. An assessment to understand the underlying cause of user apathy would be useful to determine the extent to which it can be mitigated. Future projects should develop an M&E framework and data collection tools that articulate instrumental and transformational changes rather than processes, and exit strategies should be developed as a core component of project implementation.

Scope of the evaluation covered 2017 to 2020

Total budget of the project: \$1.4 million USD funded by Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères de France

Funder-led evaluations in 2020 at a glance

4. Final Evaluation of the MOPSE Project "Renforcement du Management Opérationnel des Programmes de Soutien à l'Exportation en faveur de vingt-et-un organisme de promotion du commerce de 21 Pays d'Afrique Sub-Saharienne" (Strengthening the operational management of export support programmes for 21 trade promotion organizations in 21 Sub-Saharan African countries)

ITC, in partnership with Business France, carried out a capacity-building project for 21 trade promotion organizations (TPOs) or ministerial services in 21 sub-Saharan African countries. The objective of the project was to improve the efficiency of the participating TPOs in supporting the development of SMEs in their respective countries, by adopting more efficient TPO management practices. To achieve this objective, the project developed a training and mentoring programme targeting the manager level.

The evaluation found that the project was beneficial for all TPOs. The project made it possible to significantly improve their internal organization, particularly regarding customer segmentation, action plans, alignment with their strategic objectives, measurement of their efficiency, as well as their visibility and credibility. Even though progress made by TPOs varied, all managing directors expressed their satisfaction in participating in the project. Most managing directors also expressed the need to strengthen certain areas of competence that were still fragile or poorly assimilated, through additional targeted technical support or training.

The core recommendations were for trainings to take place within each TPO, and that a follow-up project for a new phase of the MOPSE project should take place.

Start and end dates of the project: January 2018 to December 2019

Total project budget \$1.59 million USD funded by Agence française de Développement (AFD).

5. Support to Facilitation of Trade Between CEFTA Parties

The purpose of the Support to Facilitation of Trade Between the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) Parties project was to improve capacities of the public and private sector in the CEFTA Parties to address the obstacles to deeper trade integration in the CEFTA region, by supporting the implementation of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 on Trade Facilitation.

Project beneficiaries include CEFTA Structures (Committee of Trade Facilitation, Committee of Contact Points, Subcommittees on NTMs, Agriculture, Customs / Rules of Origin); government bodies responsible for the formulation and implementation of trade policy (relevant ministries, customs administrations, and technical agencies; business support organizations involved in training and private-public-consultation such as business/sectoral associations and chambers; and private sector such as stakeholders along selected supply chains in the region (producers, exporters, importers, distributors). The final report highlighted a 20% reduction in each of the following areas: clearance time required for selected supply chains, number of documents/information required for selected supply chains, and the frequency in physical controls for selected supply chains.

Start and end dates of the project: January 2017 to February 2020.

Total budget of the project: \$820,000 USD co-funded by EU DG Trade and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

6. Myanmar-SECO-UN Trade Cluster Project “Enhancing horticulture supply and sustainable tourism to develop business linkages”

The overall objective of the Myanmar-SECO-UN Trade Cluster Project “Enhancing horticulture supply and sustainable tourism to develop business linkages” is to improve the economic situation in the Inle Lake area (Shan State) through upgrading horticulture supply capacity and sustainable tourism in view of establishing value chains leading to income generation (for male and female farmers, workers, and SMEs), and employment (jobs created/retained), as a contribution to poverty reduction. The project has two outcomes: 1) enhancement of horticulture supply capacity (quantity, quality, and sustainability), which is expected to lead to increased revenue for farmers; and 2) development of Inle Lake area’s position as a destination for sustainable and inclusive tourism, with increased and stabler business opportunities for male and female workers and entrepreneurs.

The project is jointly implemented by ITC, UNIDO, UNCTAD, ILO, and UNOPS. A midterm Result-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) assessment of the quality and progress of the project, based on standard evaluation methodology was carried out in November 2020. The assessment rated the project effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability as unsatisfactory due to external factors such as delays in starting the project and some key outputs, the impact of COVID-19 on international tourism, and ongoing travel restrictions to and inside Myanmar. The project’s management and relevance were rated as satisfactory.

The report put forth 15 recommendations, of which only one was directly addressed to ITC (to pilot and promote specific tourism products as soon as the situation will allow), and another for UNOPS to implement in coordination with ITC, UNCTAD, and UNIDO (to update the logical framework).

Start and end dates of the project: June 2018 to May 2022

Total ITC project budget: \$1.31 million USD funded by The Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

7. Evaluation of the "Ethical Fashion Initiative" in Burkina Faso and Mali

The Ethical Fashion Initiative in Burkina Faso and Mali aims to connect the local textile artisan communities with internationally recognized designers. The project is based on the valorization of the cotton value chain to market woven textiles or interior objects for the international market of fashion and interior decoration. The initiative is to pilot a private sector response to the root causes of migration. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity, the midterm evaluation found that the project demonstrated the potential of the cotton sector in both countries, that it is coherent with national policies, and that it generated tangible results. The growing demand for products provided by the project requires adaptation and increased training of craftspersons to respond to demand. The project was found to improve the living conditions of beneficiaries and support women’s economic and financial empowerment. It created jobs that have the potential to become sustainable, but results depend on the presence of the project to connect supply and demand.

Evaluation recommendations were designed to address the challenges the project faces to maintain and explore linkages with international markets. It was also recommended that the project should strengthen its work with IOM at the country level, define roles and responsibilities, and search for a local supplier in Mali. A no-cost extension was also recommended.

Start and end dates of the project: February 2017 to February 2021.

Total budget of the project: \$10.45 million USD, funded by EU DG for Internal Partnerships (DG-INTPA).

Annex 2: Project Completion Report Synthesis 2020

Background

Project Completion Reports (PCRs) are a form of self-evaluation conducted at the end of all ITC TRTA projects. They provide an opportunity for project teams to highlight key messages, draw lessons learned and provide recommendations. Since 2019, the IEU has carried out an annual PCR Synthesis Review to inform senior management, project managers and project teams about learnings conveyed through the PCRs, and about their overall quality, and compliance (e.g. rate of completion, rate of submission, etc.).

Scope

The 2020 PCR Synthesis covered 31 PCRs (DCP 11, DEI 11, DMD 9) from projects ending between April 2019 and June 2020, also PCRs for earlier projects that were not included in the 2019 Synthesis review.

Lessons Learned

The review identified 66 lessons learned, covering themes such as planning and coordination; collaboration and partnerships; sustainability; training; managing expectations; resources; stakeholder commitment; surveys; and communication.



Main Conclusions

The review found that the overall quality of the PCRs had improved compared with the previous year. In addition, the review found that the submission rate of the PCRs had significantly improved.

Main Recommendations

- PCRs should systematically include means of verification in order to support narratives and selected self-ratings
- Constructive reflections, whether based on positive or negative experiences, should be encouraged
- The PCR Consolidated Report database for lessons learned and recommendations should be further developed
- Key messages and learnings should be conveyed in Divisional learning days.

Annex 3: Status of 2020 AESR recommendations (as of Sept. 2021)

Recommendation	Action	2021 Reporting
<p>1: Mainstream Sustainable Development good practices</p> <p>(a) Fully mainstream ITC expertise and good practices in the area of gender and equity into project planning and management arrangements for the entire portfolio, where applicable and</p> <p>(b) Use the learnings, processes and tools acquired through the above-mentioned exercise, to mainstream expertise and good practices in other Sustainable Development dimensions</p>	<p>1.1: Continuous roll-out of ITC Mainstreaming Guidelines</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>ITC's Project Design Taskforce (PDTF) includes the mainstreaming of gender, youth, green growth and social responsibility in all its project development work, in line with ITC's mainstreaming guidelines. This involves informing and discussing with project developers about mainstreaming (both in general and related to the specific development markers), as well as referring project developers to the ITC mainstreaming focal points for further reference and information.</p>
	<p>1.2: Regular review of gender main-streaming marker (and other mainstreaming markers) by management</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>The PDTF keeps track of gender mainstreaming (and other mainstreaming markers) throughout the project development process and has prepared an analysis of the status of mainstreaming markers in all ITC's technical assistance projects that were in "implementation" as of August 2021. Among other elements, this analysis shows that out of 146 projects in implementation, 98% have a gender development rating of at least 1, based on the model developed in ITC's mainstreaming guidelines, with 44% of projects at level 2 or above, making a "significant contribution to address ITC mainstreaming objectives on gender in a systematic way". This analysis also covers development markers on youth, the environment and social responsibility and will form the baseline to compare the evolution of development markers ratings at project level over time.</p> <p>With a growing trend for ITC projects to cover multiple development markers, PDTF will continue to support and monitor compliance by project developers and managers on the use and allocation of development markers, as specified in ITC's Executive Director Bulletin on project development and in the mainstreaming guidelines.</p>
	<p>1.3: Develop new tools and approaches for mainstreaming gender and other sustainable</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>As part of its work, PDTF supports project developers by referring them to tools and approaches for mainstreaming developed in ITC. In particular, emphasis is placed on the</p>

	development dimensions based on project demand	<p>project development guidelines in ITC's project portal, the project quality criteria and the ITC mainstreaming guidelines.</p> <p>The mainstreaming focal points and the dedicated technical sections in ITC (e.g. SIVC, SEC, IE) are responsible for developing such new tools and approaches for development markers mainstreaming. The recent roll-out of ITC's "Green2Compete" strategy, the SheTrades hubs network and the launch of the ITC Youth & Trade programme new online platform - the Ye! Community, the global community for young entrepreneurs - illustrate the increasing focus placed by ITC on sustainable development.</p> <p>ITC's mainstreaming focal points and dedicated technical sections will continue to play a key role in the development of new tools and approaches for mainstreaming sustainable development dimensions, based on project demand.</p>
<p>2: Enhance the capacity to utilize theories of change:</p> <p>(a) Develop the ITC Results Framework into a more detailed Theory of Change for the next ITC Strategic Plan and,</p> <p>(b) Increase Project Managers' capacity to utilize the 'Theory of Change' tool to be more results-focused and improve results monitoring and information collection about attributable changes in complex project environments.</p>	<p>2.1: Review of ITC's results framework and its visualisation in the format of a theory of change in the course of the preparation of ITC's Strategic Plan 2022-2025</p> <p>2.2: Enhance Project Managers' capacity to develop project-level theories of change and use them for monitoring and management.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>In the course of preparations for the Strategic Plan 2022-25, a working group has engaged in developing a modified ITC results framework. It will be finalized by the end of 2021.</p> <p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>As part of its project development work in cooperation with the Project Quality Assurance Officer (PQAO) and SPPG, the PDTF strives to enhance ITC's project developers' capacities to develop logical and well-structured models for TRTA projects that bring sustainable outcomes to our beneficiaries and project partners. ITC projects also provide a structured narrative that is a result of a consultative process bringing together all stakeholders involved in ITC's project development. All ITC TRTA projects present a logical framework and results chain that illustrate the projects' approach leading to the achievement of development objectives and sustainable results and connecting the projects to ITC's corporate results framework and indicators.</p> <p>With a view to further improve its approach PDTF welcomes opportunities to include additional project design tools when relevant, including project-level theories of change, to complement ITC's existing focus and funders'</p>

		<p>expectations on projects' logical frameworks and results chains.</p> <p>ITC is currently reviewing its corporate results framework in the context of the preparation of its next Strategic Plan (2022-2025). Based on the learning from the strategic plan review and the current Developmental Evaluation Review (DER) of three large projects due to be completed by SPPG/IEU in April 2022, ITC will gradually introduce the development of project-level theories of change for larger projects, where they add value to the project's logical framework and results chain. ITC has also integrated in its project development toolkit the creation of "Problem and Solutions Tree" diagrams, as requested by specific funders, which represent yet another way to illustrate a project's proposed interventions and change model.</p> <p>To support the continuous development of staff skills, dedicated training opportunities on the preparation of project's Theories of Change will be identified so that staff can take full advantage of this tool. The preliminary results of the DER consultant's work may provide leads for the identification of a suitable expert and a training curriculum on theories of change, adapted to ITC's environment.</p>
<p>3: Enhance simplification, harmonization and effectiveness of the M&E corporate system:</p> <p>Conduct an assessment of the M&E practices across ITC project portfolio to serve results-focused project management, learning and accountability and to enhance the simplification, harmonization and effectiveness of the M&E corporate system</p>	<p>3.1: Complete the ongoing IEU review of best monitoring practices in selected ITC projects, and spread the results</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>The Review was completed and disseminated to all ITC staff.</p>
	<p>3.2: Complete the ongoing IEU Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Assessment</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>The Assessment was completed.</p>
	<p>3.3: Continue the implementation of the ITC corporate data management strategy</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>ITC has conceptualized a comprehensive data management system to implement the corporate data management strategy. The system consists of a data warehouse and auxiliary systems, which shall collect and structure information on ITC's clients to generate analytical insights to inform ITC's work and results. ITC is currently in the process of the technical development of the individual systems, as well as their interconnections. In support of the technical development, ITC is further harmonizing data</p>

		collection methods and is building foundations for a data governance structure to enable effective data management.
<p>4: Enhancing project results sustainability:</p> <p>(a) Identify in the project cycle, the potential for replication and scaling-up of the project, and</p> <p>(b) Ensure the development and regular updating of exit strategies during project cycle, and their implementation.</p>	<p>4.1: Ensure that all project proposals integrate a detailed outline of the “Sustainability”, “Local Ownership” and “Exit Strategy” as indicated in ITC’s project development guidelines and project portal mandatory requirements.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>As part of ITC’s project development process, the PDTF takes specific care to ensure that project proposals do outline the elements of Sustainability, Local Ownership, and Exit Strategy, as indicated in ITC’s project development guidelines. All ITC project documents have to complete the required chapters in project documents templates and the ITC project portal. Looking ahead, PDTF will further ensure that elements related to local ownership, sustainability and exit strategy are properly substantiated in line with ITC’s project quality criteria.</p>
	<p>4.2: Add a new entry field in the ITC project document templates and project portal under the “Strategy” component requesting Project Managers to identify the potential for scaling up & replication.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>This recommendation has been added by PDTF to the list of items to be implemented by the IT Section who manages all programming / IT aspects of the project portal and related templates.</p>
	<p>4.3: At the design and inception stage, sustainability and scaling aspects to be integrated in the project risk register, followed by regular risk monitoring and reporting during project implementation.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>The PDTF is putting renewed emphasis on the sustainability and scaling aspects as part of its project development work alongside project developers in the technical sections and country sections. End of inception review meetings now take place with PDTF for all projects that include a dedicated inception phase. Further discussions will take place with SPPG to clearly define the steps envisaged in the recommendation in relation to the project risk registers and risk monitoring.</p>
	<p>4.4: IEU to provide regular briefings to all relevant ITC staff on results of impact sustainability assessments, project evaluations / AESR / Project Closure Reports in relation to Project Results and lessons to be learnt.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>In 2021, the evaluation unit has finalized a first set of Sustainability Reviews, a new type of evaluative assessment measuring the sustainability of project results for projects that have ended 3-4 years earlier. As a next step, it is foreseen to share the results of these reviews with ITC colleagues and discuss them in learning workshops to jointly draw further lessons for future interventions. This approach will also be used for future reviews. Moreover, the evaluation unit will look into additional interactive formats to share results from evaluative exercises, such as the AESR or</p>

		the synthesis of project completion reports, with ITC staff.
<p>5: Build on good project field office performance and coordination:</p> <p>(a) Introduce an induction process in particular for project management staff in the field, to ensure they share a sufficient knowledge of ITC, and</p> <p>(b) Identify and enforce protocols and good practices to work effectively through project field offices and to ensure good coordination among field personnel and among field and HQ personnel.</p>	<p>5.1: Updating current field personnel list per project in ITC's Project Portal</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>After the completion of the "Who is Who" project, project teams can add UNDP and UNOPS team members on the New Project Portal.</p> <p>The ITC staff list has been updated and the ITC intranet now reflects all ITC personnel, from both HQ and country-based. The list includes 865 employees (as of 1 September 2021) of which 495 are Geneva HQ-based, and 370 are country-based, reflecting the increasing focus of ITC to develop its field presence through effective representation at project level in the countries where it operates.</p>
	<p>5.2: Organizing regular induction programmes (including trainings and selected courses) for ITC field personnel.</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>At present, the Induction Programme is a pilot for HQ-based, fixed-term staff members only. If all goes well, the work for the field staff Induction Programme should start in the next phase, TBD when.</p> <p>As established last year, ITC field personnel will continue to have an opportunity to participate in the TFIC this year, from 13-17 September 2021, through direct access to the Modules on the L&D HUB.</p>
	<p>5.3: Collecting best practices & lessons learned from ITC field personnel through specific knowledge sharing sessions.</p> <p>Proposed topic for the first session: "How ITC projects help SMEs and BSOs in the field build recovery and resilience plans in the post-COVID scenario"</p>	<p>Status: Implemented</p> <p>The concept for the knowledge sharing sessions called "ITC Shares" was developed by a team of Lab members in collaboration with PDF. Two sessions have taken place so far, the first one in March 2021, and the second one in July 2021. The lessons captured from the first session related to "How ITC projects help SMEs and BSOs in the field build recovery and resilience plans in the post-COVID scenario" were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was crucial for ITC field teams to work together in order to support local MSMEs (especially micro-producers and farmers in rural areas) and help them find innovative solutions as they faced lack of market connections, possibility of sustainable income, and isolation; • Support given to MSMEs via digital platforms as well as access to digital trade fairs was essential. In this respect, Business Support Organizations played a key role in acting as catalyzers to

		<p>motivate MSMEs and give them tools / resources / support;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the global market wasn't reachable anymore, helping MSMEs to find new clients in the local and regional markets was key; • Certified quality control support helped increase trust by customers amidst new digital delivery methods; • Price regulation could be applied during crises to ensure that farmers continue producing, buying raw materials and ultimately delivering their goods to consumers, and keep economies running; • Capacity building for e-Commerce and online branding was paramount and continues to be today; • Government policies and actions need to foster the update of digital solutions, especially with respect to physical infrastructure; • Government support (spurred by local initiatives) was also essential to allow the connection between unemployed youth and rural MSMEs. This allowed for increased local market opportunities and new job opportunities, which helped reverse the negative trends due to the pandemic; and • MSMEs need to re-think their business strategy: having a holistic (re)view of core business functions (including finances) as well as key customers / suppliers is essential to become resilient and robust for future crises. This links to the ability of MSMEs to "reinvent" themselves, find innovative solutions, think outside the box and "be prepared".
	<p>5.4: Organizing an all-ITC email at regular intervals (or via monthly newsletter) to introduce field personnel</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>CE has profiled 19 field-based colleagues through the internal newsletter Flashback, since 2019.</p>
<p>6: Implement corporate strategy to engage in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks:</p> <p>(a) Finalize and adopt a corporate strategy to engage more systematically in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and</p> <p>(b) Enforce this strategy, including training requirements for ITC Country Officers about how and why to engage in UN Sustainable</p>	<p>6.1: Adoption of the ITC UNSDCF Engagement Strategy</p>	<p>Status: Ongoing</p> <p>The draft strategy is now being transformed into the ITC UN Country Team (UNCT) Engagement Strategy to cover a wider range of UNCT-led activities spanning from joint programming and resource mobilization to monitoring and reporting. As a next step, it is envisaged that the draft strategy will be finalized with inputs from relevant sections across the organization and presented to senior management for their review and approval.</p>

Development Frameworks.	Cooperation	6.2: Roll-out of the ITC UNSDCF Engagement Strategy	Status: Not started The ITC UNCT Engagement Strategy will be launched following approval by senior management.
		6.3: Capacity building for ITC Country Managers through e-courses provided by DCO and UNSSC and, if deemed necessary, ITC's own training programmes	Status: Ongoing By the end of 2020, ITC Country Managers have been informed of e-courses such as the UNSDCF online course and the SDG Primer offered by UNSSC. In addition, reference materials and other forms of technical support, potentially including information sessions, will be provided for Country Managers and other relevant personnel following the launch of the ITC UNCT Engagement Strategy.

Annex 4: Implementation Status of Past Evaluation Recommendations (as of March 2021)

Since 2013, and in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards¹⁹, and ITC Evaluation Guidelines²⁰, the IEU follows up on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations. This process monitors the progress made on the recommendations and helps to ensure that they contribute to ITC's organizational effectiveness, learning and accountability.

This follow up addresses independent evaluations carried out by the IEU. It does not include recommendations given in self-evaluations or funder-led evaluations. As of 31 March 2021, the IEU followed-up on 85 recommendations resulting from the following nine independent evaluations carried out by the IEU:

- Final Evaluation: Promoting Intra-Regional Trade in Eastern Africa;
- Final Evaluation of the Lesotho Horticulture Productivity and Trade Development Project;
- Final Evaluation of the Pashmina Enhancement and Trade Support (PETS) Project in Nepal
- Evaluation of the Non-tariff Measures (NTM) Programme;
- Evaluation of the Certified Trade Advisers Programme (CTAP);
- Evaluation of the Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP);
- Midterm Evaluation of the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) in The Gambia;
- Evaluation of the ITC Participation and Performance in the UN Delivering as One (DaO) System; and
- Evaluation of the ITC Programme 'Strengthening Trade and Investment Support Institutions' (TISI)

Overview of implementation status as of March 2021

Evaluations	Recommendations				Implementation Status		
	Total	Accepted	Partially Accepted	Rejected	Not Started	Ongoing	Implemented
Eastern Africa 2017	10	4	6	--	--	--	10
Lesotho 2017	15	7	7	1	--	--	14
Nepal 2018	14	8	4	2	--	10	2
NTM 2018	6	6	--	--	--		6
CTAP 2018	5	5	--	--	--	1	4
TFP 2019	10	8	2	--	--	1	9
YEP 2019	11	8	3	--	--	2	9
DaO 2019	6	5	1	--	2	4	--
TISI 2020	8	8	--	--		5	3
Total	85	59	23	3	2	23	57

¹⁹ Standard 1.4 Management response and follow up: The organization should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure that management responds to evaluation recommendations. The mechanisms should outline concrete actions to be undertaken in the management response and in the follow-up to recommendation implementation. Source: United Nations Evaluation Group (2016). *Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. New York: UNEG, p. 17.

²⁰ International Trade Centre (2018). *ITC Evaluation Guidelines, Second Edition*. Geneva: ITC, p. 46

The follow-up process is useful to track the results of the evaluations, and to learn from the implementation of the recommendations. At the end of March 2021, almost all the recommendations had been started; 70% were implemented, 28% were ongoing, and 2% had not started.

The status regarding individual evaluations was as follows:

Eastern Africa:

The evaluation resulted in 10 recommendations. Since the Eastern Africa project did not have a direct successor project, the recommendations were designed to maintain a level of sustainability of the results achieved. The management response addressed the substance of these recommendations, indicating they would be implemented through other similar value-chain projects that were at the time in their design stages or already underway. All recommendations were implemented. As recommended, there is now a sector database that can be used to share experience and best practices. The EAC Quality Portal <https://un-consulting.ch/eac/success> developed by Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP) includes a module on Quality Success aimed at sharing SME success stories in the region and fostering cooperation.

Lesotho:

The evaluation resulted in 15 recommendations; of which three were to be addressed directly by project management, and 11 to be implemented when designing future similar value chain development projects. The evaluation helped to secure a no-cost extension and was instrumental in the acceleration of the project's Sustainability Plan that was agreed by the National Steering Committee involving governmental participation. All the recommendations were implemented. Many of the recommendations were applied to the design and implementation of two subsequent projects in Lesotho including the National Trade Policy Implementation Programme and formulation of the National Export Strategy Roadmap project, and the Empowerment of public and private stakeholders on the implementation of the NES Roadmap project.

Nepal:

The evaluation provided 14 recommendations primarily addressed to the implementing partners. Two of the recommendations were implemented and 10 were still ongoing. When compared to March 2020, the status of implementation had not changed much due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, however, to maintain the consistency in the quality of exported pashmina products, as recommended, work with the Nepal Bureau of Standards and Metrology (NBSM) was included in the sector strategy development process and is reflected in the new sector strategy that is awaiting stakeholder approval.

NTM:

The evaluation provided six recommendations for the programme. All recommendations were fully implemented. A network of focal points has been strengthened through established and regular regional exchanges and a dedicated ITC focal point supporting the network. In cooperation and close consultation with institutions, the follow-up to reported trade obstacles has been improved to become more systematic and better documented, leading to an increased number of cases being reported and solved. In parallel the system itself is being modernized and improved based on the feedback and recommendations of institutional stakeholders. Combined, these efforts have led to increased country and institutional ownership of the Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanisms (TOAM). In addition, coherence between DMD offers has improved as evidenced in the UKTP, Eswatini (with the alignment of the TMI and RSE survey offerings), the Denmark-funded projects (involving both TMI and TFPB), and particularly the work in Viet Nam (which also involves close cooperation of the NTM team with an EU-funded and TFPB-led export quality management project).

CTAP:

The evaluation of CTAP (an ITC training programme) provided five recommendations designed to inform strategic decision-making for future operations, scaling up, and further qualitative developments. Four of the recommendations have been fully implemented, and one is still ongoing. Through the implementation of the recommendations, there is now a common understanding related to how to improve SME competitiveness, which has led to internal collaboration in the identification and mapping of areas of change for SME competitiveness. A new programme, Certificate in Small Business Internationalization (CSBI) has been developed, with the aim to train Business Support Organization (BSO) staff on key issues of SME internationalization. To improve the portfolio of SME competitive

performance capacity-building services, an Export Accelerator Programme was developed, as well as a programme focusing on international entrepreneurship. An online diagnostic tool is still being developed, which will be embedded into ITC's institutional benchmarking platform; a beta version of the tool is expected to be piloted at the end of 2021.

TFP:

The evaluation of the Trade Facilitation Programme provided 10 recommendations designed to help the programme move in the right direction in a phase of growth. Nine of the recommendations were implemented. As recommended, ITC ensures that the allocation of projects to programmes is done accurately by the project managers. This is supported through the enhancement of the functionality of the project portal, which enables programmes to manage their portfolios effectively, allowing work-planning and reporting for programmes, across individual projects. In addition, programme managers (and related country managers) are notified by the project portal when a project concept (and small plan) is submitted which is marked as contributing to their programme. The TF programme continues its efforts towards adequate team strength and appropriate funding arrangements.

YEP

The midterm evaluation provided 11 recommendations addressed to The Gambia Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration, Industry and Employment (MOITE); to the project; ITC; and the EU (as the funders). Nine of the recommendations were implemented, and two were ongoing. As recommended, ITC continued to support the government in outreach to other development partners to adapt the YEP framework for youth empowerment in the areas not reached by ITC. To deliver on the intended outcomes, work streams were consolidated in the 2021-2022 work programme through the technical core teams (entrepreneurship, tourism, creative industries, and ICT), and adopted by the Project Steering Committee (PSC). The work programme was aligned with SDGs 1, 4, 8, and 17; the definition of 'sustainable employment' was adjusted; additional employment-related indicators are considered as part of the COVID response and recovery support including short-term job gains through cash for work. YEP continues to engage with SMEs in the value chain, including exporters that have the potential to grow and create jobs, and work with industry leaders. The project offices in The Gambia have been consolidated and dependency on external inputs has gradually decreased. The EU has signed a second contract rider for YEP extending the duration of the project to 2022 and increasing the budget by 1.5 million euros. Prioritization of EU support beyond 2022 will be done in keeping with the overall approach and programming cycle.

DaO

The DaO evaluation provided six recommendations designed for ITC strategy level, administration of UNDAF processes, accountabilities, job descriptions, and for enhancing engagement at the system-wide and country levels. Four of the recommendations were ongoing, and two were not yet started. ITC is developing a corporate strategy for engagement with the UN Country Teams (UNCTs). It was initially focusing on the engagement in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), but the focus has now broadened to cover all initiatives led by UNCTs, including the UN Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and joint resource mobilization efforts. ITC has increased its engagement in the UNCT-led initiatives, and as of March 2021, ITC is a signatory to 22 UNSDCFs, most of which include a pillar on economy, trade, and/or SMEs. ITC plans to sign another 15 UNSDCFs by the end of 2021. ITC is part of the CCA processes in 11 UNCTs and plans to do so in another 10 UNCTs. In addition, ITC is developing a new website, where a range of socio-economic data at the country level will be available for the public.

TISI

The evaluation provided eight recommendations, four had been implemented so far. There has been a significant shift toward a more diverse portfolio of institutions, with the traditional work with TPOs now being a minor share of corporate indicator dedicated to the number of institutions having improved operational or managerial performance because of ITC support. Diversification has come from work with chambers, regional networks and organizations, cooperatives, investment agencies (of the 95 results in 2020, over 50 were non-traditional ITC TPO partners). Digital delivery channels became a critical part of the offering, hastened by the lockdown of COVID-19. The programme tailored its approaches to make them appropriate for video conferencing and online workshops, delivered via e-learning modules, and hybrid events. The programme has strengthened its identity and recognition value, and a new name for the Section 'Institution & Ecosystem Development (I&E)' was announced in Q1 2021.